RESPONSES OF FOUR ADOLESCENT FEMALES

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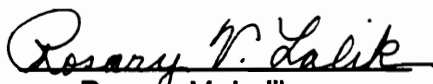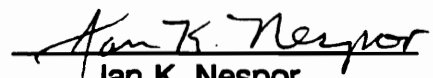
WITH STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS

by

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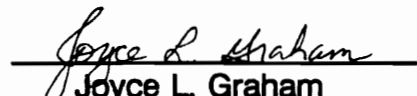Curriculum and Instruction

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(ABSTRACT)

This study is an investigation of responses of four adolescent girls to the characters in two adolescent novels: *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, by Mildred Taylor; and *Lyddie*, by Katherine Paterson. The novels were chosen because the main characters are strong, independent young females, whose various struggles could provide a medium for a discussion of the needs, preoccupations, and aspirations of the girls in the study. The approach to the series of book discussions was based on Louise Rosenblatt's conceptions of literature as human experience and a medium for exploration. The research was further informed by multiple perspectives on reader response theory as presented by Richard Beach, and by the work of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule on the various ways women approach learning. Although response begins as an individual activity, a primary focus of the study was an investigation of responses shared in a group setting.

The study is a contribution to the efforts of educators and others concerned with the enhancement of women's confidence by a validation of their experiences, and through demonstrations of social constructions of meaning.

DEDICATION

To Jack and Rose Carico - Mom and Dad

This is for Mom, who speaks in so many different languages, not just the five languages that her tongue can speak, but the beautiful language of her music, and the incredible language of her care. Mom, this is for you. Thank you for giving me gave me a love for languages of every kind. I've thought often how much you would have loved college and graduate school. That thought has made the experience a special joy.

This is for Dad, who spoke the language of love every day as he worked for his family. Dad, this is for you. Thank you for showing me what commitment is. You're one reason I could push to the end. I wish your teachers had looked beyond the quiet demeanor to find the inquisitive mind and depth of thoughtfulness. They would have liked what they saw.

This is for both of you, with love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the staff at Connectionist School - thank you for being so flexible! Beyond that, thank you, especially you, Jinny, that after observing you and working with you and the girls, I have much more to think about than before I began. Hope, Leah, Micki, and Natalie - thank you for talking about books. That seemingly simple act provided me with things that I will be thinking about and working on for a long time to come. I hope that what you did was as good for you as it was for me. I know that what you did will be good for others, as I continue to learn and to teach.

To my friends and family -- thank you for the patience and the love that supported me. I will enjoy getting re-acquainted!

To Liz Barber -- your support made the going less stressful, your insights made the study richer, your input made the document better. Thank you.

To Edie, Bill, and Ben -- thank you for your love and your prayers.

To Barb -- I thank you for the contributions you made to this study: introducing me to Connectionist School, talking with me whenever I needed to work through a next step, proof-reading, and running to the library and on other countless errands. Thank you most of all for the contributions you have made and continue to make to my life because of the way you respect, care, listen, and help. It's been my great good fortune to know you.

CONTENTS

Defining the Problem

Introduction

In a turbulent age, our schools and colleges must prepare the student to meet unprecedented and unpredictable problems. He[1] needs to understand himself; he needs to work out harmonious relationships with other people. He must achieve a philosophy, an inner center from which to view in perspective the shifting society about him; he will influence for good or ill its future development. Any knowledge about man and society that schools can give him should be assimilated into the stream of his actual life. (Rosenblatt; 1938/83: p. 3)

From the above opening lines through her closing words where she wishes for literature to be a "potent force" (p. 276) in people's lives, the message of Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* is clear: students should be able to find personal, social, and cultural value in what they are taught in schools.

As I read her work, its message resonated with my life experiences through various stages: my distant past as an avid reader and writer, yet a somnambulant literature student, the type Mike Rose describes (1989); my more recent past as a classroom teacher of adolescents and language arts, in a profession plagued by "burn-out" (Le Compte and Dworkin, 1991); and my present situation as a graduate student preparing for a future in teacher education.

The confluence of Rosenblatt's work with my own experience, as well as those volumes that extend, challenge, and move her theories into the classroom (Beach, 1993; Clifford, 1991; Karolides, 1992; Nelms, 1988; Probst, 1988), provided the impetus for a study I undertook with a small group of adolescent girls. Micki, Leah, Natalie, Hope[2], and I followed a model of reader response as we read and talked about two adolescent novels. The novels, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and *Lyddie,* were written from the viewpoint of two female characters who can be considered strong, independent thinkers.

Reader response, the theory "inaugurated" by Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* (Clifford, 1991), assumes a view of literature as human experience and the act of reading as a transaction between the reader and the text. Experiencing literature through a transaction with it is more than an attempt to extract meaning *from* the text. It is an attempt to make meaning *with* the text. In our times together, the girls and I worked toward making meaning through experiences with texts in an open-ended discussion format, and afterwards, we reflected on those experiences. I made sense of their responses and mine through our conversations, through my investigations of the girls' lives, and through a growing awareness of my own stances as a teacher past and present -- as a teacher-researcher in my study with the girls and as a teacher in the more formal settings of my middle school classroom and now of the University. I also reflected on my remembrances of the effect of literature and the literature classroom on my mind and life when I was, as the girls in the study are now, an adolescent female, thinking about

2

the roles I would assume as I grew up.

It is important at this point to explore the connections between Rosenblatt's work and my experiences, those that caused me to develop an interest in such a study and those that move the research in certain directions. I do so because the person I have been and am affects how I carry out, analyze, and write up the research (Hammersley and Atkins, 1990; Hollingsworth, 1992; Rosaldo, 1989). First, I want to examine the relationship between my experience as a classroom teacher and my move into graduate work, because one continues to inform the thoughts about the other. Then I will travel back to my junior high English classroom to give a brief illustration of the connections between that experience and Rosenblatt's assertions.

Rosenblatt and Teacher Education

As a graduate student I have learned that part of teacher education is learning to examine deeply-held assumptions about teaching and learning and the nature of knowledge (Feiman-Nemser and Featherstone, 1992; Kincheloe, 1991; Short and Burke, 1991). I have come to understand that schools can be places where teachers and the institutions themselves are unwitting partners in intellectual and societal oppression (Cherryholmes, 1988; Edelsky et al, 1991; Giroux, 1988; Foucault, 1977; and Wexler, 1992); and that teachers must be informed of how linguistic, social, and cultural phenomena shape our institutional practices (Beach, 1993; Bowers and Flinders, 1990; Edelsky et al, 1991; Gee, 1990; Kincheloe, 1991; Shannon, 1990; and Taylor, 1989). I have also come to hope that schools can be

3

places where change can happen (Greene, 1988) and students can find empowerment and hope (Atwell, 1990; Beane, 1993; Duckworth, 1987; Rose, 1989). And, through the contemplation, initiation and completion of my study, I have come to think of the language arts classroom as a place where teachers might practice a "pedagogy of possibility" (Atwell, 1987, Berthoff, 1990; Wigginton, 1988).[3]

My views on the purpose of schooling and the role of teachers and students are the foundation of my study: schools are not for indoctrination but for investigation and exploration, and the teacher's epistemology directs her stance. If knowledge is "fixed and verifiable" (Beach, 1993) the classroom teacher's job is to impart that knowledge. Even when this transmission model is practiced creatively, it remains a "passing down" of information from teacher to students, whose only role is to listen obediently, absorb, and regurgitate (Wilson, 1992). Perhaps worst of all, many of these students then go on to college to "learn" how to "teach" others the same way.

> Given their assumptions about knowledge, it's not surprising that my students (pre-service teachers) treat texts as authorities whose contents should be memorized, not human constructions about which we might converse, argue, disagree. The difficulty I face with my students is that they believe school is about obedience and politeness and respect for the teacher, <u>the one with the goods</u>. (*Exploring Teaching*, 1991: p. 141; parenthetical comment and underlining mine)

4

I, too, hailing from a positivist paradigm, have had to come to understand that there are different forms of knowledge, and that one of the privileges and pleasures of schooling is the opportunity to make knowledge. In Beach's (1993) experiential theory of reader response criticism (which I explore more fully in Chapter Two), social construction of knowledge is central.

In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) share the stories of over one hundred women as those women report their experiences when a curriculum of study, or knowledge, has been accessible and when it has not:

...[A] middle-aged Irish woman said that until recently much of the world had seemed to her "magic," beyond comprehension. Now that she had entered college, she was learning things she would not have believed she could learn, and the world had become reasonable. She told us there were many things she did not understand, but there was nothing she could not understand eventually, because "there are reasons for it, logical reasons that I can understand. I don't have to think that somebody out there has to figure these things out for me anymore, because if I want to, I can." (p. 96)

Understanding different ways of knowing is critical. Rosenblatt writes about students' "influenc[ing] for good or for ill [society's] future development." The whole of her writings suggest that she is referring to the difference between the effect of a critical posture and a "receiving," (Belenky, et al., 1986: p. 36) or

5

unquestioning posture. Her writings also suggest the difference between passivity and an engaged presence. I use the word *presence* to indicate an active "knowing," a confidence in one's ability to make knowledge through reflection, investigation, and/or collaboration.

In my study, I am particularly concerned with exploring ways to encourage the kind of confidence in adolescent girls that the Irish woman in Belenky et al.'s study discovered in middle age. For many women, myself included, our knowings as girls were unexamined, circumscribed and limited by firm notions of society concerning what constitutes a happy life for women. I'd thought of my adolescence as a time of "not knowing," but as I've taken a look back, I see that I indeed had very strong ideas. Many of those ideas rested, however, on limiting assumptions about the role of women. Difficulties and insecurities came as I grew older and began to see those understandings fail me and fail many of those I knew. What I was left with was confusion and a definite sense of "not knowing." It was then that I began to problematize those notions and seek other ways of understanding what I was about as a woman.

Reader response theory is not a remedy for all the ills I and women like me face, but I do assert that it represents broad opportunities for students, regardless of gender, to become aware of what they know, and what possibilities exist for their futures. Such opportunities won't happen in schools, however, until we begin connecting with what really happens in students' lives, until we learn to accept and *hear* their knowings. In other words, we need to make it clear that what students,

6

particularly women, already know *counts* as "real" knowledge.

> A woman, like any other human being, does need to know that the mind makes mistakes; but our interviews have convinced us that every woman, regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, and academic achievement, needs to know that she is capable of intelligent thought, and she needs to know it right away. (Belenky, et al., 1986: p. 193)

Rosenblatt's notions of literature as a medium for exploration suggest that it is possible to learn about oneself and others through literature. Designing a study around those notions, focusing on encouraging confidence about one's knowing, must have at its point of entry, then, the experiences of the participants. Instead of an approach that seeks meaning only in the text, the girls and I (what I will refer to as the "literature group" throughout this document), used an approach that allowed us to make meaning through our transactions with the text and our reflections on them. We talked about what we thought when reading books together, how we viewed the main characters, what we understood of their actions. As we talked, connections between the texts and our own lives seemed to be made naturally, e.g., Leah's desire to be more like Lyddie Worthen, because she speaks out, or Hope's appreciation for Cassie Logan, because she is honest. It was important to me in this study to demonstrate to the girls that I viewed their responses as valid forms of knowledge, and that the group develop a sense of collaboration in seeking to understand each other's points of view. The research

of Belenky et al., confirms this as a worthy goal: "For women, confirmation and community are prerequisites rather than consequences of development" (p. 194). What I was hoping for was a "relationship in which both people speak and listen to one another" (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). I saw reader response theory offering such a possibility.

My purpose in using reader response theory in working with the girls was to allow *their* voices to be heard, not just mine, and eventually, not even primarily mine. Rosenblatt's use of the words "potent force" suggests that there is a power to be found in a literary experience; hopefully, then, the literature classroom might be a place where learning is empowering. The power of which I'm speaking comes from the realization that what I know is important and can be used, often in collaboration with others, to know more and thus be more things. "Empowered learners become authors of their own lives" (Short and Burke, 1992: p. 34). That is, I think, a worthy and important goal for women of all ages (Heilbrun, 1988).

Becoming the author of her life or as Heilbrun says, "writing" her own life script is a process for a woman, a journey. Rosenblatt talks about a process of "weaving a personal philosophy," which is part of the journey, I believe. The process can be aided by literature, which offers a range of "choices and aspirations and values" to explore. (*Literature*, 1938/83: p. 20). The weaving of a personal philosophy is not the chief end of the literary experience, because it limits the potential of the experience. However, it is clear from Rosenblatt's writings that the process of weaving entails the examination of the reader's assumptions, a

8

reflection on her[4] values and the values of her classmates, and a study on how those values were shaped.

Terri Apter (1990), a researcher of girls in adolescence, discusses the journey for adolescent girls as a "clarification of the range of what we might become, a set of self-references by which we can make sense of our responses, and justify our decisions and goals" (p. 109). Apter describes what the adolescent needs to know in order to do that:

> She needs to have reached a certain stage of ego develop-
> ment, wherein what she does and feels counts, because she has
> some control, some sense of responsibility and the capacity to act
> responsibly....She sees herself, and understands herself as an actor
> in the world. (1990: p. 112)

Recalling my days as a student in the literature classroom, I think it is safe to say I would have welcomed an approach that helped my classmates and me learn about ourselves and life through an engagement with language, that helped me understand that the opinions that we had mattered and were valid. I would have welcomed an approach that took advantage of my love for reading and writing. Instead, my cognitive powers remained unchallenged, my literary understandings remained stunted, my literary taste, immature. But worst of all, as a female student, I was cheated of the opportunity to identify and examine assumptions about women, men, and our roles in life, assumptions that remained unidentified and unchallenged until much later. Instead, I read on, and what I

9

chose and discussed (with no one except a friend who was much like me) reinforced a romantic vision of life that was to stay with me for years to come.

Reading Rosenblatt's works, other literary theorists, and later, Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* (1989), brought the memories of my days in Mrs. Bellinski's 8th grade literature class back again. I'd thought about those days before, but this time it was with a different lens, the retrospective lens of the *possible* viewing what *was*. This view is important in understanding the purpose of my study.

Louise Rosenblatt and Remembering Eighth Grade English

My time in Mrs. Bellinski's 8th grade English grammar and literature class was divided between two passions: ignoring Billy Clary and writing stories with Chryso Packard. Enduring Billy's harassments was to be expected, had been endured before and would be again; I was *C-a*, and he was *C-l*. (The ubiquitous alphabetical seating chart meant that for most of our seven years in the same classes, he was behind me, beside me, or otherwise in close proximity.) Mrs. Bellinski's unseeing eye seldom caught him red-handed, and for that I suffered. However, neither did it catch me passing my latest chapter behind me, past the onerous Billy, and across the rows to Chryso; for that we rejoiced. Usually I would receive her latest chapter in return, and the rest of English class would be spent absorbed in reading and re-writing the most recent adventures of the heroines we saw ourselves to be.

Chryso and I wrote notebooks full, that year and the next, and edited them undisturbed, except for Billy and the occasional "What are you guys *writing* in

10

there?" from a curious classmate. Mrs. Bellinski didn't know about our "stories"; we wrote them ourselves because we had a thirst for the dramatic and romantic, and except for our own melodramas, there was not much either of us found compelling in 8th grade English. Chryso and I not only loved to write, we were voracious readers as well, trading books and sharing authors regularly. We became acquainted with Victoria Holt's hapless governesses while Hepzibah Pyncheon and David Copperfield hovered over Mrs. Bellinski's desk like phantoms, though nowhere near as intriguing. I did glance up for Ethan Frome, but eventually hunched over my desk again to read Chryso's latest chapter.

Why wasn't English class more enticing? There are probably a whole host of reasons, ranging from problems with our educational system to Mrs. Bellinski's training and attitudes toward our initiative as students. However, the following reason captured my interest as I read *Literature as Exploration*:

> Perhaps adolescent students are often impervious to the appeal of literature because for them words do not represent keen sensuous, emotional, and intellectual perceptions. This indicates that throughout the entire course of their education, the element of personal insight and experience has been neglected for verbal abstraction (*Literature*, 1938/83 p. 50).

The "element of personal insight and experience" is at the heart of Rosenblatt's reader response theory and the central theme of this study. The theory recognizes that in the act of reading and studying literature, who the reader

11

is, what she knows, and what she has experienced -- her linguistic-experiential reservoir[5] -- counts at least as much as what the author intended to say or what the text means. The selections the reader makes from this reservoir affect her desire and ability to interact with the text.

Because literature is viewed as human experience, the reader's "human-ness" matters, if important connections are to be made. I am sure that Mrs. Bellinski thought her students were important; she was a kind woman. However, the work of personal meaning that Chryso and I accomplished in Mrs. Bellinski's room was not inspired by her overt agenda at all. Mike Rose (1989), illustrates this point further from his own experience:

> All the hours in class tend to blend into one long, vague stretch of time. What I remember best, strangely enough, are the two things I couldn't understand and over the years grew to hate: grammar lessons and mathematics. I would sit there watching a teacher draw her long horizontal line and her short, oblique lines and break up sentences and put adjectives here and adverbs there and just not get it, couldn't see the reason for it, turned off to it. I would hide by slumping down in my seat and page through my reader, carried along by the flow of sentences in a story...I couldn't keep up and started daydreaming to avoid my inadequacy. This was a strategy I would rely on as I grew older. I fell further and further behind. A memory: The teacher is faceless and seems very far away. The

12

voice is faint and is discussing an equation on the board. It is raining, and I am watching the streams of water form patterns on the windows" (p. 18-19).

Mike Rose's *ennui* is induced in part by the irrelevance of the curriculum; he was "carried along by the flow of words in the story" only as he read surreptitiously while the teacher was attending to the "important" study of the formal structure of language. It seems to me that there should be a place in school life for the ideas that mean something to students, sometimes found in daydreams, whether generated in the head of a student like Mike Rose or in the notebooks of students like Chryso and me.

Rosenblatt suggests another problem associated with an irrelevant curriculum:

[Academic success] can be accomplished even when the work presents nothing that awakens an intimate personal response (p. 58).

As long as the student can follow the teacher's line of thinking to its predetermined conclusion, the teacher has accomplished her "objective." The process recalls the transmission model of teaching: The teacher is viewed as the "one with the goods," she knows which "goods" the students need, and it is her job to transfer those goods from her head to the students.

This incredible bypass of the student's engagement en route to "truth" takes place on broad levels in education. One can go through school and do well academically and remain unawakened, untouched. It can be done *easily*. It is not

necessary to have one's mind engaged in order to demonstrate "understanding," or "proficiency."

The traditional aim of education has been to prepare children for societal roles and responsibilities (Kaestle, 1983; Tyack, 1974). Perhaps in many cases this aim is only being reached in a negative sense, on two counts: one, the students leave schools untouched; and two, their passivity is a qualification for the kind of work they will do and the societal role they will play (Apple, 1979; Spring, 1972; Shannon, 1990).

Today in education, many call this part of the problem *passivity*. In 1899, John Dewey called it *waste*, "the primary waste...that of human life, the life of the children while they are at school, and afterward because of inadequate and perverted preparation" (p. 38). The waste in the classroom is comprehensive and long-term. If indeed time equals life, then students' lives are wasted in the present and in the future. But they are not the only ones to consider. Teachers who are not involved in doing "good work" (Kincheloe, 1991),[6] are susceptible to the now-common problem of burn-out, discussed at length by LeCompte and Dworkin (1991) in their book *Giving Up on School*. The authors discuss how strain felt by many involved in schooling leads to alienation:

> The problem is one that affects both teachers and students immedi-
> ately, because disaffected students increase the tendency for
> teachers to find their jobs unrewarding and onerous (p.11).
>
> Nancie Atwell recounts a familiar school-related experience in the introduc-

14

tion to *Coming to Know: Writing to Learn in the Intermediate Grades* (1990). In February of her 6th grade year, she received an assignment to do a "report on the country of your choice" due the following month. She chose the British Isles but put off her study until the weekend before, and then unable to complete it, she did not hand it in and sat in dread of the teacher's discovery of her missing report. She waited for three months but nothing happened. Then on the last day of school the teacher handed back every report except hers, and not a word was said. What Atwell said next took me by surprise:

> What I realized in writing about this memory is that my sixth-grade teacher did not discover until the last day of school that I hadn't submitted the report. For the same reason that I had postponed writing it she had postponed grading it: sheer boredom. (Introduction, xiii)

Not all worthwhile endeavors are sheer fun; they often require discipline. Few serious-minded teachers doubt that. Neither do they lack the quality of discipline, themselves. However, the point from Atwell's story is clear: Good work is good for students *and* for teachers. That teachers and students spend time doing good work is one reason I chose to engage in a study based on theories of reader response criticism. It is work that relates the interests and needs of students and teachers in the "human experience" of literature. Jane Tompkins expresses similar sentiments as she looks back on her experience in the classroom:

If only I had known how important it was to open up intercourse with

the class, to be there with them in a human way, take the tempera-

ture of their feelings, find out what was really on their minds, give

them an opportunity to take control of the material for themselves, let

them run with it and see how it felt. If only I had let them get access

to one another, allowed the class to become a community instead of

a collection of people...If I had known about these things and

realized that I had the freedom to do them, life would have been a

lot easier for me and more rewarding, and I think the students would

have had a better time. (in Beach, 1993: p. 123)

Concluding Remarks

My study is an effort to see how literature studies might provide students

a medium for the forging of confident identities as knowers. It is for teachers, too.

so that the work that we do might offer students what they need and what will

point them to future growth. The study is also for me, to make what happened in

my life as a student count now and for the future.

In the next chapter I list and address the questions pertinent to a study of

the use of a reader response approach with a group of adolescent females reading

adolescent novels. I address these questions through an examination of literature

related to reader response theory, and zero in on the issues that have particular

relevance for my study.

1.   In a letter to Temma Berg, Louise Rosenblatt admits her difficulty with the pronoun forms of "he." She used "he" in her earlier works (1936) in a reaction against the feminization of teaching, specifically rejecting the accompanying notion that teachers may therefore receive lower pay than other professions. Later, she says she was occupied with other battles with the New Critics, and being unable to find a satisfactory substitute, it seems that at the time of the writing of the letter (1987) she had not found a solution.

2.   The names of the participants, the school, the town, surrounding towns, schools and colleges have been changed. For consistency and future use, I borrowed many of the pseudonyms from my colleague's (Smith, 1993) study of Connectionist School. The girls approved the changing of their names. The names of my colleagues have not been changed, with the exception of those at CS.

3.   I will insert a caveat at this point. By pointing out that all of my adult years have been invested in teaching, I hope to demonstrate both my esteem for the profession and my belief that teachers can make a difference, particularly enjoying that attempt through teaching language arts to adolescents. However, I believe that schools share only a portion (albeit a large portion) of the influence and the responsibility for growth. I have come to surmise that real and lasting knowledge, the kind that gives direction and produces change, is created relationally with significant others, especially at particular periods in life. The more an idea becomes part of who I am, the more powerful I am at effecting change in others. Although I think that the classroom can sometimes be a place for a small intimate community to be profoundly affected, I am not certain that the mission of the teacher is to attempt to be the "significant other" for the classroom at large, for with that comes the potential to see oneself as "the answer," and in my opinion, usurps the individual's right to choose her mentors. The view I just described can be a comfort in the face of one of the more difficult realities of teaching: not every student will understand the work we try to do for her/him.

4.   I use "her" rather than "him" and "she" rather than "he" as generic pronouns for three reasons: 1) When referring to teachers I use "she" because I am female; 2) When I refer to a student I use "she" because the participants in my study are girls; and 3) I use "she" in this paper as one way to balance out the centuries-old practice of employing the masculine pronoun, and as a means of reminding readers to consider the female when picturing the subject.

      A personal example comes to mind. One day as I was reading one of the chapter-end notes in *Meeting at the Crossroads*, I came across a paragraph beginning with this line: "Sheldon (1992) critiques the value-laden language these

researchers use to interpret these gender differences" (239). The remainder of the paragraph amplifies the point and gives examples. Interested in finding out more about Sheldon's work, I checked the references and was surprised to discover that Sheldon is a "she." What was surprising is that I had automatically pictured a "he" and considering myself a fairly typical reader, I imagined that most other readers do the same. It is time that we stop assigning gender based on the nature of the work cited. It would seem fair, at least, to wonder.

5.   Rosenblatt defines "linguistic experiential reservoir" in her paper, "Writing and Reading: The Transactional Theory."

> Embodying our funded assumptions, attitudes, and expectations about the world -- and about language -- this inner capital is all that each of us has to start from in speaking, listening, writing and reading. We make meaning, we made sense of a new situation or transaction, by applying, reorganizing, revising, or extending elements drawn from, selected from, our personal linguistic-experiential reservoir" (p. 10).

6.   Kincheloe describes "good work" for teachers through a discussion of the following characteristic principles: self-direction, the job as a place of learning, work variety, workmate cooperation, individual work as a contribution to social welfare, and play as a virtue which must be incorporated into work (1991: pp. 4-6).

CHAPTER 2

The Literature Review

Introduction

In Chapter One I described the connections to my own life that I discovered while studying reader response theory.[1] I was particularly intrigued by Rosenblatt's notion of literature as a medium for exploration. As an outcome of that study I selected a research question that would pull together those interests with my concern for finding ways to assist adolescent girls by confirming their processes of knowing. The research question is: What happens when four adolescent females and an adult researcher engage in conversations about two adolescent novels with strong female characters?

In this chapter I examine how the existing literature on reader response informed my study, particularly with regard to the text, the literary experience, and the reader. In addition I include an introduction of Belenky et al. (1986), and show how their work on women's experiences of learning have informed the research.

Resources on Reader Response Theory.

Because reader response is an issue of current interest in both high school and elementary circles there were numerous texts to choose from when I consider-ing what to include as a frame for my research. I have chosen to focus on three major works, however: *Literature as Exploration* (Rosenblatt, 1938/1983); *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (Rosenblatt, 1978); and *Reader-Response Theories* (Beach, 1993), as points of orientation for my own work and for other pertinent

19

literature in the field.

Each work makes a unique contribution to my study. *Literature as Exploration*, written first in 1938, followed by three editions (1968, 1976, 1983), is the seminal work on reader response theory (Clifford, 1991). In it Rosenblatt vividly presents a view of literature different from the one that was predominant in 1938: the *text* as central in literary analysis. In contrast, Rosenblatt proposed the literary *experience* as more than analysis of formal structures, more than a search for the author's intended meaning, more than the dispensing of a literary critic's interpretation. To Rosenblatt literature is alive with human experience, and as such, has the potential to be "lived through," not simply studied.

In Rosenblatt's reader response theory, the province of literary criticism no longer remains in the hands of the elite literary critic. The invitation to view literature as a medium for exploration is extended to all readers, novices and "experts" alike. Her invitation is compelling, because it is an opportunity to carry on meaningful work in schools, the kind of work that requests the engagement of individuals, that honors the contributions of individuals and groups. Perhaps equally notable, it is work that can be described as "educative activity," or work that inspires further learning engagements (Dewey, 1938/1963).

Her second book, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* follows *Literature as Exploration* so closely that it seems to be more like "Chapter Two" of the latter than a separate volume, and reads as if it had been written a year later rather than after the fifty years that separate the two books. In it she discusses the theory for which

she has now become famous: a transactional view of the literary experience, one in which both reader *and* text have a voice, and the conversation that takes place between the two changes both the reader and the text until a new text is created.

The transactional view is of supreme importance because it explains how literature can become personally meaningful and stimulating. "Transaction" connotes a specific relationship or connection between the reader and the text. *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* is an important book theoretically in that in this volume, Rosenblatt answers the questions concerning validity, interpretation, and the reader's stance that have arisen since the beginning of reader response criticism. It is important practically because it makes clear the translation of theory into the classroom.

The third book I will consider is *Reader Response Theories*, by Richard Beach. *Reader Response Theories* is organized differently than many books that critique reader response (Clifford, 1991; Corcoran and Evans, 1987) or that critique *and* offer collections of classroom strategies (Karolides, 1992; Nelms, 1988; Probst, 1987). Though each of the critiques and collections is well worth reviewing, the Beach book is more pertinent to my study. In it the theory of reader response is presented as a field onto which multiple perspectives have emerged: textual, psychological, experiential, social, and cultural. Beach looks at reader response through the lens of each perspective, locating particularly the contributions and limitations of each toward a clearer understanding of how and why we read, and what elements in the text, our culture, societies, and ourselves impinge upon the

literary experience.

Because he delves into multiple perspectives of the theory, Beach's work can be used to demonstrate that Rosenblatt's theory of reader response is indeed relevant in today's field of literary criticism, where theorists and practitioners are taking note of the ways discourse, gender, and class differences make problematic a fixed view of the relationship between the reader and text (Fetterly, 1977; Flynn, 1986, 1991; Gilbert, 1987; Rich, 1990; Schibanoff, 1986; Schwieckart, 1986.) Beach affords Rosenblatt's work the attention it deserves, for although she does not use the present-day language of critical theorists, Rosenblatt's meanings are clear: literature, when offered to the reader as a potentially meaningful transaction, can be transformative, if the teacher understands not just a view of literature as experience, but the location of readers in varying discourses.

I find *Reader Response Theories* useful in other ways as well. In explicating the various theories that fall under the rubric of "reader response" Beach shows that not everyone who calls herself a reader response theorist views the text, the reader, or other elements of the literary experience exactly alike. Beach contributes in another way, by demonstrating practical applications that I found useful in describing the processing the individual girls in the literature group use in making sense of the novels.

Theoretical Issues In Reader Response Theory

At this point I will address the theoretical questions that are important to a study involving the reading of literature: First of all, what is the response theorists'

view of the literary experience? the reader? the text? The history of literary criticism includes accounts of considerable wrestling for privileged spaces both in the canon and in the classroom. The Romantics thought the author should receive the emphasis; the New Critics emphasized the text; and in the twentieth century the reader emerged from "invisibility" to be given recognition as an integral part of the reading process (Beach, 1993; Rosenblatt, *Reader*, 1978). However, it is clear from her writings that Rosenblatt's theories concerning response "...reject *any* limiting approach" (emphasis mine). Therefore, the reader is given not exclusive, but appropriate attention as part of a process which includes the reader, the text, the literary experience itself, and in the case of schools, the teacher.

A second question to pursue in the case of my study is this: how can a theorist such as Rosenblatt, who is described as "not overtly feminist" (Flynn, 1991), be useful in a study of adolescent female responses to literature?

Third, what do the differing views of response theorists have to offer the study? I begin by considering a view of the literary experience.

<u>Concerning the Literary Experience - A Transactional View</u>. Literature is to be experienced, not *had,* much as one would have the measles, Rosenblatt says (*Literature*, 1983), suggesting that there is a vital interchange between the reader and the text, referred to as the "event" (*Reader*, 1978: p. 12). The fruit of this synthesis, no longer the text as it was before the event, but the work that the reader has evoked, she calls the "poem" (p. 12).

The experience itself is viewed as a *transaction*, a term borrowed from

Dewey and Bentley's work in philosophy (*Reader*, 1978: p. 17):

> "Transaction" designates, then, an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are, one might say, aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other.

This concise definition embraces a key notion of the theory, that the "total situation" must be considered. To isolate elements such as text, author or *even the reader* as the central focus, without consideration of the total experience is to miss the essence of the theory. In fact, in reading Rosenblatt, one might wonder if she felt reluctant to use the words "elements" and "factors," as if to indicate an acting upon rather than the organic nature of the process. This is not to say that any one of these elements should not be singled out temporarily, for study; it is simply to say that each is an inextricable part of the whole. Exclusive or exhaustive attention on any one element, e.g., focusing obsessively on discovering the "truth" of a work can become an impediment to the possibility of a meaningful experience between the text and the reader. When that happens, experience is reduced to exercise, and school becomes a place where, to borrow a metaphor from sports, much exercise takes place, ostensibly in preparation for an event, but which never actually culminates in play.

In Mike Rose's description of his school days, we find the personal illustration of the malaise induced by such an approach. Rosenblatt's language, throughout a chapter entitled "The Setting for Spontaneity" *(Literature,* 1983, pp. 59-72), evokes a metaphor of distancing, as well as somnambulance. Below I

paraphrase Rosenblatt's ideas to describe the literary experience as it happens in many classrooms and as many former students have known it. I make clear which of her words I borrowed with the use of italics.

The Literary Experience - At a Distance.

1. When the teacher makes all the sense for the reader, when she exalts literary value to the exclusion of human connectedness, she keeps the reader *insulated* from the work, *remote*.

2. When the reader comes to the literature wondering what she should make of it based on what the teacher has asked for, what she gets is *useless baggage*.

3. When the student sits passively and waits for the teacher to present meaning, she becomes a *spectator*, not a participant.

4. The picture frame is "elaborate" and probably beautiful, "but there is a *blank* where the picture should be" (p. 61).

5. There's a *screen, an unbridged gulf* between the reader and the work. She is *cut off, shut off, divorced* from the personal value the piece might have for her, because of her attention to the value the teacher has placed upon the surface features.

6. When the literature makes no connection to the lived-through experience of the reader, the response is *vague, feeble, or negative*. What the student becomes is *indifferent, docile*.

7. What's possibly worse, the reader becomes *indiscriminate*. In other

words, she has developed no taste, no power of judgment. She is at the mercy of raw responses. Her developed ability to discern the surface features apart from the content makes her, in Rosenblatt's word, a *peacock*.

> The history of criticism is riddled with people who possess refined taste but who remain minor critics because they are minor personalities, limited in their understanding of life. Knowledge of literary forms is empty without an accompanying humanity. (*Literature*, p. 53)

What has just been described is the traditional, New Critical approach that persists in literature classrooms even now. The teacher has the authority by virtue of knowing the correct answers. This authority is borrowed presumably from whichever critic's interpretation was given the privileged space in the teacher's guide.

I see this approach disadvantaging all students, female students in particular, in two ways. First, girls are included as victims of the dulling effects of literature classes that follow a behaviorist pattern of "hint and tell" (The teacher hints at the correct answer until the student tells her what it is). Secondly, the traditional canon is predominantly masculine, resulting in an "alienating rather than healing effect." This effect is due in part to the presentation of unproblematized female role and potential (Flynn, 1991: p. 167). Girls are thus disadvantaged in their positions as female readers. This is explained well, I think, by Pam Gilbert:

> Certain meanings are elevated by social ideologies to privileged

26

positions, and their ideology is perpetuated by reading practices which seek to find unity of meaning and oneness of purpose in the text, instead of readings which seek out the "silences" in the text (Macherey, 1978), which refuse to accept the one offered "meaning" and instead look for evidence of other texts suppressed within the one pseudo-meaning. (Gilbert, 1987: p. 234)

A transactional view of the literary experience would allow girls to identify with, rather than "against themselves" (Flynn, 1991: p. 171) as they read, because their responses are accepted as valid knowings and because what they read has some connection to their positions as gendered readers.

Concerning the Reader - An Inclusive View.   Reader response theory recognizes the importance of the individual reader's contribution and context: background, knowledge, experience, thoughts. The theory locates the student at the center of literary activity, actively engaged in making meaning.

Students usually respond inwardly (if not outwardly), to literature that resonates with their own experiences. These responses are important indicators of the reader's opinions, maturity level, beliefs about human nature, society and culture, and understanding of the literature. When a student's responses and experiences are validated in the classroom, literature has the potential to become a medium for exploration. When they are not, the movements toward separation of reader from meaning accelerate.

A study done by James Marshall (1988) provides an example. In it, he

analyzes a discussion of a literature class studying "The Undefeated" by Ernest Hemingway. The obvious purpose of the discussion is to lead students to the teacher's already stated purpose of studying the hero and the relationship of "The Undefeated" to another piece by Hemingway.

In the first part of the discussion, students give two-, three- and four-word answers to factual questions. In the second part of the discussion their sentences are longer and seem to be natural expressions of opinions, statements of value, what Rosenblatt might call "personal insights." The teacher, however, does not respond to the cues tossed out by the students that they are ready to engage in a discussion; instead, she steers the comments back on "course," and the exchange concludes the way she obviously intends. Marshall comments:

> Given the announced agenda, the students can do little except follow
>
> the teacher toward an interpretation of the story that is already
>
> beginning to take shape. They have few considered opinions about
>
> the story--they have read it only once--and their wisest course might
>
> be to listen as their teacher tells them what the story means. (p. 47)

How would a transactional approach be different and/or better? *The teacher would be most concerned with the activity of the students:* first, that they and the text had a basis for a relationship; and next, that the students actually do make personal connections to the text. Hopefully there would have been prior preparation to help make those connections, the benefit being an anticipation of the story and its meaning for the readers' lives. Short, factual answers (such as

28

those given by the students in Marshall's study) would be insufficient, or at best, a prelude to the exploration of the text to come. In fact, in the case of the actual scenario, we know that the students read the text only once (it can be safely said that a few *may* have looked over it again, and some may not have read it at all). It is not difficult to imagine what that reading involved: an attempt to grasp the main idea, to keep the main characters "sorted out" and in view, and to remember important points in preparation for the usual question-and-answer session or quiz to follow.

Rosenblatt's language clearly applies in the case of Marshall's study. The reading evokes no "poem"; the literary experience was viewed from a distance by the students in their role as spectators, and their participation could be described as indifferent, feeble, docile. Clearly, in this scenario the teacher is the only one who is engaged, and that probably because she likes literature in general, does her job well and with enthusiasm, and is privy herself to the answers. It is obvious that she hopes to "bring the students along," a goal many of us who teach have often heard and considered a worthy goal. What we haven't recognized is the fallacy of the notion of bringing students along without viewing them as central figures in a literary transaction.

In reader response criticism according to Rosenblatt, the notion of the active reader is central. In addition, a *situated* reader is assumed:

The selection and organization of responses to some degree hinge

on the assumptions, the expectations, or sense of possible

29

structures that he brings out of the stream of his life. Thus built into the raw material of the literary process itself is the particular world of the reader. (*Reader*: p. 11)

When a reader is accustomed to having her responses accepted, it is no longer necessary to maintain the defensive posture that some female readers choose in the face of the alternative--passivity. Once the acceptance is established, the reader can attend to ways in which her assumptions mediate in the interpretation process.

Rosenblatt asserts that this understanding begs a sophisticated reader, which reinforces the need for a transactional view. A sophisticated reader is one who has confidence in her ability to make sense of a work; who sees how her own assumptions may interfere with the text, and may compromise the evocation of the poem from the text. Although adolescents do not become sophisticated readers easily in any paradigm, they particularly do not in an approach that insists on one correct interpretation, and the authority of literary critics, above the realm of mortal men, to offer it.

Nor do adolescents become sophisticated readers through "meager experience and casually acquired assumptions..." (*Literature*, 1983: 16). A traditional view of the reader limits the possibilities for an honest examination of assumptions. It eliminates the possibility of a lived-through experience of reading the text, because the reader can only go in one direction--toward a pre-determined "correct" interpretation. Robert Probst (1988) elaborates further:

> Preoccupation with self should make adolescents uniquely receptive to literature, for literature invites their participation and judgment. It gives them the opportunity to test perceptions against those of author, character, and other readers, and in that testing to see more clearly who they are and how they feel, react, and think. (p. 5)

I suggest that those perceptions will not be tested in the literature classroom without the intervention of a teacher who understands that much of useful knowledge is not apprehended, but made, and *that* by real people who bring to the classroom years of life's experiences, often unacknowledged as important and usually unexplored.

> Fundamentally the goal is the development of individuals who will function less as automatic bundles of habits and more as flexible, discriminating personalities. Our great heritage of literary experiences can be fully enjoyed and understood only by such personalities. (*Literature*, 1938/83: p. 106)

Concerning the Text - a Symbolic View. Entering a discussion of the text must begin with a reminder of Rosenblatt's Deweyan maxim: reject any limiting approach. The text does not have meaning that is self-contained, which makes the text supreme and limits the reader to the search for what the text means. Neither is it a "Rorschach inkblot" (*Literature*, 1983; *The Reader*, 1976) onto which the reader can impose any meaning she chooses, a positioning which makes the reader supreme and limits the text to whatever the reader wishes it to be. Neither

31

view is acceptable in her theory, because the text is not one thing but many.

At this point it is important to define "text," which can be many things *if* the text is viewed as a sign. According to Probst, the text has power only as a sign; without infusion of a reader, it is lifeless, "only potentially a literary experience" (1988: p. 22).

When considering the power of language I have often remembered Emily Dickinson's "A Word:"

> A word is dead
> When it is said,
> Some say.
> I say,
> It just begins to live
> That day.

We cannot know for certain what Emily Dickinson meant by "when it is *said*," but if I consider it a poem *a la* Rosenblatt, then it can and must safely mean, "when it is read and considered by a person who comes to it expecting to make meaning." When the meaning is made, the word (the text) begins to live, or in Rosenblatt's words, becomes a poem, because within those words which are alive to the author, is another potential text.

Rosenblatt uses the word "poem" to describe what the text *becomes* during the literary experience.

> It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-
> together...of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his
> past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of

the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being. (*The Reader*: p. 12)

What then of Emily Dickinson? Does she count in the interpretation? Rosenblatt answers: "Nothing that I have said or shall say denies that the text is the outward and visible result of an author's creative activity. Nor does it deny the importance of the author's text" (*The Reader*: p. 15). Considering the words to be "signs" implies a relationship between the signified and the sign. Therefore, though the "poem" must have relationship to the "text," there are many possible relationships.

Rosenblatt's metaphor of performance to express the interrelationships between the author, reader, and text is helpful because in a performance the artist -- all she brings to the experience, and what she is surrounded with -- influence the interpretation. Rosenblatt quotes Aaron Copeland, composer and symphony director:

Honesty compels me to admit that the written page is only an approximation; it's only an indication of how close the composer was able to come in transcribing his exact thoughts on paper. Beyond that point the interpreter is on his own. (in *The Reader*: p. 14)

And though the "interpreter is on his own," the nature of a transaction does not permit him to be considered autonomous or independent. Neither is any single player in the literary transaction permitted to be more or less important, whether it be the author, text or reader. Recalling Flynn (1991), the relationship is "organic and sharing."

Before leaving the topics of text, reader, and experience, one more idea, central to reader response, must be mentioned: the reader's stance toward the text.

The Reader's Stance. Readers read in different ways according to purpose. Reading the directions on how to pre-set the stations on the new walkman is different from reading the latest John Grisham novel or a volume of poetry. The difference, according to Rosenblatt, is in the reader's stance. Reading for utilitarian purposes requires an "efferent" stance. Reading for a pleasurable experience of some kind calls for an "aesthetic" stance (Rosenblatt, *The Reader*: p. 24). [2] Efferent reading is useful for what happens after the reading is complete; aesthetic reading is concerned with what happens during the reading event. The points in a discussion of stance that I am suggesting are pertinent to the study are as follows: (1) in a discussion of adolescent novels I am primarily concerned with the aesthetic stance; (2) as I will demonstrate in later chapters, an aesthetic stance does not prohibit an efferent effect; i.e., in discussions of the novels, details and "main ideas" that are often the focus of literature lessons were learned as a natural consequence of discussions; (3) exclusive or nearly exclusive study of the formal

structures of literature over time develops in the reader a primarily efferent stance in which she approaches literary works. Exclusion of an aesthetic stance inhibits the transaction.

In the next section I discuss the possibility of reader response as a feminist enterprise, important because of my work with the girls, and because Rosenblatt's work has not been considered "overtly feminist" (Flynn, 1991).

Rosenblatt and Feminism. How can works such as Rosenblatt's that are not "overtly feminist" be used in a study with four girls and a female researcher? First of all, because her work is "distinctly feminine" (p. 170). John Clifford, a former student of Louise Rosenblatt at New York University, edited a volume of essays (1991) on her theories. Two contributing authors, Temma Berg and Elizabeth Flynn, both feminist literary scholars, have illuminated the feminist aspects of reader response. In the introduction to the volume containing both Berg and Flynn's essays, John Clifford gives an example of the "distinctly feminine" nature of Rosenblatt's work:

> ...in her astute comparison of [Wolfgang] Iser and Rosenblatt, Flynn
> shows us how the text is in masculine control in Iser, while in
> Rosenblatt the relationship between the text and the reader is more
> organic and sharing. In other words, Rosenblatt enacts in her theory
> of reading feminist impulses that can be seen as a fertile ground for
> more explicit feminist ideas to grow and flourish. (1991: p. 12)

Rosenblatt's theory promotes the "organic and sharing" nature of relationships, a

qualitatively feminist proposition (Noddings, 1984; Belenky et al; 1986).

Temma Berg, in her essay, "Louise Rosenblatt, a Woman in Theory" (1991), offers further illumination regarding Rosenblatt's stance.

...Rosenblatt presents literature as an empowering force and as a place where all the facets of our world can be brought into play. *Everything counts. Everything helps us understand the literary text and the literary text helps us understand everything*--about ourselves, about our world. We cannot throw out the personal, the irrational, the merely historical, the contingent, the practical. Reading is a profoundly complex experience, which draws us both into and out of the worlds we inhabit. (p. 187, italics mine)

Clifford (1991) reminds us that "Rosenblatt's objective, of course, is not just to empower women, but all readers, of all abilities" (p. 12); my ultimate vision is to see reader response benefiting all readers as well. However, perhaps largely because of my history as an avid female reader, my disconnected experiences in school, and my unexamined assumptions about women, men, and our roles in life, my present objective in the study is to draw attention to the particular possibilities for girls. I would like to explore ways to give girls a voice through the medium of literature, in the context of a school setting, guided by me, an adult woman. Rosenblatt's work to a large extent prompted that vision. Flynn (1991) writes of her work and her impact:

We do not look to Rosenblatt for advancements in feminist literary

theory, though...her work does have useful applications here. We look to her as a foremother, a strong woman aware of the implications of gender in her own life and the lives of her colleagues and students, a woman who was influenced by Ruth Benedict and who was a friend of Margaret Mead, a woman who chaired a department, won a distinguished teaching award, bore and raised a child, wrote books, but whose work has not, until quite recently, received the recognition it deserves. Hers is the kind of story feminists need to tell. (p. 174)

The focus of this chapter is the contributions of Rosenblatt and Beach toward a clearer understanding of reader response theory with its applications to the literature classroom and its implications for a feminist pedagogy. However, throughout the dissertation, in method and analysis, I draw from important feminist works (Belenky, et al, 1986; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Christian-Smith, 1992; Fetterley, 1978; Heilbrun, 1988; Lakoff, 1975; Noddings, 1984; Schweickart and Flynn, 1986; and Tannen, 1986) because of the ways these works speak to relevant issues that arose in my study.

Rosenblatt's works provide the basis for a deep and thorough understanding of reader response theory. Her work is accessible and convincing. Beach's work broadens our understanding of the theory and its applications by introducing theories from other disciplines into the conversation: feminists, Marxists, psychologists, pragmatists, and others whose writings have reflected

37

interest in response theory and its use in the classroom. In the next section I show how the various perspectives on reader response theory bear on my study with the literature group.

The Impact of Varying Theoretical Positions of Reader Response Theory.

The purpose of Richard Beach's *Reader Response Theories* is to explore five views existing within the field of reader response: textual, experiential, psychological, social, and cultural. Each perspective emphasizes a certain important aspect of the reading experience: the text; the reader's experiences; the development of cognitive and emotional capacities; the effects of society on the reading event; and the effect of cultural pre-dispositions on the reading event. By considering these five strands he alerts teachers to the ways in which our unexamined yet deeply held assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the role of literature shape practice.

All of his points relate to reader response issues, and therefore, have connection to my study. I will, however, include only those that actually emerged in the study.

A Textual Perspective. A textual perspective concerns the reader, but the emphasis is on a *knowledgeable* reader, one who uses her understanding of text conventions to make meaning.[3] An important point from a textual perspective is the difference between teacher and student perspectives. A teacher who has read a certain text several times will approach that text differently than the uninitiated student. The teacher and students may respond on different and inharmonious

levels; student responses may seem immature.

I found this perspective especially intriguing as an adult woman with female students. It is important that students not always look to someone other, someone older, someone "wiser" to help them think, but maintain or begin to develop confidence in their own voices. As Brown and Gilligan (1992) point out in their study of female development, the development of girls' knowings, often very strong and steady in childhood, is in jeopardy when adult women authorities begin to reinterpret those knowings in line with a social and/or cultural code.

This perspective also speaks to the need for teachers to remember that there are different ways of thinking, that texts have multiple meanings, and that, while using literature as a medium for exploration, remembering to let it have its impact in a unique transaction with each individual.

An Experiential Perspective. An experiential perspective of reader response emphasizes the impact and potential of the reader's experiences in the transaction with the text, and maintains that the literary transaction itself is actually a lived-through experience, a unique "event in time" (Rosenblatt, *The Reader*: p. 12). Although Rosenblatt's work cannot be fixed in any one position regarding response theory, upon examination of the experiential perspective her influence is unmistakable; I agree with Richard Beach when he calls her "central" to the theory (p. 49). Her entire book, *Literature as Exploration*, is a celebration of the possibilities afforded when the act of reading is considered an event to be lived through, experienced.

Beach's chapter includes several important contributions to reader response theory and ultimately to my study. The first is to be found in his discussion of the processes a reader may take when responding experientially, which include *engaging, constructing, imaging, connecting*, and *evaluating/reflecting*. (I use these terms in Chapter Four to describe the girls' reading processes.) I do not consider them to be entirely linear, always discrete, or completely exhaustive processes, nor do I wish to prescribe them for classroom use as "testable items." However, they are very useful for my purposes in describing the various ways the girls respond to text and how those responses can lead to a meaningful experience with text, i.e. in an exploration.

In *engaging*, the reader becomes "emotionally involved, empathizing or identifying with the text," important because, as the work of David Bleich (an "experiential" reader response theorist) suggests, "the subjective response leads to cognitive understanding" (Beach, *Reader*: pp. 52-53). When this type of engagement is bypassed in favor of a shorter route to cognitive understanding, the reader loses the opportunity to find ways of making meaning that make sense to her, that can lead to further understanding, of self, of others, of different textual experiences. I am concerned that, until we begin admitting the subjective as a valid form of knowing (Brown and Gilligan, 1992), our students will not learn how to read without the omnipresent audience of authority perched on their shoulders, making judgments about their interpretations.

Bleich posits a reader negotiating her meanings not just with herself and the

text, but with others. In schools, the "others" are teachers and students. This argument is important in my particular study, because one of the emphases is on reader response in a group setting. As I will explain in later chapters, there are many issues teachers must confront when considering ways for students to share their subjective responses with others in the classroom. As students find that it is safe to share what they feel, know, and believe, the experience may become less stressful, more educative (in the Deweyan sense of inspiring one to continue learning), and the classroom can become a place for the "unfolding, rather than the concealing, of the drama of knowing..." (Salvatori, in *Reader*: p. 58).

The *constructing*, *imaging* and *connecting* phases are pertinent to the study because they entail drawing on past images, experience, assumptions, values, activities which ultimately create mental "frames" by which we judge ourselves and others, and from which we make decisions. In my analysis in Chapter Four, I sometimes examine the girls' imaging and constructing processes together, because it seems that imaging, or being able to create mental images, has an impact on the reader's ability to construct the textual world. The same applies to connecting autobiographically. The more experiences I have, and the more varied they are, the more possible connections can be made to text.

The construction of the textual world is largely dependent on the frames we have in place for making sense of the world. The term "frames" comes from Tannen's (1986) work on conversational style: "Framing is a way of showing how we mean what we say or do and figuring out how others mean what they say or

do" (p. 82). It is loosely translated in this context to indicate the different means we use to interpret events, e.g. believing another person is selfish, foolish, magnanimous, etc. based on an action performed, influenced by countless factors in family, society, and culture.[4]

Evaluating and reflecting, or "judging the quality of one's experience with a text" (p. 52), is important because it requires a type of honesty in assessing how closely the reader has engaged with the text, how much she has allowed the text and the conversations surrounding and concerning it to move her thinking. Just as in friendships, there are different levels of engagement and therefore influence. Not all reading engagements must move the reader to problematize deep levels of understanding; continual disruptions are in most cases not healthy. But when the usual fare at school does not allow for any sort of connection, even on the level of pure enjoyment, it behooves us to examine our practices.[5]

A Psychological Perspective. This perspective looks within the student, at her cognitive or intellectual development, to find reasons for the types of responses she may make. The perspectives are appropriate to the discussion for the following reasons: One, Piagetian psychologist David Elkind (1988) suggests that the adolescent, "must encounter a great number of different experiences within which [she] can discover how [her] feelings, thoughts, and beliefs are different from those of other people. At the same time, [she] needs to know how much [she is] like other people" (1988: p. 15). Louise Rosenblatt sees reader response as beneficial to the developing adolescent because it "contributes to the

enlargement of experience" (*Literature*, 1983: p. 37), and because a variety of experiences enhance the "ability to listen with understanding to what others have to say and to respond in relevant terms," an important quality not only for confirmation of women's voices but for democratic participation in society.

In a discussion of psychological perspectives related to reader response or to education in general, it is imperative that we, as Beach did, look at the work of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) as they researched the ways women learn, or *come to know*. Belenky et al. have categorized these ways as epistemological frameworks; at the same time, I see them as *methods* that women use to "learn." I also see the women they describe as those who have unconsciously or consciously accepted them as their only choices. Belenky et al. have identified the positions as follows:

1)   *Silence* - this silent woman believes she has nothing worthwhile to contribute to anyone, nor can she learn. Belenky et al. found this a rare, but existing extreme;

2)   *Received Knowledge* - the transmission model in operation provides the most fitting context. An external authority knows more than this woman and will give her "the goods."

3)   *Subjective Knowledge* - "truth" or "knowledge" is what the subjective knower feels or believes herself. Just as this woman believes that she is the authority, so does she view the subjective understandings of others as authoritative in their own lives.

4)   *Procedural Knowledge* - these women find rational, analytical procedures for gaining knowledge; and

5)   *Constructed Knowledge* - these women are examples of social constructivism: knowledge is not fixed, but is constructed in relationships with others. The women have learned to speak,

43

to listen, and to "integrate the voices" (p. 134).

My concern in schools and colleges is the number of women who "know" only by receiving or by procedure. Perhaps through classroom applications of reader response theory we can offer another choice:

Constructivists seek to stretch the outer boundaries of their con-
sciousness -- by making the unconscious conscious, by consulting
and listening to the self, by voicing the unsaid, by listening to others
and staying alert to all the currents and undercurrents of life about
them... .(p. 141)

A Social Perspective. Social constructivism is at the heart of the constructed knower definition and is basic to the issues involved in reader response. Social constructivism challenges the existence of knowledge as verifiable, incontrovertible truth. A New Critical approach to literature, in which meaning inheres in the text and is to be found by the reader, is in basic conflict with social constructivism. Cherryholmes (1988) comments on the consequences of assuming a monologic orientation:

The only way to exclude readers from making meaning is to assume
that a text has one "correct" interpretation, that it is univocal --
speaks with one voice.... (p. 63)

Gilbert's essay (1986), referred to earlier in this paper, suggests looking for evidence of "suppressed" texts within a text, looking for the "silences". Seeking "unity of meaning and oneness of purpose" precludes the validation of subjective

responses, significant especially for girls who must begin to trust their own voices. It also restricts the kinds of knowledge available only in social interactions, thus denying the possibilities for growth through relationships.

"That which is not said is as important as that which is said" (Giroux, 1988: p. 4). Not seeking the "silences" ignores potential meanings, thereby obstructing the "event" and regulating the possibilities of creating a poem out of text. Giroux also said, "The language of efficiency and control promotes obedience rather than critique" (p. 4). If one purpose of education is to "lead out," then we will have to attend to the many ways we circumscribe the paths.

Social constructivism is at the root of a transactional theory of the literary experience. The activity induced by the reading of a text by a socially and cultur- ally situated individual culminates in Rosenblatt's "event," a unique experience because of the uniqueness of the reader. Rosenblatt is eminently social in her epistemology--Ann Berthoff (1991) singles out Rosenblatt and Paulo Freire in her study of "those whose pedagogy takes into account the social contexts of meaning" (p. 112).

Short and Burke (1991), reading researchers, draw from Vygotsky's work to emphasize the influences of the social on learning:

> We don't just live in a social world, that social world is already within
>
> us determining how we think. The ways in which we talk and interact
>
> with other people become internalized and change the ways we think
>
> (Vygotsky, 1978). When we are in learning environments that allow

us to take full advantage of what others have to offer, to really

interact and learn from those around us, we create new potentials for

ways of thinking. (p. 15)

A reader response approach is ready to "take full advantage of what others

have to offer," oddly enough, because it begins with an individual response.

Belenky's constructed knower, who can "integrate the voices," is a good example.

Part of Beach's review of social constructivism includes a description of the

"interpretive community" of Stanley Fish (*Reader*, p. 106). (I make use of the

notion of interpretive communities in Chapter Four as I describe the primary social

groups that influence each of the girls.) The notion is controversial; Beach cites

several arguments against it as limiting of meaning to that derived from the

community of a particular group of readers. He writes:

Critics charge that if the meaning of a transaction is totally

constituted by a set of institutional strategies, then the reader and the

text disappear, along with reader-response theory as a viable

perspective. (p. 107)

I agree that if meaning is totally derived from the interpretive community, it pre-

cludes the possibility of a transaction; what we have for a literary experience is a

treatment or an application. However, the notion of an interpretive community is

still instructive, if it is possible for a moment to step aside from a definition of it as

totalizing. Realizing that we may come from several interpretive communities that

attempt to define our worlds through a variety of media is essential to our

benefiting from those outside our particular community. We must recognize its influence. Further, I believe that some interpretive communities can be totalizing, especially when they are connected to institutions such as schools, churches, prisons, business, and even some families (Goffman, 1961). In such cases, the beliefs of the communities may constitute any responses to media. The result is a closely circumscribed pattern of responses; hence, there is no growth outside the parameters of the community. I believe we must be careful how closely we circumscribe the definition of our school community.

A third aspect of social constructivism is Beach's review of dialogic theory. It is important to a study of reader response theory because of the attention he gives to two perspectives on experience. One, a monologic perspective, is positivist in nature: only one meaning is credible or real. A dialogic perspective is willing to give credence to multiple meanings:

> Members of a dialogic community resist monologic orientations in order to "keep talking to themselves and to one another, discovering their affinities without resting in them and clarifying their differences without resolving them." (Bialotosky, quoted in Beach: p. 112)

Schools are unfortunately characterized by a monologic rather than dialogic orientation when dialogic communities are so desperately needed. Adolescents need them in order to "keep talking to themselves and to one another," something they like to do, but are not always able to manage well without help. Teachers are beseiged in between classes by the student's need to talk or by the teacher's need

47

to talk to students. But time and space to talk about problems is only part of the need and is somewhat sanctioned already in middle schools. Teachers need schools to be dialogic communities for themselves. Too much closure is boring; lack of opportunity for dialogue is oppressive. It is ironic that during the course of the school day when teachers and students are in the same building, that there can be so little "transacting," among or between the two groups. Literature as a medium for exploration implies a recognition and validation of personal response, *and* a commitment to open conversation.

The major limitation of social perspectives, according to Beach, is the concentration of social theorists on the "local," the present and immediate context, thereby failing to "capture the larger, more global cultural and ideological forces that, in invisible ways, shape the meaning of the event" (p. 123). Those forces are the topic of the next section.

A Cultural Perspective. The four perspectives described in the preceding pages share the limitation of the social theories: none directly address how students respond as members of a certain gender or class; hence the need for cultural theories. I briefly mention the following points with their application to my work: poststructuralist theories, literary criticism and education as discourses, and gender roles and attitudes.

Regarding poststructuralist theorists, Beach writes: "[They] examine the ways in which schools, businesses, organized religions, or governments limit the signifieds of the signifier to meanings consistent with their own institutional

ideology" (p. 123). This practice of "limiting the signifieds" may be more harmful than circumscribing the worker/student/parishioner's schedule, space, or activities, because a limitation of the signifieds means a limitation of what I am to let things mean. It robs me of the right to think for myself, but the theft is not usually very obvious. Beach comments further: "These discourses constitute relationships among persons according to the power, status, and rights inherent in institutions" (p. 127), so that not only are my thoughts limited, so are my relationships and my power in the organization.

Beach includes literary criticism in his indictment of discourses, because of the authority ascribed to critics and scholars who have power over writers and teachers of literature. The connection to reader response is clear. If New Criticism is permitted to dictate not only course offerings but pedagogy, then possibilities for exploration are once more limited.

A pertinent theme in Beach's discussion of education as a discourse was his assertion that as a discourse, education "serves to reify the authority of teachers" (p. 128), so much so, that it can be difficult to break out of that role. The power ascribed to most teachers is in part a result of the familiar *in loco parentis* dictum, and in the institutions with which I was associated, is synonymous with the power of "knowing better." For a teacher to change her perspective on her role, she must first understand the consequences of inordinate authority, *notice* when she is practicing undemocratic or unproductive behaviors and then be able to learn alternate behaviors. This is not an easy task, but one worth undertaking for the

benefits to the teacher, to the students, and the larger community.

Beach's argument with cultural theories is their "deterministic stance," their "limiting hegemony" (p. 152). An exclusively critical method may have the effect that it denounces in other theories: limiting possibilities. However, an awareness of those theories was an aid to me as I analyzed and interpreted the conversations of our discussion group. The literary event cannot be viewed only in terms of the location of the reader *vis a vis* the text, or even in terms of a transaction. Discourses have power that mediates in the transaction itself:

> Power precedes speech [or thought] because utterances are located
>
> within existing social institutions whose rules, power configuration,
>
> norms, commitments, and interests determine what can and cannot
>
> be said and what utterances count as. (Cherryholmes, 1988: p. 59)

In this chapter I have explained how the literature that I chose to review supports the study I undertook with the literature group. The five perspectives of reader response theory that Beach describes are tied directly to Rosenblatt's work. A consideration of them contributes to the conversation about teaching in general, and in particular, the teaching of literature. Beach has offered alternate ways of considering the literary experience, always with a view to making it richer, more meaningful to students and teachers. His and Louise Rosenblatt's conceptions of the reading event make it possible for literature to indeed be a medium for promoting healthy ways of learning rather than a journey fraught with self-doubt, premature closure, alienation and isolation.

In the next chapter I consider the design of the study itself, describing the processes and method used in order to carry it from initiation to completion.

1.   When I use the term "reader response," I refer to Louise Rosenblatt's conception of the theory, unless otherwise noted.

2.   There are times when I believe both stances may be involved, e.g., the time I was re-reading *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in preparation for meeting with the literature group. I began the reading to re-familiarize myself with the book, and ended by being re-captivated by it.

3.   Textual perspectives are important in a study involving reader response, but are not so directly related to my study that they belong in the body of the document. Therefore I offer salient points here.

First, the emphasis on a knowledgeable reader implies that the better the understanding of conventions, the more easily she is able to transact with text. The problem arises when conventions are emphasized in a technical, not experiential context, i.e. we teach "knowing that" before we give a context to "know how." For instance, a student teacher brought into a class I was teaching a story written by a 9th grade boy. Structurally and linguistically, the story was clearly a mystery. "Just the facts, ma'am," was just one tell-tale sign. The student teacher had not taught the conventions of a mystery, but the writer knew. "Readers acquire a tacit, 'knowing-how' knowledge of these conventions from years of reading certain types of texts." The point is that we too often teach conventions in a one-time experience with the text, and the sole purpose of reading that text is to teach the convention. *The best way to learn to read is by reading* (Atwell, 1988; Edelsky et al, 1991; Lindfors, 1987; Reif, 1992; Rhodes and Dudley-Marling, 1988; Smith, 1985). Therefore, if a reader's "knowing-how" can be extended by continued reading, it is important, according to a textual perspective, that part of literature instruction is allowing time, lots of it, simply for reading and talking about reading.

The second point concerns intertextuality, or students creating links between the various texts they encounter. "Unfortunately... students often experience texts as autonomous entities with no sense of how they are related to other previous texts" (p. 38). A reader response approach which allows for transaction between text and reader, evokes a poem. The poem is meaningful and is used to revise prior knowledge (p. 38). When the notion is extended to the rest of the curriculum, it is possible for students to enjoy a connected, global view of learning and of life.

4.   Regarding the constructing phase of engagement, Beach's discussion of Judith Langer's "envisionment" is useful (p. 59). Envisionment involves an ongoing process of involvement with the text in which the reader responds and acts in much the same way as she would in the development of a new friendship. There is the initial contact and response, then the formulation of a theory about the

person (Langer's initial envisionment), followed by consideration of how that person affects us, and sometimes reaching a point where she sees the person more and more realistically. Presumably she has been in contact with the person at various points of the relationship, and those contacts have changed both persons, to a certain degree depending largely upon sustained interest. Beach in fact points out the analogy of reading to relationships with friends that offer "a richer and fuller life than I could imagine on my own" (Wayne Fuller, in Beach: 61).

5.   I find the discussion of reading response processes particularly important in light of Flynn's essay, "Gender and Reading" (1986). In it she proposes a continuum of relationships between the reader and the text. At one pole is the reader in a dominant position, where the experience is characterized by detachment from the text, an over-emphasis on experience "rather than an empathetic engagement with and critical evaluation of new material encountered" (p. 268). The opposite pole finds the text in domination, with the reader "gain[s] no critical distance" because she does not count her own perceptions, experiences, and constructions as valid in her interpretations of text. The text is everything. What Flynn calls for is "productive interaction," a reader attaining "balance between empathy and judgment by maintaining a balance of detachment and involvement."

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Research

In this chapter I outline the research design: the questions under consideration; a description of the research method; the context of the research; the research processes; and analysis.

Research Questions

The research question that framed the study was: *What happens when four adolescent girls and an adult female engage in discussions about two adolescent novels with strong female characters?* Louise Rosenblatt's work inspired that question, and Richard Beach's work on the various perspectives in reader response theory were a means to investigate important aspects of reader response. In the following sections I will outline the questions that emerged from four perspectives of reader response theory. All of the questions were addressed in some way in the study, although not all to the same extent.

Questions From an Experiential Perspective. What were the girls' responses to the characters' actions and utterances? Which textual events seemed most salient to the individual girls? to the group? What were the relationships between the experiences of the girls and the text? What the quality of our experiences with the text, that is, did we engage with text or in "free fantasy" (Rosenblatt, 1938/1983)? What was the impact of the experience on the girls?

Questions From a Psychological Perspective. What evidence is there that I listened to their responses? that they listened to mine? to each other's? What

was the climate of the group? What patterns can be drawn, if any, by looking at the responses we made -- as a group, as individuals, as teacher v. student? How well did we handle differences of opinion? Which differences seemed to elicit more response than others? Is there evidence that anyone in the group was silenced?

Questions From a Social Perspective. What was the impact of our interpretive communities on our responses? What evidence is there that we had a dialogic community? the beginnings of one? Did the girls evidence "procedural display," i.e., were there times that they responded according to the script they know for student-teacher interaction, instead of actively searching for their own responses? If so, can reasons be found for their choice?

Questions From a Cultural Perspective. What were the ways in which our primary discourses limited our interactions unfairly? In what ways did we attempt to recognize and unmask our prejudices? To what extent was that possible?

Description of Method

What I and the girls were involved in was an "inquiry process" which allowed me to look for what actually happened during our interchanges. The process is described in ethnographic terms by Wolcott (1988) as follows:

It is carried out by human beings and guided by a point of view that

derives from experience in the research setting and from the

knowledge of prior anthropological research. (p. 191)

In Chapter One I described how my personal experiences and those recounted by others have informed my point of view. In Chapter Two I examined

how existing literature on reader response theory informed my point of view. In Chapters Four and Five I show how my point of view is now informed by my work in the field with the literature group.

The Researcher's Stance. As a "participant observer" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1993), I had to be aware of how the "reflexive character of social research" (p. 14) located Xmewithin the study, not outside looking on. It also mattered that it was I who did this study, and not just "any researcher" or "just any" language arts educator (Warren, 1988). As I attempted to make clear in Chapter One, I came to the study with great personal interests in and experiences with the topic of responses to literature, both as a student and a teacher. As such, I was a "positioned subject," "observ[ing] with a particular angle of vision" (Rosaldo, 1989: p. 19). I became "re-positioned" as I began to problematize my own position, and as the study changed courses, and my angle of vision changed.[1]

In relation to stance, questions of power, authority and control made the going uncertain. Even though the girls' interests and needs guided the research design, to a great extent I was still in charge, and in that setting was somewhat in the role of a teacher. Even though I aspired to less didacticism in my role with the literature group, I found myself at times acting in ways that reflected my former teaching persona: the teacher was more than a guide, more than a facilitator, more than a listener. She was the one with the answers.

The Context

The context of the study included the school the girls attended and the

literature group itself. I describe the school from the vantage point of the girls, describe the language arts program, and then explain how we came together to form the group.

What the Girls Said About Connectionist School. All four girls were vocal about their opinions of the school and the way things are done there. Micki and Leah, at the school less than two years at the beginning of the study, were appreciative of the differences they were experiencing compared to the public schools from which they came. Micki said they are "allowed to be more expressive," at CS, it is not as boring as at her old school, and here she can not get away with not paying attention. "It isn't only stuff you know, but...if the class is smaller the teacher's gonna see it...if I just nodded off in science class with Bob[2], he'd realize it. It's not like I could exactly crawl underneath my desk and he won't even know I'm there, you know" (April 6, 1993: p. 9).

Hope, with the confidence of a student who had been at the school for nine years quickly inserted that she had slept in Bob's class -- a couple of times, and that she was not going to miss anything except fruit break and recess when she left for high school. She was tiring of the same faces, a condition Micki and Leah admitted to understanding. The school is very small, and they did sometimes miss the availability of possible connections with many people.

One thing they all seemed to enjoy was the freedom to be any way they wanted to be, especially if was strange. Strangeness "runs in this school," said Hope. Micki liked being able to act "weird," even if she didn't choose to. Natalie

57

liked the feeling of not being cooped up (*River City Times and World News* article, July 6, 1992), and Leah feels more relaxed than she did in public school, where, being one of the popular crowd, she felt continual pressure to stay that way. She would only listen to popular music and only wear "new-fashioned" clothes. "Last year I was not an individual.... But this year I am definitely an individual, and now...I hate pop music. I like classical music! I liked it last year, too, but I just didn't say I did" (April 6, 1993: p.20).

Middle School Language Arts. Mary Ann Goodman-Sweeney has been the language arts teacher at CS for fourteen years and was my primary contact person among the staff. Mary Ann uses an adaptation of Atwell's (1988) reading and writing workshop approach. The middle school schedule is arranged so that students and teachers can have large blocks of time together doing lots of actual reading and writing. If a student does not like a book she is reading, she discontinues and chooses another. If a writing piece is not working for her, she is free to start over.

Hope's journals to Mary Ann revealed that she sometimes had difficulty staying interested in a book and would switch often before finishing. Mary Ann's letters back to Hope revealed that her main concern was that Hope find something good to read, not necessarily that she finish what she started.

Selection of the Participants. In this section I describe the process by which the girls came to be part of the study. I will not at this time describe the girls except for basic information that will be helpful in reading this section, because

each of them is profiled in Chapter Four.

I met Micki Stanton-Myers and Leah Corbin as a result of a project assigned for "Middle School Curriculum," a course I was taking during the 1993 spring semester. I was to interview four middle school age students using a format structured around principles of multiple intelligence theory (Gardner, 1990; see Appendix A). To prepare for the interview, the two boys and two girls were asked to think about which of Howard Gardner's seven levels of intelligence reflected their particular intelligences.

The two girls were Micki and Leah, and through the interviews, I discovered that they were able to express themselves very well verbally. Because the study was an investigation of responses, it was important that at least some of the participants were able to respond somewhat fluently; therefore, Micki and Leah were good candidates. In addition I thought their close friendship was likely to help in maintaining a pleasant atmosphere.

I had a concern about the ways their similarities also matched mine at their age: white, middle-class, avid readers, and that we would lack breadth in our perspectives and therefore in our discussions. A colleague mentioned that Hope Dunlap, a middle-school girl whom she had interviewed for her study (Smith, 1993), seemed to be a willing participant and might make a good candidate.[3] Hope was not involved in the multiple intelligence project because she fell into the 7th grade range in the middle school at that time, and I was working with the 6th graders only. (There are no grades at Connectionist School, but there are multi-age

groupings which I refer to as grades.) Hope, unlike Micki and Leah, who were relative newcomers to the school, had been there since pre-school. When I asked Mary Ann her opinion of Hope's participation, she said that Hope communicates well verbally but does not have much enthusiasm for written work. She did think, however, that it might give Hope a "boost" to be in the study and that she would participate well.

So the study began with Micki, Leah, and Hope, and during the first two weeks we met on four occasions to talk about *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, or another topic if the girls seemed preoccupied. On the first meeting day, I arrived to find the girls waiting for me at the top of the stairs leading to our meeting room. With them was a tall, shy-looking girl who appeared reluctant to bid her friends good-bye. The girls told me she was Hope's friend, Natalie Tomlinson, and when I asked if she liked to read, Hope replied, "Nah, she isn't into reading, she's into horses" (March 23, 1993: p.1). I was anxious for Hope to be happy in the group, and thought that including a friend for her would balance out Micki and Leah's closeness. Natalie was willing, and joined the group on April 5, 1993. She was usually quiet, but when asked, would provide thoughtful responses. At fourteen, she was the oldest of the group, and she was in the 7th grade range.

The Researcher. As Chapter One indicates, throughout my childhood and adolescence I remember a love for books and writing, and my best experiences with literature came outside the classroom. Until high school I was the typical good student, making good grades, "behaving" well. However, there is not much

school work that engaged me enough to remember it, other than one poem I wrote as a little girl about how the snow looked on the trees around my house, the time after lunch in fifth grade when Mrs. Hutcheson would read *Indian Captive*, the sound of "Roland to the Dark Tower Came" in sixth grade, and a book report I wrote as a junior.

My home revealed my parents' appreciation for learning and was filled with various kinds of print. *Reader's Digest* "books of the month" were stacked around the German and Czech language textbooks and the huge German Bible on one bookshelf; encyclopedias Mom and Dad couldn't afford but bought anyway lined another. There were some magazines, mostly *Das Beste*, the German version of *Reader's Digest*, and World War II books my brother read, about which I had little interest. Piles of sheet music lay in the bench of the old piano Mom bought from someone, acquainting all of us with the scores from American pre- and post-wartime movies.

Though my memories of reading are many, there are few times that I remember discussing books with anyone. The little reflecting that I did do was in my head, but usually I simply went from book to book, not stopping to contemplate or to make decisions concerning where the new reading fit into my existing notions. Neither did I stop to argue or to "resist" (Fetterly, 1978) the information I absorbed. Not too many people do at that age on their own, however; and the impress of ideas that finds no place for expression often finds itself buried along with the rest of the assumptions that drive our actions without our really knowing

why.

Research Processes

Qualitative research is not a linear, but a recursive process involving field-work, on-going analysis, discovery, re-routing of directions, re-framing of research questions, and roadblocks (Ely, et al., 1991; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990). For clarity and because the research fell into some natural divisions, I will present the phases of it in a linear fashion: gaining access; book discussions; and reflective sessions.

Gaining Access. Gaining access is a matter of importance and concern and often directs the fieldwork as much as the research questions do (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990). My initial access to the field was facilitated in three important ways:

1.   My colleague, Barbara Smith, was completing her own fieldwork at CS with an analysis of the organizational structure of the school. She had established friendly relations with the staff and was discovering that they were encouraged by the attention afforded them through her research. They were open to further research opportunities.

2.   I was conducting what was supposed to be a short-term project for a middle school curriculum course with four of the students.

3.   I knew Mary Ann from previous graduate school work.

After the initial contacts with Mary Ann and Joan Martin, the director or principal, I proceeded first by asking the girls if they were interested, and then by

calling the parents. All parties seemed willing and interested, so I followed up with the consent forms, and we began immediately (see Appendix B).

Gaining access is more than obtaining permission to enter the site and work with participants; it is an on-going negotiation of roles, space, and time (Ely, et al., 1991). Continuing access was facilitated in several ways:

1.	I live only 1.2 miles from CS, which gave me nearly immediate access, important due to the changing schedules at CS.

2.	CS is an open campus. The administration and teachers were willing to share resources such as time, physical space, and psychological space i.e., the willingness to be harried by interruption and change. Continual negotiation for suitable times to meet was difficult, but only because the girls' schedules were not constant from day to day.

3.	My colleague Barb is also my roommate. Living in the same house with her during the two years of her research and analysis gave me invaluable insight and access to CS as well as a "research support group" (Ely, et al., 1991).

4.	Mary Ann and I attended a two-week course in Appalachian literature during the summer of 1993. Carpooling together on the forty-five minute trip back and forth each day gave us time for informal chats about the girls and our work as language arts teachers.

5.	As a result of the multiple intelligence interviews and as a way of giving back to the school for the opportunity to continue the research, I assisted the middle school teachers and students in arranging their end-of-the-year portfolios accord-

ing to Gardner's levels of intelligence (1987). Assisting with the project gave me further opportunities to interact with all of the middle school students, as well as read through all of their portfolio selections and the accompanying reflection pieces.

Book Conversations. Between February 23 and June 7, 1993, the girls and I met on fifteen occasions to discuss the characters from *Roll of Thunder* or *Lyddie*. The structure of those conversations was affected by various conditions: the point of the research question in its particular evolution at any given time; the disposition of the girls toward book talk or extraneous talk[4]; and the success of the group in making room for everyone's voices to be heard. An extensive analysis of those conversations is given in Chapters Four and Five.

Reflective Sessions. Between December 3, 1993, and March 18, 1994, the literature group met to reflect on the conversations from the previous year. There were two stages of the reflective sessions: a two-session critique of the discussions (see Appendices C and D for the questions that served as discussion prompts); and four listening sessions when we listened to portions of our taped conversations, reading the transcripts at the same time.

For the reflective sessions I had selected sections from the transcripts that I believed would lend themselves to fruitful analysis: the early sessions when the girls gave vehement responses to Cassie, Stacey, and TJ from *Roll of Thunder*, would, I hoped, confirm or disconfirm some of my early analyses; and I chose sections from *Lyddie* that would allow me to explore reasons for some of the

judgments the girls had given concerning the behavior of Lyddie, Charlie, Luke, and Diana.

During the months between our book conversations and our reflective sessions, some changes had taken place that were to affect the latter sessions. Natalie had transferred to Washington Middle School, and we were unable to coordinate everyone's schedule with hers. She and I met separately to reflect on the sessions with the aid of the question prompts I had used with the others. The listening sessions were held during the school day, which was most convenient for the majority, so I contacted Natalie's mother Blanche about checking her out of school for a portion of the day. Blanche referred me to the guidance counselor at Washington Middle School who advised against it because of Natalie's low grades. Blanche understandably concurred with the guidance counselor. We were able to arrange an after-school meeting so that Natalie could come to at least one of the listening sessions, but one of the many snowstorms that visited us during the winter of '94 hit the day before we were to meet. We were never able to coordinate the schedule again so that Natalie could attend.

I noticed another change beginning in the early February, 1994, meetings. Micki and Leah were uncharacteristically withdrawn. They participated, but only minimally, and it did not appear that they were enthusiastic about the project. Hope, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy it and was the most alert of the three on each occasion. What I did not know until our last meeting in March was that Micki had been suffering from anorexia since before Christmas. Leah had known

about it from the beginning and lived with that knowledge in the intervening months, until Micki was checked into a hospital the day before our last meeting. Thus, for three sessions when we listened to the tapes, Micki and Leah were not themselves. Hope gamely interacted with me, even when the others did not appear engaged.

Even with all of the distractions, the listening sessions were quite valuable. First, the girls gave a few unexpected, important insights. Second, I discovered that what I was just beginning to learn through the book conversations -- to let them respond naturally -- was still the best agenda for these sessions. However, I had certain information in mind that I wanted to obtain, and I had anticipated that the girls would stop the tape at just the spots I wanted them to and tell me what I wanted to know. Instead they sometimes stopped the tape and said things like, "Who was that talking?" or "That was Nat." or "What's Strawberry?" Third, much of what I learned from those times came as I analyzed the sessions. On the spot, I did not see all or even most of the value they actually were. Fourth, neither the "fun" nor the intimacy of meeting in the basement restaurant at Miller College, across the street from CS, caused the girls to open up that much more than they already had in our regular sessions. There were topics that remained "off limits" to me.

Analysis

Analysis was on-going as throughout each phase of the fieldwork I made analytic memos of my hypotheses, listed questions about the girls' responses as

66

they occurred to me, and recorded my responses, not to the characters in the books, but to the conversations with the literature group. In the following section I describe the analytic processes that culminated in the writing of this document.

Analytic Processes. In the preliminary stages of analysis which I carried out while doing fieldwork, I had relied on three categories as an organizational framework: responses to characters' utterances and actions; disagreements between members of the literature group; and relationships between the texts and personal experiences of the girls.

After the reflective sessions I began organizing data in preparation for the writing of individual profiles that would become Chapter Four. I discovered that the categories I used earlier would no longer work as a framework. Upon consulting Ely et al. (1991), I found that the categories related more to what the authors referred to as "thinking units" (p. 143) than they did to an organizational framework. Going back a step further to what originally prompted those three categories led me to what would become a chart of "Overarching Thinking Units."

The first three thinking units emerged from my study of Rosenblatt and were what intrigued me about reader response theory the first time I read *Literature as Exploration*: reading as lived-through *experience*; reading as a literary event, i.e., engagement with *text*; and reading as a *social* encounter. The other three came from my reading of Belenky et al., (1986) and Brown and Gilligan (1992), and from my personal experiences as a reader. Those categories were: conceptions of *female* characters; women as *connected knowers*; and the importance of *talk*. The

67

italicized words represent the various foci I wanted to keep in front of me as I organized the data. The thinking units subsumed the three categories I had been trying to use, which freed me to find related *themes* instead.

I then began the process of analyzing and interpreting the transcripts for the first profile, which was Leah's. Using an old 11" x 17" accountant's ledger book, I gave in to handwriting instead of the word processor and listed information that related to Leah. My sources were the transcripts, field notes, my journals, Leah's journals to Mary Ann, my analysis of her multiple intelligence interview, and all other related materials. As I completed notes from each transcript and each other source, I wrote out "reflections so far." As I went along, some categories emerged which I began to list on separate sheets with the corresponding transcript date and page.

During the same period I carried out another important part of the analysis: re-listening of tapes, usually done on morning or evening walks. With the tape of the conversation in my Walkman, I listened and then recorded my reflections into a hand-held tape recorder. Back at home I wrote the comments into the transcripts for inclusion in my notes.

From the lists of all of the pertinent data on the large sheets, I wrote a composite sheet listing "what happened," with page numbers corresponding to the notes instead of the transcripts. While writing the composite list it was necessary to remind myself over and over not to interpret, but to report what happened. Although it is not possible to be completely neutral, I believed that a conscious

effort not to interpret might keep me from skewing the information at that stage.

I then looked through the composite list to see what themes were emerging. Many corresponded to the ones I found during the note-taking. At that point I began revising the theme list. I borrowed Ely et al.'s (1991) suggestion of two ways to decide on workable themes: (1) abundance of evidence from the data and (2) evidence of a striking category, even without an abundance of data. After various tries, an outline similar to the final one as used in Chapter Four took shape, and I began to write.

As I wrote Leah's profile, I began to be aware of a need to fill in some gaps in the data as well as a need to confirm some of my assertions, so I obtained an interview with her mother. I asked two basic questions: describe Leah, and describe the effect of Connectionist School. After that I finished the profile.

The process seemed to work quite well for Leah's profile, so I proceeded to follow it for the other three. There was some trepidation as I approached each one that I might not find the abundance or quality of material that I did for Leah. The process worked each time, however; and gradually I began trusting the process more and more.

Repeating the process meant that each transcript was read at least six times (once before for a content analysis; later for Chapter Five) and many of the tapes received four and more listenings. In all I compiled 79 pages of hand-written 11" by 17" pages of notes, composites, and outlines.

Repeating the process also meant that I read our conversations from the

vantage point of each girl. When I worked on Leah's profile I realized even more than I had before what a special person she was. Then when I wrote Micki's, I became more endeared to her. The same thing happened for Hope and for Natalie. I do not wish to imply that these are model adolescent girls, if there is such a thing; they were quite "normal," and I found myself perturbed with them on occasion throughout the study. My point is that I was able to get a close look at them individually, and what I saw was each girl's special qualities.

Back to the Field. Just as I noticed a need to confirm assertions regarding Leah's profile, so I did with the other three. In addition to interviews with each of the girl's mother or father, I visited the school again for rehearsals for "The Tempest," a play Mary Ann was directing with the help of a drama coach from Miller College. I also observed Hope, Micki, and Leah in classes with Mary Ann, Bob (the science and math teacher), and John (the social studies teacher who is also Micki's father). I was not able to visit Natalie's school, but I visited with her in her home and at a fast-food restaurant. I also called Natalie while writing her profile in order to interpret her remarks more accurately. In addition I realized that the multiple intelligence interviews with Micki and Leah had given me insights that I did not have with Hope and Natalie, so I asked Hope and Natalie for separate interviews. They turned out to be important gap-fillers and confirmation for many of my preliminary analyses.

Another important part of the confirmation process was an interview with Mary Ann (see Appendix E) and her agreement to read the work of Chapter Four,

and later, Five and Six. As the language arts teacher of all four girls for at least two years, she was in a position to know if my assertions "rang true," and I asked her to tell me if they did or did not. She did so by marking a "Yes" beside the points she found particularly applicable. She marked "Yes" forty-two times in Chapter Four, significantly confirming my assertions from her standpoint; she indicated no disagreements with my assertions.

Writing Chapter Five. Chapter Five, a treatment of reader response in a social setting, required a somewhat different approach. I used the same note-taking procedure, but needed a new structural format. Becker (1986) gives a process that was to meet that need: writing down each idea on notecards; categorizing swiftly, "intuitively," he says; making preliminary labels; re-shuffling; re-labeling; then outlining. Before doing that I scanned all related sources: my response logs, my daily journals, and the large handwritten sheets from the profiles. That completed, I began Becker's process, which helped to "download" the various thoughts related to conversations. Although I had far more cards than I was comfortable with, it was a process that I could work with. Especially freeing was his note that there are many ways to organize. Realizing that there was no one way I *had* to find, made it easier *to* actually find a suitable one.

Analytical Resources. I consulted several different sources to aid me in conversational analysis (Lakoff, 1975; Schiffren, 1987; and Tannen; 1984, 1986, 1990); discourse analysis (Gee, 1990; Potter, Stringer, and Wetherell, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Van Dijk, 1985); and semiotics (Berthoff, 1990; Christian-Smith,

1990; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; and Rosenblatt, 1988). [5]

Resources in Writing. In the actual writing of Chapters Four and Five, I relied on lessons learned from favorite works: Kirby and Liner (1981); Murray (1990): and Goldberg (1986); as well as from Strunk and White (1935/1979). *Becoming a Woman Through Romance* (1991) and *Reading the Romance* (1984) provided models of literature studies. Another written resource was a collection of reader response logs, written throughout my graduate studies. They were an important part of "integrating the voices" (Belenky et al., 1986: p. 135) of authors, professors, the girls, and me.

Looking Ahead. Chapter Four, "Profiles," contains a profile of each girl, including descriptions, and centered on each one's experiences with the texts and with the group. Chapter Five, "Reader Response in a Social Setting," describes our effects on one another as members of multiple interpretive communities. Chapter Six, "The Importance of Talk," brings together the findings from each phase of the study in order to make practical applications.

Regarding Chapter Six: what can be transferred from this study to classroom practice? Though it was my hope that what I learned as a result of this research will be useful to other teachers, I realized that there were limitations on the generalizability of qualitative research. The students and I represented a unique sample whose mix is not replicable, nor representative of groups of students and teachers gathered across the United States. However, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) note that there is another way to look at generalizability: The

researcher and/or reader operate on the "...assumption that human behavior is not random or idiosyncratic. Therefore, they concern themselves not with the question of whether their findings are generalizable, but rather with the question of to which other settings and subjects they are generalizable" (p. 45). Further, though my work with the girls will not represent all other work with adolescent females, it must be "reckoned with" by those who read of it in future similar cases (p. 46).

ENDNOTES

1.   One aspect of the positioning that will not be covered in any of the chapters is the fact of my experience working as a teacher and principal in a private, Christian school, River City Christian Schools. Connectionist School is a private school, but at the opposite end of the bureaucratic-cooperative continuum as RCCS. Mary Ann and I occupied roughly the same positions as middle school language arts teachers, and then in administrative work. We have known each other since 1986, after taking a class together. Our schools were approximately one mile apart, sharing the same street, but on opposite sides, literally and in some ways, figuratively. For many of the years of our acquaintance until we got to know each other well through the study, we eyed each others' schools warily, neither quite sure "what's going on in there." It is still surprising to me that with both of us in the types of private education we are in and thus, accustomed to people wondering "what goes on in there," that we still asked the question of each other.

I mention my particular positioning for another reason. I did not tell the girls at any time that I had worked at RCCS, because I believed that it would have prejudiced the study with them. Whether that is a misconception of mine, a fact of humanness, or an indication of prejudice, I do not know. What I do know is that it made me comfortable discussing any topic, including religion, knowing that they had no reason to be wary. There was no need for any one of us to "freeze" any time a subject related to the "far-right" was mentioned: religion, abortion, gender-issues, etc. I did not want all of the "psychological events" (see Chapter Five) surrounding the word applied to me.

2.   The students at Connectionist School are on a first-name basis with the teachers and staff. It is a preferred practice of both teachers and students, and makes the teachers seem more "real," according to the students (Smith, 1993).

3.   Hope is African-American, a characteristic that I thought would make the study more useful. Were I to do this over again, I would want Hope as a participant, not because she is black, but because she is another person with different preferences, abilities and needs, just as Micki, Leah, and Natalie are different from each other.

During the final stages of analysis, as I was considering my response to Hope, I realized that I could withhold information about what could be considered "minority status" but that she could not. Just as I did not want to be examined or viewed as a representative of the far right, which I am not, nor should she have been examined as a representative of African-Americans.

In order to have had the African-American perspective, it would have been necessary to work with several African-Americans. However, I cannot and do not claim to have obtained a white perspective either, only the perspectives of the white

74

girls who were in the study. Chapter Five includes a more in-depth look at this particular personal and research dilemma.

4.   The distinction between extraneous talk and book talk is ambiguous. Extraneous talk includes our usual "warm up" time before we launched into book talk, as well as extreme rabbit trails that had little or no connection to the topic of discussion or to literature in general. Book talk includes discussions of characters or events, critiques or conversations initiated as a result of those discussions. I also consider conversations centered on reading habits or preferences "book talk."

5.   Although conversational analysis and semiotics can be subsumed under discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1990), it was helpful to me to distinguish between them. An introduction to semiotics provided me with a deeper understanding of Rosenblatt's transactional process of reading; discourse analysis helped me see the ways our languages are socially and culturally constituted speech acts; and conversational analysis provided me a way to think about the interactions of the literature group.

CHAPTER 4

Profiles

Introduction

In this chapter I profile each of the four girls with whom I undertook the study: Leah, Micki, Hope, and Natalie. In each profile I first briefly describe the girls as persons, then as readers, and I situate them within their interpretive communities. (see Chapter Two, "The Literature Review," p. 46-47). Second, because the study was concerned with the investigation of a reader response approach to strong female characters in adolescent fiction, I characterize them as responders to those characters in the books[1] we discussed. Third, because the focus of the study has been on responses shared and discussed within a group setting, I include a section in each profile characterizing the girls as group members.

To make the characterizations of the girls as persons, readers, and group members, I drew upon information through analyzing the following phases of our conversations: (1) our talks about books and characters; (2) our first round of reflective discussions when we discussed the benefits and drawbacks of the exper-ience; and (3) our second round of reflective sessions in which we listened to, read, and reflected on portions of our taped conversations. Other sources of information served to supplement those conversations as well as confirm and/or disconfirm my findings: multiple intelligence interviews with the girls; conversations and interviews with their teachers and parents; and observations at school and at

special school events such as Art Night and Celebration Night.

I begin the profiles of the girls by briefly describing each as individuals in order to provide a context for later discussions: their characteristics, talents, hobbies, families, and social groups. Then I profile them as readers, showing that all four engage with the text based on their individual experiences and ways of reading, doing so under varying conditions. In Leah's profile, I demonstrate how she restricts herself to books that are reality-based and reads with a painstaking attention to detail that does not seem to compromise her emotional evocations. Her evocations reveal strong attachments to or rejections of characters and emphasize relationships between characters.

In Micki's profile, I show how she is similar to Leah in her skill at reading and expressing herself verbally, yet her habits are different. Micki samples as many literary offerings as she can manage and has thoroughly emotional initial engagements with texts. In subsequent evocations she often moves toward more commonsense, less fanciful responses than does Leah. She has a remarkable memory and appreciation for detail and textual language.

In Hope's profile, I show that she has had enough literary experiences to allow her to make sense of books that do not interest her, but she is not an avid reader, and her engagement with text seems to be restricted to those textual experiences that intrigue her. Her own life provides more palatable, sensory experiences than do characters and events of books, and it is through her own experiences more than the text that she views the characters.

77

In Natalie's profile, I reveal more of a literary history than in Hope's, though not as extensive as in Micki's or Leah's. Natalie was able to connect with the books and characters we discussed. However, her real passion and engagement, her abandonment to and in a book, was obvious only when she talked about texts dealing with horses, the "Saddle Club" series or her horse magazines and encyclopedias.

In the section of the profiles where I describe them as group members, I demonstrate that their characteristics were equally as varied as they were as persons and as readers. Leah described herself as timid and unable to speak her mind as she would like to, but I observed that she was able to disagree pointedly and politely with opinions of others. Her style of intense communication kept topics alive until they had been thoroughly discussed, or at least discussed to her satisfaction, and the manner in which she shared her literary experiences with us suggested that Leah has a great need and desire to express herself.

Micki, clearly the best public speaker of the group, dramatic and colorful in her observations, also liked to share those observations non-stop, a habit she lamented and tried to work on. In addition to discussing how her loquacity affected the group, I explore the effect of her conversational style and signals.

In Hope's section I discuss the various roles Hope assumed as a group member. Her participation varied from week to week, depending upon the character we were discussing, what had happened to her on that day or the previous weekend, or her mood in general; she was what she would call an "honest"

participant. As a "storyteller" and "provider of information," she reveled in our extraneous talk, being perhaps the most social of the group, with Micki a close second. Hope's forays into personal experience were often humorous, sometimes unbelievable, and usually involved her friends or acquaintances in some way. Hope often listened to book talk more than she participated, especially in our discussions of *Lyddie*, but her listening was active, often accompanied by chortles or short exclamations or comments. She was often what I call an "eager participant."

Natalie was very soft-spoken, rarely offering an unsolicited comment, some-times asking questions when startled by or interested in someone else's response. Her contributions were fewer than the others, and though they sometimes mirrored the others' comments, there were times when her perspectives revealed an ability to think clearly for herself, providing a completely different view from that which the rest expressed.

At the end of each profile I make personal, pedagogical, or theoretical observations and applications from the analysis of each girl. I begin the profiles now with Leah.

Profile 1 - Leah Corbin

<u>Leah, the Person</u>

<u>A Description</u>. At the beginning of the study Leah was twelve-years-old, and my first impressions of her were that she was pleasant, shy, verbally expressive, well-adjusted, and surprisingly unassuming, given her range of talents. She seemed quite carefree, though enjoying a rather busy schedule of studies and ballet. A year and a half later, those impressions have been confirmed many times, and they have been altered some or added to as well. I have come to see Leah in much the same way as she described Lyddie, the main character in the book by the same name. "She's in a way stubborn, but stubborn, I guess, stubborn-sweet" (May 12, 1993: p. 5). Leah, too, is stubborn and sweet. She's stubborn enough to practice ballet and work on her classwork and school projects until they are right. Her mother says she is one who will see projects through to the end. She is stubborn enough to argue her points about the characters with the rest of us until we see her points or until she understands why not. She is also sweet in a thoughtful sense; she is the one who inquires about my personal life and my comfort during our sessions. She is the one who is ready to sympathize with others. She appreciates kindness in others, whether in her immediate circle or in books.

Leah's carefree existence is threatened by her worries: about her parents and their busy life in two restaurants they own; about her friends, chief of whom was Micki, who struggled for five months, and does so now, with anorexia; about

80

her work at school, which weighs on her when she cannot do it well or when she runs out of time to attend to it. She seems to struggle particularly with math. When she doesn't succeed at it as she thinks she should, she gets frustrated, occasionally crumpling up her papers, and throwing them away. "After that, I'll stay moody for the rest of the day" (June 4, 1993: p. 50).

Interpretive Communities. Leah's interpretive communities differ in ideology. Her dance company is competitive, "high-pressured," according to her mother, who described the scenario: girls from ages 6 - 13, standing in front of the mirror, comparing bodies and performance. But Leah loves to dance and is good at it, so she continues. Connectionist School promotes community through equality and diversity, not competition (Smith, 1993). There are no evaluative grades, no honor roll, no competitive sports. Boys and girls play games together: sometimes softball in the grassy field by the driveway; sometimes basketball at the hoop in the parking lot. If I arrived at lunchtime I would often see Bob, who is the science and math teacher, out playing basketball with them as one of the team members. Leah has discovered that she can be herself more at CS. Her parents love it for her and their other children, and have "no worries" when the children are there (Interview, May 10, 1994).

Leah mentions her family often, and it is clear that there is a close bond. She worries a great deal about her father's busy life, a worry that was intensified by the fact that a friend of her father's, who also owns his own restaurant, had a heart attack. Other than Leah's own internal worries about her family, her family

itself does not seem to be a source of pressure to her. According to her mother, they encourage her independence. In addition, there appears to be little pressure from religious or social dogma to which the family adheres, to which Leah is also expected to adhere; her family occasionally attends a Unitarian church, whose philosophy of inclusiveness is in close alignment with Connectionist School.

Leah mentions her friends on occasion, but her busy schedule and desire to succeed at ballet and school leaves little time for simple recreational socialization. Her friends at school are important to her, and her mother was pleased that she has been branching out there.

Leah, the Reader

Reading Habits. Leah is an avid reader, and her reading habits are purposeful and particular. She reads slowly books that she cares about in order to capture details. If she discovers that there is a bit of information that she missed in her previous reading, she will go back to investigate. She says that her reason for the practice is to prevent confusion, but I suggest now, and will explain further later, that part of it may be so that she will not get caught "not knowing" important information because, although she does not like to go back and confirm details, she says, "I make myself go back" (April 2, 1993: p. 5). This year she has decided to choose books she can learn from, a notion from her dad, she thinks. Hence, her choices of books make sense: *The Autobiography of Varian Frye, Annie Oakley, The Diary of Anne Frank*, and *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. She does not always choose biography; she also likes *The Westing Game, Sea Wars*, and

Number the Stars.

Reading Processes. In her discussions, Leah reveals ongoing processes of response that correspond to those in Beach (1993): engaging, constructing, imaging, connecting, and evaluating/reflecting. (See Chapter Two, The Literature Review, p. 39 for a discussion of these processes.)

Leah's *engagement*, or tendency to become involved with the text on an emotional level, was evident in nearly every discussion. One telling example was when Leah was talking about books in general: "It's a good book if it makes you cry" (April 2, 1993: p. 23). On other occasions, Leah exhibited her emotional involvement by her expressions of affection and loyalty to some characters, disdain of others. Leah grew attached to both Lyddie and Diana in *Lyddie*, so much so that she argued for them and defended them. Sometimes it was difficult for her to be objective where they were concerned, much as it would be difficult to be objective about a particularly close friend. Leah was negatively impressed with other characters -- Charlie, Luke, Clarissa, and Judah -- and her discussions of them were usually punctuated with expressions of disgust, exasperation, and outrage. Her conceptions of all of these characters will be explored in more depth and for their relational implications in the next section.

Another process, that of *imaging*, or visualization, is evident in Leah's responses, so much so that she is disgusted when an author introduces an element that "changes" the picture she has constructed. In reading *Sea Wars*, Leah was particularly annoyed when her image of the house was changed. "I was

starting to imagine these nice little tudor houses and everything next to the sea-shore. And then they change it, and then they explain more...and, I mean, I can't change after that" (April 2, 1993: p. 14).

Leah was also disturbed that her picture of Lyddie had to be incomplete because of the author's omission of an important detail. "She never had a birth-day! That drove me up the wall" (May 12, 1993: p. 11)!

Her immersion in the book is so complete that she seems to merge with it, reacting to it as if in a conversation with a person, acting within it as if in reply. Therefore, she does not always follow the lead of the author but becomes the author's partner in another process of response, that of *constructing*, this time, the character or situations. She will change names when she cannot pronounce them or when they don't suit the characters: Prudence in *Lyddie* became Emily because "she was too nice to be Prudence." Her ability to visualize and "construct alternative worlds" causes her to strike off horror novels from her list; books based on reality are scary enough for her. For if unpleasant incidents -- the murder of a Jewish girl in Germany, the terrors of the KKK visited upon a small town in South Carolina -- are documented in a book, then they could happen again, she reasons. After reading such episodes, she goes to sleep thinking things like this: "What if there were such a thing as a black KKK" (April 2, 1993: p. 19)?

Leah's ability to construct, or enter the world of the text was also clear in an instance when she and Micki disagreed about Lyddie's greediness. Leah defended her, in this case accurately so, according to the text, but the defense

was more than textually based. Leah had constructed an image of Lyddie to which she was loyal. "I just got to know her so well, that I didn't really resent much about her...I just, I don't know, she just, I just liked her so much that I just thought she was great" (May 17, 1993: p. 26).

Another process, that of *connecting* autobiographically with text, is common for Leah and was especially pronounced in our discussions of Lyddie. Reflecting on Lyddie's loss of her mother and sister, Leah imagined her own wild grief if anything would happen to one of her family members:

> Leah: If I was her, my heart would have been broken because of
>
> what happened to my mother...I would have been freaked out if like
>
> one of my brothers or sister died. I mean, I'd probably have to go
>
> to like—
>
> Hope: a mental institution!
>
> Leah: I mean, like yeah! (May 17, 1993: pp. 23-24)

The last response process cited by Beach is that of *evaluating/reflecting.* Leah was able to understand why certain experiences with texts were more fulfilling, more enjoyable than others. For instance, although she liked *Roll of Thunder*, it was not as meaningful to her as *Lyddie* because of the way she read it. Having started *Roll of Thunder* at home when she was nine, she remembers being downstairs by herself and getting to the part about the night riders coming by Cassie's house. At that point she had to set it aside because it was "too scary." Coming back to it at age twelve was not a fresh experience, and she read it in snatches

instead of all the way through as she likes. Some parts seemed real to her and others didn't. She thinks it would have been different if she had read it all in one sitting or in larger blocks of time as she prefers.

In the next segment I show that what Leah brings to the text of both personal and literary traits merge with the text to produce the evocations of importance to her. Her evocations reveal certain themes to which she returns again and again in her discussions of the characters and the relationships between them.

Recurrent Themes in Leah's Responses to Characters

From the many topics Leah either touched on briefly or dwelt on protractedly, certain themes emerged that seemed salient to her: love, independence, and the oppositional themes of betrayal and loyalty. I first briefly explicate those themes as they appear in her judgments of characters, then more in depth as they emerge in relationships between the characters.

Themes in Leah's Judgments of Characters. Of all the characters we discussed from either book, Lyddie was Leah's favorite. She liked Lyddie's persistent drive for the freedom to live her life as she chose. "She just kept going and going until she got what she wanted" (May 26, 1993: p. 16). She also appreciated Lyddie's love and loyalty for Charlie and Rachel. To Leah, Lyddie is nearly a paragon of the virtues of love, loyalty, and independence.

Lyddie's friend Diana earns Leah's respect by her care for Lyddie as seen in her demonstrations of patience, her concern for Lyddie to have a better life, and

86

her willingness to spend time teaching Lyddie, not just about running the looms at the factory, but how to understand the written regulations for workers that confuse Lyddie.

Cassie's mother, from *Roll of Thunder*, was another favorite of hers, partly because she, like Lyddie, pursued her goals and, at the end of that pursuit, reached an independent status unlike the other mothers in the town. "They told that [her mother] had followed her dream to be a teacher, that she actually did it. I thought that was really neat. That's why I liked her so much" (May 17, 1993: p. 5).

Love and loyalty are two traits Leah appreciated in the male characters as well. In fact, she identified more with Stacey, Cassie's brother, than she did with Cassie herself, not just because Stacey was less bold in action and speech than Cassie, but because he was very loyal to his friends. What she loved about Charlie, Lyddie's brother, and what made his betrayal reprehensible in her eyes was the fact of his great affection for Lyddie in the beginning of the book.

Themes in Leah's View of Relationships Between Specific Characters. Leah wants loyalty, love, and independence to be present relationally among specific characters. In this segment I feature the following relationships about which Leah seemed to care the most: Lyddie and Charlie; Lyddie and Luke; Lyddie and her mother, Mrs. Worthen; and Diana and Dr. Craven, Diana's married lover.

1. Lyddie and Charlie: Leah believes that Lyddie loves Charlie in the *agape*, or sacrificial sense, and she wants the relationship to be reciprocal. In the

beginning of *Lyddie*, Leah believed it was. "At first, on that farm, I just thought, 'They're the perfect brother and sister.' I mean, they didn't get into any fights, and they were just so sweet together" (May 17, 1993; p. 7). When Mrs. Worthen decides to take the little sisters, Agnes and Rachel, to live with Aunt Clarissa and Uncle Judah, Lyddie and Charlie decide to stay, and end up spending a long, difficult winter together. Then in the spring, Lyddie and Charlie find they must leave the farm; their mother has hired them out to pay off debts: Charlie to Baker's mill; Lyddie to a woman who runs Cutler's Tavern. Though their separation is particularly cruel because of the hope they gained after surviving the winter and spring alone, Lyddie does not give in to anguish. In her mind, and subsequently in Leah's, she and Charlie are parted only physically and only temporarily. Lyddie thinks about him, writes to him when she can, and actively plans and saves toward the day when they'll be reunited along with their two younger sisters. When it appears that Charlie's life and thoughts are taking a different track, Leah is concerned:

> I started realizing that, um, when she went back and she brought the maple candy to [Charlie's new] home, right when she was going back to the farm from the Cutler's Tavern. Well, when the mother (Charlie's "new" mother) said, "He's at school," I started thinking, "I wonder, they must be really good to him because he was supposed to be there to *work*. And I really didn't think of it much, then. But, I guess, when he wasn't writing back, I was, I started

wondering. And oh, I was so mad! I was really angry." (May 17,

1993: pp. 7-8)

Like a jealous lover, Leah has been watching for "signs" of Charlie's love, or at
least his faithfulness:

> Leah: It, it didn't seem like he loved her anymore. I mean, I mean, he
>
> barely even said good-bye. He barely even said good-bye.
>
> He was like, just sort of took Rachel.
>
> Micki: I know! And he didn't even know Rachel!
>
> Leah: I know, and oh--sssssssssss (Leah hisses in contempt).... I
>
> was like, "Lyddie, Punch him! Punch him!" (May 17, 1993: pp. 8-9)

There are no signs of love, and when he comes to take Rachel away from Lyddie
to live with his new family; in the absence of proof to the contrary, Leah draws her
own conclusions: Charlie has betrayed Lyddie. Forgiveness, a relational act, was
very difficult for Leah, not just because of the magnitude of Charlie's "sin," but
because of the depth of her identification with Lyddie and with *him* at the beginning
of the book.

In our next conversation Leah again expressed a wish for some outward
indication that Charlie cared. "I'd feel a lot better if Charlie said like, 'Well, how
about if you come and visit us any time you want to' and said good-bye and given
her a hug" (May 26, 1993: p. 5). When Micki and I both noted that Lyddie withheld
her own demonstrations of the deep affection she felt, Leah dismissed the
argument: "I think she was like, in shock" (p. 6). It seemed that Leah would not

and could not excuse Charlie for what was to her no less than betrayal.

2. Lyddie and Luke: Luke Stevens, Lyddie's would-be suitor, was the son of Quaker neighbors, and in Leah's eyes, a threat to Lyddie's happiness and independence. Leah expressed her dislike for Luke the first time she mentioned him, saying that he just did not seem right for Lyddie. The only reason she could come up with at the time was that he was religious and Lyddie was not. We began exploring her opinions and the reasons for them, ranging from his Quaker dialect to his dark homespun clothing and round-brimmed hat. When in a subsequent conversation Micki asked her why she didn't like Luke, she replied, "I just don't think he's right for Lyddie. He's too much like of a 'goody two-shoes,' a 'mama's boy.' Lyddie needs somebody more like Charlie" (May 28, 1993: p. 1). After much exploration of the subject with all of us, what Leah came back to decisively was their incompatibility due to religious differences. If Lyddie marries Luke, she will be restricted by his religion as much as he is. "He hasn't met any other girls. He's been all cooped up with his religion" (p. 15). In Leah's mind, religion has caused nothing but trouble for Lyddie's family. Lyddie's mother has abandoned the family to await the end of the world, and Leah suspects Uncle Judah has taken the money Lyddie has sent and "given it to *God*" (p. 16)! Leah is not about to agree with a marriage that will restrict Lyddie even further. However, it is not marriage alone that seems restrictive to Leah at this point. It is marriage to Luke.

3. Lyddie and her mother: An on-going disagreement between Leah and Micki concerned a wish expressed by Micki that Lyddie have a mother. Though

90

Mrs. Worthen is not dead, she is of no use to Lyddie at this point in her life, and in fact, has hindered her freedom by hiring Lyddie out and abandoning herself to the religious fanatic, Uncle Judah. Leah believes it would change Lyddie as a character to have a mother. Even though she admits it would be hard -- unthinkable -- for her, Leah, to live without her mother; for Lyddie, who is accustomed to hardship and independence, it would be better to remain unattached. "I think she did great by herself," Leah said (May 17, 1993: p. 24). Earlier, she had spoken with great admiration for Lyddie's and Charlie's ability to go it alone throughout the winter and spring. Leah likes Lyddie's character the way she is -- self-sufficient. When Micki clarifies that she does not want Lyddie to have a mother who is over-protective, nor does she want her to go back to the "little family structure," Leah is satisfied, and wraps up the conversation with her own prescription for Lyddie:

> I think she needs at least like a really good friend that she can go to when she has problems and talk to her. And, I think that's why I wanted her to stay with Diana. And then, when she goes off to college, she could, after she goes off to college and she gets a little older, I think it would be good for her to marry somebody. (May 26, 1993: p. 12)

4. <u>Diana and Dr. Craven</u>: In Leah's eyes, Diana was betrayed by Dr. Craven. "Oh, God, that made me mad!" she said (May 17, 1993: p. 15). In subsequent discussions of their affair, Leah continued to see Diana as blameless. "My theory is that he pushed her into it," she said (June 4, 1993: p. 15). Dr.

Craven has taken advantage of Diana, and though Leah admits that we don't know everything about Diana, she still thinks she is "dazed" by Dr. Craven, and that "she probably didn't even know that he had a wife" (p. 16). Leah read the situation entirely as Dr. Craven's betrayal of Diana and would not implicate Diana. What she saw was Diana being forced to quit work at the factory, remove herself from the Association for Worker's Reform, and move to another town, all because of Dr. Craven. Leah understood that even if he did love Diana, he did not have to pay what Diana did for what Diana called their "wickedness."

In the next section I describe Leah as a group member through a consideration of the following: her own self-description, her patterns of intense communication, and the effect of structure on her communication.

Leah as Group Member

Leah's Self-Description. In the first conversation I had with Leah about one of our books, she described herself as more shy than Cassie. "She speaks what's on her mind. I usually sorta think about it...I usually get real timid and decide not to say it," she said. "I think she's very brave" (March 24, 1993: p. 1). Leah was shy the first time we met, but as the days passed, she grew more and more bold until at the very end, she was ordering the others not to interrupt her. And even though she was a bit shy at the beginning, it never seemed to prevent her from speaking her mind clearly, whether in disagreement with someone else or in expressing her opinion. She continued to rue the fact that she was timid, however, even when we would stop and point out times when she seemed to prove she was

not. She always answered our protests by saying, "That's because this is a small group." She explained further one day:

> I wish I was like Lyddie, a lot. Because, I don't know, I just wish I could stand up a little bit more for myself sometimes. I just get so nervous. I mean I want to, but then, I, I just get too nervous to do it, and, and, I never end up doing it (sigh). And that really sort of drives me up the wall when I do that. (May 17, 1993: p. 20)

The conversation continued as the girls tossed out possibilities, then questioned Leah:

Hope: Depends on how you mean by "stand up for yourself."

Micki: Yeah.

Leah: I just,I guess, well, I mean, like, God, today! How Micki said, you know, in that big group, that something happened in the middle school and nobody'd done anything about it. I could never do that. I just, I mean I'd like to do it, but I could just never do it! I mean, I just couldn't get the nerve up to stick up my hand and say something.

Hope: Yeah.

Leenie: So it's not, can you figure out why?

Leah: I, cuz I don't want to get humiliated if I---

Natalie: Uh-*huh*!

Leah: stutter or something. (p. 20)

Leah went on to say that "it's so easy" to talk to a small group like ours, but if there was someone "annoying, like the boys in our class," or someone that she didn't like in the group, she wouldn't be able to talk (p. 21).

It was nearly a year later that Leah listened to the portion of tape on which the conversation comparing herself with Cassie was recorded. When the tape stopped, Leah commented:

Leah: You know what I just realized?

Leenie: What?

Leah: I'm starting to change. I'm not as timid as I used to be. (February

8, 1994: p. 14).

She went on to explain that she thinks it's because she's getting to know people better. She sounded pleased.

Intense Communication. The intensity of Leah's communication is revealed in two aspects of her discourse: 1) in her persistence as she pursued her ideas and 2) in her need to express herself. That I describe her communication as "intense" is an indication that she rarely displayed indifference; the level of intensity varied only minimally according to her interest in the topic, her comfort level, the group disposition, and the occasion.

1. Leah's Persistence in Pursuing her Ideas: Throughout the course of our conversations together there emerged certain issues about which Leah felt passionate, and she would raise or resurrect these issues until she effected some sort of satisfactory closure. Those issues revolved around our opinions of the following

94

people or situations: Charlie, Luke and Lyddie, and the question of Lyddie's greed. I begin with Charlie.

Leah spoke of her feelings about Charlie often, whether it was during her response time or in the form of a question to someone else. Her question to Natalie, "What about Charlie?" was accompanied by her own opinions of him, much in the same way two people gossip about a third party. Her question to Micki was framed similarly as the one to Natalie, and from her comments and tone, it seemed the motive was reinforcement of her own opinion and the satisfaction of shared horror at what he had done. Although this topic was never as clearly resolved as the others, Leah seemed to gain some closure by having the last word in the exchange where she expressed her wish that Charlie would have given some sign of affection.

Micki: But the thing is---

Leah: I didn't, I mean---

Micki: Lyddie didn't exactly encourage that! She was aching in her
        heart, but Charlie didn't know that!

Leah: I think she was just like, shocked. (May 26, 1993: p. 5)

Although Micki and I both attempted to use the text to show her what led us to believe that Lyddie was at least partially culpable, the subject soon was changed, as it often is in a group discussion, and Leah never raised it again.

The issue of Luke and Lyddie was resolved when Leah came to terms with it herself. After many queries and lengthy discussions in the five sessions between

May 4 and May 28, Leah's arguments against Luke and Lyddie were halted when she realized that her objections were due to his and Lyddie's differences in religious upbringing. It was not that she changed her mind, but that she understood herself in the matter and was able to let it rest.

Concerning Lyddie's greed, however, coming to closure was not a result of her own understanding but Micki's understanding of Leah's point. The question had been batted about during four sessions, and between the third and the fourth conversation about it, Micki re-checked the text. When she returned the next time, she conceded that she had missed some important information and that she accepted Leah's point. Leah was elated, nearly triumphant. "Thank you, Micki! Thank you!" she said (May 26, 1993: p. 15).

2. Leah's Need to Express Herself: Leah was an eager participant in the group, talking and listening energetically, and it became apparent that she enjoyed sharing her thoughts with the rest of us. On several occasions she made remarks such as, "This was lots and lots and lots of fun" or "I just love talking about books" or "Can we stay until 2:00?" It seemed that on the one hand she was keenly interested in book talk; but on the other hand, she often seemed interested in *expressing*, or having an outlet for the myriad thoughts that crowded her brain during the school day. During the February 4, 1994, reflective discussion, we had spent the first few minutes listening to an exchange between Hope and Micki, and Leah was eager to get to the portion of tape on which she was featured. When Micki teased her about having an "ego problem," Leah grinned and said, "I guess.

96

I just want to hear myself" (p. 4).

The Effect of Structure. Leah began our discussions shyly in March, but in April I noted that she began revealing her thoughts more freely, disagreeing with others. At that point most of our discussions were unstructured, with no one officially "taking turns." During those times, I would sometimes have to ask her questions in order to draw out her opinions, and on occasion it would be necessary to protect her space to speak so that others would not monopolize. When on May 12 I changed the structure temporarily and for the next few sessions we had official turns, Leah's participation style changed. She seemed to pick up steam, began blurting in when others were speaking in order to make her points, and intensified her interactions. She became overtly aggressive, openly admitting that she wanted to speak. She stopped Micki from interrupting her by whispering loudly, "It's my turn! It's my turn!" When Micki tried to get a word in later, while it was still Leah's turn, Leah said matter-of-factly and pleasantly, "You can talk later" (p. 22).

By this time Leah was getting more and more comfortable with the group, but I suggest that the structure of the sessions gave her added freedom , perhaps in her mind, a right to speak. She liked being told to speak for a certain number of minutes, she was assured uninterrupted time, and her talking was more than sanctioned -- it was solicited.

Theoretical, Pedagogical and Personal Implications

Leah's profile invites an examination of several theoretical, pedagogical, or

97

personal concerns. Those concerns fall into roughly three categories: reading processes; identification with characters; and benefits derived from group work.

Reading Processes. Leah's literary experiences support current understandings of reading processes: conceptions of text as experiences that must have connection to the reader in order to make sense; and conceptions of the literary experience as transactional, i.e. when the text, and what constitutes it, and the reader, and what constitutes her understandings, meet and become transformed according to the degree of consciousness on the part of the reader and according to the degree of potential in the text. In addition, her processes raise a point of importance when considering how best to facilitate a reading or otherwise learning experience.

1. Leah's imagination, history of reading, and experiences allow her to visualize as she reads a wide variety of books; in fact, it is Leah's ability to visualize that makes horror stories too vivid. This practice makes her a particular reader and supports Rosenblatt's point that what the reader brings to the text is as important as what's in the text. Leah brings a vivid imagination, a fund of experiences and creative challenges that work together with the symbols on the page to order an interpretation that is meaningful, and in the case of horror novels, overwhelming to her.

2. Leah's experience of merging with the texts reflects Rosenblatt's concept of a literary transaction. What she selects from the text, and what it evokes in her are particular to her situation. Though her evocations may be similar to some of

the others', they are uniquely hers.

3. Leah has learned that attention to detail enhances the evocation of the text. She is able to attend to detail because she chooses her books and because her experiences allow her to make sense of detail. She does not, however, lose the forest for the trees. Details are an aid; she needs to capture them in order to make sense of the book, and in order to interact, not in order to be right. However, if she does not keep that in mind, or is not continually encouraged about that fact by the kind of work she is required to do, details and right answers may become too important.

Identification with Characters. The themes emerged from Leah's own life in her identification with the characters. She was intensely loyal to Lyddie because of the depth of Lyddie's love for and loyalty to her family, and defended her actions with as much textual and psychological evidence as she could muster. Leah also appreciated Diana because of her sweet and giving disposition and supported her with much the same zeal that she did Lyddie when it was revealed that Diana had become pregnant and had to leave the factory and town because of it.

Leah is not biased toward female characters, but she does seemed to be biased toward the feminine, displayed in the traits of love and caring, connectedness and loyalty (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Tannen, 1992). The other trait, independence, is not considered a traditionally feminine one but is one that Leah values in the characters and in her friends, like Micki, whom she admires for her ability to risk disfavor, a form of independence, by speaking

99

out. She also likes two other Connectionist students for their independent behavior: one who has many opinions, which "although it can get annoying, is sorta neat" (May 17, 1993: p. 13); and another "who will tell you the truth right to your face if you ask" (February 4, 1994: p. 3).

She interprets the actions of the characters just as many of us do in our own relationships. In life as in books, we have only partial information, and in *Lyddie*, we can only infer what isn't written from what we know of life and from what evidence we can find in the text to support our inferences. The action takes place through Lyddie's eyes, and the characters are seen only as they interact with her or are explained by those who do. With the exception of her opinions about Luke and perhaps Diana, Leah's logic is textually and experientially sound.

Leah is able to make extremely powerful connections with this book, illuminating well a foundational principle of reading and of reader response:

> In order to share the author's insights, the reader need not have had
> identical experiences, but he must have experienced some needs,
> emotions, concepts, some circumstances and relationships, from
> which he can construct the new situations, emotions, and under-
> standings set forth in the literary work. (Rosenblatt, 1938/83: 81)

The circumstances of Lyddie's life do not match Leah's in any way. Leah's family is close, and her existence is privileged; Lyddie's is not. The temporal distance spans one and a half centuries. But what reaches across both time and context from Lyddie to Leah are the needs, emotions, and understandings they

both experience. Both of them love people fiercely: for Lyddie, it's Charlie and Rachel; for Leah, it's her entire family. Both are stubborn in their pursuits; they have even been described as driven. Though they express them differently, both have sensitive natures and a great capacity for loyalty. And Leah understands Lyddie's need to order her own life.

Although Leah displayed incredible textual understanding, she does have some misconceptions of characters based on her own assumptions. She is still confused about Luke, perhaps because of her own ambivalence about religion, perhaps because the magnet of conformity still has some power in her life; and Luke, who looks and talks differently, does not "fit in." She continues to despise Charlie, who though in one sense can be construed as despicable, cannot be faulted entirely based on what is evident in the text. Perhaps Leah has not yet learned how to move beyond strong emotion to examine the possibilities there. Her confusion and short-sightedness are normal occurrences, both in a literary experience and in life. However, once they are spoken and become texts themselves to be analyzed, they also become an avenue by which to examine her personal, societal, and cultural assumptions, leading to not just a clearer under-standing of herself and others but also providing a model for future learning experiences.

Benefits Derived From Group Work. Leah seemed to both benefit from and enjoy the sessions, which I attribute to her own particular taste and to the format of the discussions. Of all the girls, Leah at least outwardly enjoyed our

conversations the most, frequently expressing her satisfaction on a particular day or asking to stay longer. When I asked the girls to tell me how the experience compared to other discussions they've had about books (see Appendix C), Leah wrote, "I liked it better because it was with small groups and only girls. That helped. It was more organized than just talking to a friend about it."

The format was usually loosely structured and relatively unhurried. We worked within a schedule, but acting on the belief that it takes dialogue and time to understand each other, I made an effort to allow the conversations to take the courses the girls chose as much as possible. Leah seemed to flourish under such a set-up. The loose flow seemed to relieve pressure and the temporary structure seemed to allow her voice to be heard. When I asked what she valued about our discussions she replied, "I always felt like I could be myself without feeling embarrassed, and I really like discussing books, so I loved it!"

Profile 2 - Micki Stanton-Myers

<u>Micki, the Person</u>

<u>A Description</u>. On the outside Micki is a friendly, cheerful girl of thirteen with a warm smile. She possesses a poise and an eloquence unusual for a girl her age, qualities I saw throughout our many sessions and during school events such as Art Night, when she dramatically portrayed a creation myth of the Kono people of Guinea. Having heard her father address his class one day, it is clear that Micki shares his gift of public speaking and his enjoyment of it.

"I love to talk," she said at our first meeting, and she is of the opinion, much to her chagrin, that she talks too much. But what she says is clearly expressive of herself, partly because of her gift for language and partly because she is tuned in to her own feelings and attitudes; she seems to know herself well.

Micki reveals that the outward poise that she seems to display so effortlessly does not always keep her calm on the inside. "I am afraid of silence," she says, "because of my imagination," which is very vivid and hard for her to control. Therefore, she monitors what things go into her mind such as horror novels or movies, and she likes having people around; they are a "safety net" (Interview, February 3, 1993).

Micki is intelligent, intuitive, and sensitive, qualities which help her to learn easily, to understand the feelings of others and the complexities of human nature, and to relate her understandings to her friends, family, classmates, and teachers. These same qualities, however, cause her considerable difficulty. Her antennae

103

seem to remain in extended position, receiving countless arbitrary signals -- words, facial expressions, body language, imagined feelings, impressions -- some translating as negative metamessages (Tannen, 1986, 1992) which distort her perceptions. She does not seem to question her talents as much as her physical appearance. According to her father, she hates her red hair, and her slim figure (by anyone's standards) of last year has now become anorexic. She spent over four weeks between April and May of 1994, hospitalized in a nearby city.

During one of our reflective sessions before Micki's condition became public, the girls and I listened to a portion of a *Roll of Thunder* discussion. Afterwards we considered the effect of Cassie's maturity or immaturity on her actions and in general, the difference between young children and adolescents. I told them about David Elkind's theory of cognitive growth in adolescence, what he calls "thinking in a new key" (1988: p. 23).

> Leenie:...[He says] that during that time your thinking patterns change and you're able to think about things differently. You're able to understand other people's motives more and think through things in a way that's not as simple as when you were younger. I don't know if you feel that is true.
>
> Leah: I'm sure that *is* true.
>
> Micki: I'm not so sure if it's always so good, because---
>
> Leenie: If it's always what?
>
> Micki: I'm not sure if growing up is always so nice, because it seems

I was happier when I was younger....

Leah: Maybe, it seems like when you know more, you seem more happy, you know?

Leenie: When you know more? So are you sort of disagreeing with Micki?

Leah: No! I'm agreeing with her!

Leenie: Pardon me?

Leah: Like when you grow up you start, you know more. That's probably why your younger years were better.

Leenie: Oh, I see.

Leah: Catch my drift?

Leenie: Yes. Because there are some unpleasant things that you learn.

Micki: Yeah.

Leenie: And life isn't quite as simple---

Leah: Yeah.

Leenie: And people aren't quite as---

Leah: Yeah, and you know, all those little fantasies are gone. Santa Claus is gone, the Easter Bunny's gone. (February 8, 1994: pp. 12-13)

As of this writing Micki has gained back twenty pounds. I saw her on several occasions after her release from the hospital, and though she is nearly

back to her vibrant self, she is "not out of the woods yet," her father says.

Interpretive Communities. Micki's communities include her riding companions and teachers in 4-H, the faculty and students at Connectionist, her church, and her family. Micki enjoys 4-H through the resources of small college in the county where she lives. She has won ribbons in horse judging and loves to ride. As for the people there, she spoke of a girl in her 4-H class with whom she could be best friends were it not for the competitive aspects of horsemanship.

Connectionist School is a place where "you're allowed to be more expressive," she says, which suits her well. She is appreciated by her teachers and from what I could discern, accepted and liked by her peers. Because she is a very sociable, affable person, the small size of Connectionist School and the familial milieu it assumes after time are a concern to her and the others. They discussed the complexities of the problem on different occasions, and one day Micki talked herself out of and then back into the concern:

> Another thing I'm realizing is, we're always having people coming
> into the middle school, because every year new people from
> downstairs move up, because, because, but then again every year
> people leave, so you know! So it's just the same size. (April 6, 1993:
> p. 11)

Micki's family consists of her, her older sister Kara, and her mother and father. Her father John has been a social activist for years; in 1968 he joined the peace movement, taking various instructor and leadership positions, and is a

recent former director of Plowshare Peace Center. Her mother Jo Anne is also highly interested in social issues.

To say that Micki's family is central in her life is an understatement as well as a matter of concern for them at present. John, who during the 1993-94 school year became her teacher for social studies, has nearly always been present in her schooling. He directed the pre-school where she attended, he substitute-taught in the same school she attended before coming to CS. Because he is on the faculty, the family can afford to send her to CS, and her transportation is combined with his. Also because he is on the faculty, Micki is never without the knowledge of his presence. They ride together on the one-hour, one-way commute; she is currently in his class, and even when she wasn't one of his students, she heard about him from the other students -- not always favorably, as is normal in student discourse. To further complicate matters, Micki's mother is the priest of the Episcopal church she attends. The family is in the midst of deliberations about Micki's schooling next year. She has one more year of eligibility at Connectionist, but the question of its benefit under the present conditions remains a concern.

The overlap between CS, the family, and the church includes more than the people involved. Her mother Jo Anne cites a similarity in ideology and practice: "an acceptance of divergent ideas and opinions" and social concerns. She appreciates the emphasis on service projects both in Micki's youth program in church and at CS. Jo Anne says that part of the church's teachings include the belief that people are made in the image of God, and that "life is learning who that

107

image is" (Telephone Interview: June 10, 1994). Of CS, Micki had this to say on Celebration Night '94: "The best thing I've learned is to be yourself." According to Micki, at CS you can be "who you are."

In the following sections I describe Micki as a highly-skilled reader who chooses reading as a hobby, and whose skills seem effortlessly won, but are in actuality a product of a great deal of activity, not just on her part but on the part of those surrounding her.

<u>Micki, the Reader</u>

 <u>Reading Habits</u>. Micki is described by her father as a "voracious" reader, exactly the word I had chosen when considering how to describe her in that area. She loves to read, and usually had a book in hand when I came for a talk. On one occasion, she was absorbed in *Many Waters*, by Madeleine L'Engle; on another, Agatha Christie's *Ordeal by Innocence*. She can get Agatha Christie novels in large print editions from the library which makes reading on her hour commute less dizzying. That may be one reason she seems to favor Christie, or it may be her affinity for mystery and intrigue at work as well. As my examples in the next section will demonstrate, Micki is very much the "Miss Marple" of the literary experience. She sniffs out problems in discussions, looks for clues in the text and for motives in the discussants, she trusts her intuition, she analyzes the evidence and asks good questions of it, she's usually right, and when she's wrong she's gracious about it! She loves to talk about books which is why she enjoys reading books with groups. Her language reflects her wide reading, her exposure to

literature through her parents, school, radio and television -- National Public Radio and public television are two influential media in her life -- and most importantly perhaps, her appreciation for the sounds of language or the turn of a phrase. Her normal discourse is heavily peppered with references to books she is reading or has read, and what she quotes is usually close to verbatim.

Unlike Leah, Micki does not read laboriously for detail, unless she must do so for a reading assignment. Her natural pattern of reading, she says, is to read a book several times: the first time she reads quickly to see if she likes it; the second, she "really reads it"; on the third and fourth times she goes back over her favorite parts. She did not mind making notes in the books in preparation for our discussions, and she especially enjoyed having her own book to highlight. "That was the best part," she said (December 10, 1993: p. 12). What she and the others do not like is reading a book with a view to writing a report about it. When I asked if that changed the experience of reading for them, the answer was "Yeah!" As usual, Micki illustrated: "It makes me like, 'Omigosh! I didn't understand this part! Call in the brigade'" (p. 9)!

In the next section I will discuss what seem to be for Micki nearly intuitive processes, corresponding, like Leah's, to five that Beach has identified. The processes are again italicized for clarity.

Reading Processes. Micki's *engagement* with the texts we read and discussed evoked emotions of frustration, anger, fear, satisfaction, excitement, concern, and care. She cried for TJ (Stacey's disloyal, unfortunate friend in *Roll of*

Thunder), she railed at Charlie, and she chastised Cassie. "I felt like shaking her!" she said (February 4, 1994).

Imaging, or visualizing the scenes, is something she does readily, enhancing them when she likes:

> Micki: I love making pictures more interesting, you know?
>
> Leenie: In your head?
>
> Micki: If I'm picturing something in my mind, I'm picturing this lady
>
> getting killed and it says she was stabbed with a regular knife
>
> in the kitchen. I will see a black and white tiled floor with
>
> blood splatters on it, the door still open, the screen slid to the
>
> side.... (April 2, 1993: p. 13).

She *constructs* events in the lives of the characters as a matter of course. She predicts what Cassie would do in Stacey's place: "Cassie never would have given TJ the coat in the first place" (April 5, 1993: p. 43)! She ascribes motives to Charlie: "He had just taken away from her any sort of a family that she'd ever have. And he had done that on purpose. He'd done that so he could have his own family...."(May 17, 1993: p. 6). She infers information about TJ:

> TJ acted like he didn't need any friends, which bugged me!
>
> I mean, it, it's kind of, it must be so frustrating to be friends with
>
> somebody who was like, "I don't need you. I'm just keeping you
>
> around because I feel like it," when you know they really need you!
>
> (April 5, 1993: p. 44)

110

The response process of *connecting* autobiographically is also exhibited in

Micki's discussions. Some of her connections are hypothetical: "If that were my

mother..." or "I would have blown up the first time." Others of her connections are

with actual, lived-through events, such as in her reading of *Where the Red Fern

Grows*: "I loved my dog so much after that...I called their names after I read that

book, and I took my doggie up, and I just cried on top of her, and I just loved her,

you know" (April 2, 1993: p. 23).

She connected both hypothetically and actually in passages where images

of her older sister Lara were evoked, especially striking when talking about Louise,

the overlooked twin sister in *Jacob, Have I Loved*:

> Also, even though I'm the younger sister, and I have the same
>
> interests as my sister, I'm not in any way in her shadow. I'm very,
>
> very different from my sister, and it's just hard for me to realize how--
>
> I didn't realize why [Louise] didn't do something to separate her from
>
> her sister, to get some likes or interests of her own. (April 20, 1993:
>
> p. 6)

Her sister Lara figures in later as well when Micki is scoffing at the "Little House"

mother, Ma Ingalls, for her too oft-dispensed platitudes, what Micki characterizes

as her "unfairness" to Laura. "'Pretty is as pretty does,'" Micki mimics. "She's so

like my sister! It bugged me" (April 20, 1993: p. 19)!

Micki's connections are more often intertextual than autobiographical,

especially when compared with Hope, who tends more toward experiential connec-

tions. Micki's habit of reading, combined with her visualization and memory, make intertextuality a normal process for her.

Micki's metacognitive processes are often exercised as she steps back to *evaluate* hers or our experiences with text. She understands that texts can be misconstrued and mis-read; she also understands that she is in a position vis a vis the text to interpret, to construct, to imagine, and that those evocations are affected by age and life experiences. Although there are several examples from her texts, perhaps the best is the conclusion to the running disagreement she and Leah had concerning Lyddie's greed.

> Micki: I was thinking about it this week. I'm kind of going to take back my thing about she's kind of too tight with money. I think---
>
> Leenie: Okay.
>
> Micki: she's tight with money, but I just realized that the only reason she's really tight with it was she thought she could buy back the farm. I still think she could have been a little bit looser, but I don't think she was as tight as I first thought it, because I hadn't read it for awhile---
>
> Leah: Thank you Micki! Thank you!
>
> Micki: But I had just realized that farm thing. (May 26, 1993: p. 15)

The conversation went on in spite of Micki's attempts to make sure she was understood, so she let it rest, and later, when it was her designated turn, came back to the subject.

112

Micki (Reading Hope's question to her): *What do you mean by "Lyddie has changed a lot since she has been working at the factory?"* I think that we just went into that.

Hope: Yeah, pretty much.

Micki: I thought she changed a lot more than I had [on first reading], because when I picked up my book (to review it on the day we were going to discuss it), I'd gone, didn't even mean to, you know that first day when I said that stuff about her being tight with money?

Leenie: Yeah.

Micki: The first thing I'd read was that thing about her not putting the dollar in? And then, just flipping through it, and the next thing I read was her, um, like her not wanting to help Brigid because she'd only have been able to do four looms. So I was like, I,   I, and I hadn't even read anything about the farm that day, which is what, you see, because I hadn't read it for a while---

Leenie: Yeah, I know.

Micki: so you can remember it? But I went back and re-read it, and I got a lot of the feelings that I had before about it, because when we talked before, you know how I'd really liked it, and couldn't see anything wrong with it then?

113

Leenie: Yes, yes.

Micki: I, and I hadn't even meant to be reading just those parts, but

those are the parts I accidentally flipped to, so.. (p. 21)

In her hurried review before our session, Micki gained only a partial re-cap which changed her perceptions of Lyddie's actions. After a closer review Micki remembered the significance of the farm in dictating those actions. And what is also interesting, she remembered the positive feelings she had experienced upon reading the entire account earlier.

Throughout the next section I explore the themes of realism and justice as they present themselves in Micki's text, and show how Micki's awareness of complexities influences and sometimes distorts her evocations.[3] In addition, I illustrate Micki's perceptions of female characters in written texts and in life's texts, namely, living women whom Micki knows. I begin with the theme of realism.

Recurrent Themes and Perceptions

Realism. The theme of *realism* in Micki's text is intriguing because it is pervasive and unexpected. Micki seems to be a classic romantic: melodramatic, soulful, longing for an escape from these present mundane surroundings, having an intriguing, but impractical view of life. However, though she does reveal glimpses of a romantic spirit, she also reveals a corresponding realism--an emphasis on the practical in all human relationships. Time and time again it was she who problematized the positions of the characters and of the group members. For instance, she marveled that Leah and Hope could entertain the idea of Ezekiel,

114

a runaway slave twice Lyddie's age, being a good match for Lyddie. She was incredulous to think that Louise, the neglected twin in *Jacob*, would fall for an "ancient guy"; amazed that Diana could be so stupid as to love such a "sleazeball" as Dr. Craven; and surprised that I would consider rooting on the sidelines for Cassie's outspoken behavior that put her in jeopardy. And as for romantic relationships (as in boyfriends) in her own life, at this point she says it is "dull and boring." "I have the hots for the grocery boy" she says drily, "how ridiculous" (June 4, 1993: p.27)! Perhaps the most comprehensive example of realism is her view of Lyddie, the decisions she made, and the ones that were imposed on her.

1. <u>Lyddie, a Human Heroine</u>: Micki enjoyed *Lyddie* more than an old favorite of hers also by Katherine Paterson, *Jacob, Have I Loved*. She identified with Lyddie more so than with Cassie, from *Roll of Thunder*, and seeing her as a heroine did not prevent her from also seeing her as a human, subject then, to a conflicting and complex human nature. Micki realizes that Lyddie's stoicism in her determination to get the farm masks her pain, causing her to appear greedy as well as unfeeling toward Diana's cause, toward her roommate Betsy, toward her trainee Brigid, and even toward Charlie. Micki sees lost opportunities for friendships that may have been mutually supportive in the face of the difficulties each of the girls at Lowell faced. "And she really didn't get close to people, which was I think, because she was so goal-oriented. The only thing she thought about was going for her goal, and I admired that, but it also made her very lonely" (May 26, 1993: p.16).

2. Lyddie's Need for a Mother: Micki admires Lyddie and her independence, but she also sees beyond Lyddie's (and Leah's) perspectives, considering the more complete aspects of Lyddie's life.

> I realized that she understood a lot and was very, you know, grown up, but I still think it might have been great if she'd really had a mother. I know she had one, but her mother was a looney tune. I still think, I think she was a great girl, and she'd done a great job of growing up and that, but I still think maybe it would have been easier if she hadn't had to grow up so quickly. (May 12, 1993: p. 14)

Micki's opinion stands in contrast to Leah's. Micki recognizes the validity of Leah's assertion that Lyddie "did great by herself," but does not give up her belief that a child has a happier life with someone in her life who is responsible for care-giving and who indeed gives care. She does not suggest that Lyddie needs a "Mother Knows Best" mother now, simply more of a supportive friend. Further, she adds a change of focus from Lyddie's present to her past. "I think she would have happier memories," she said (May 26, 1993: p. 9).

3. Lyddie and Luke: Again, Micki's opinions differ from Leah's. In Leah's profile I suggested that at the heart of her objection to the match is her rejection of Luke himself. Micki is not as troubled by him. She made fun of his dialect and his clothes as much as the rest did, but her remarks did not have the same tint of disdain as did Leah's. Her opinions are based more on her reasoning concerning the timing of their relationship rather than a personal feeling of dislike for him.

116

Micki argues that none of us, neither Luke, Lyddie, nor those of us discussing them, has a basis for much of an opinion on a marriage between them. They do not know each other well enough, she says, and we do not know enough of him from the text to make an informed judgment. What she is willing to commit to, however, is her opinion that both have lived relatively sheltered lives, and that is enough to delay marriage at least. Lyddie has been only three places: the farm, Cutler's Tavern and the factory at Lowell; and at each place her absorption in her work precluded outside experiences. When Uncle Judah sells the farm, she has the whole world before her, Micki thinks, and she needs to have some fun, to "lighten up" before she settles down to marry. "I would like Lyddie to go to college.... I think what she really might like is to see where Charles Dickens lives, stuff like that, maybe before she settles down. To get to read some more, and I think she might frequent the library" (May 17, 1993: p. 4). Micki has seen Lyddie pouring over *Oliver Twist*, copying pages to paste on the window in front of her loom, becoming as fascinated by books as she is. And Lyddie has never known freedom; even the carefree days of childhood were not given to her, but she has a chance for a new start. Somehow Micki is worried that marrying Luke will signal the end of Lyddie's growth in areas that have just opened up to her. And Luke has been as sheltered as Lyddie.

And then, I did like the Quaker, but I think, that before they
got married that he should have gone away, too, because he didn't
know anything. It was like, she was kind of one of his first loves,

and it might have not worked out. But I think that when she went away to college, he shouldn't have just stayed on at the farm; he should've left and been able to see something, too. Maybe he'll realize that what he really wants is a career, or that he really falls in love with another lady, and that [Lyddie] has learned that--she's gone away, but he hasn't, so I think he needs to do that if they're going to get together (May 12, 1993: p. 14).

She admits concern about their religious differences, citing the difficulty she has seen in the lives of couples at her church who differ about religion, and the difficulty her parents sometimes face because her father does not always want to go to church. However, she does not rule out the union of Lyddie and Luke, nor does she reject Luke. Instead, she presents reasonable courses of action as possibilities for Lyddie and Luke.

Justice. Of herself Micki says, "I have this extreme sense of justice" (May 17, 1993: p. 21). She says that as she tries to explain her ability to speak up in the presence of others, the quality Leah is so impressed with. Micki seems to pick up on justice in the relationships of the characters. She was thrilled when Lyddie stomped on the overseer's toe with her boot heel when he tried to molest her and cheered when I told the story of Gertie Neville in *The Dollmaker*, whose husband finally followed her for once instead of the other way around. "Ha, ha, ha! Stay with his little wife!" was her sing-song (May 4, 1993: p. 12).

Her sense of justice was particularly apparent in her responses to the char-

acters in *Roll of Thunder*. When Cassie yells at the white store owner, *"I ain't nobody's little nigger!"* Micki is at first angry because of the position that places her family in, but she also admits to a sense of happiness that Cassie spoke her thoughts and feelings. She was able to more fully enjoy the carriage of justice in the case of Lillian Jean, whose crime against Cassie is clear ignorance and prejudice, resulting in cruel mistreatment. Cassie manages a way to beat up Lillian Jean without being caught, something all of the girls were pleased with.

Another character, TJ Avery, is a thorn in Cassie's side because his bragadocious, inflated discourse is irritating to her and because he is Stacey's "best" friend. His friendship with Stacey frustrates Cassie in that Stacey does not seem to see TJ for who he is, or if he does, he is longsuffering where Cassie is not, and puts up with it. TJ has made trouble for Stacey on more than one occasion, and although Stacey at one time fought him, he has not called it quits on their friendship. Then TJ, who often is unable to think of anyone but himself, cons Stacey out of a handsome coat that Stacey's Uncle Hammer had given him. Like Cassie, Micki was furious with TJ.

> I was so pissed off at TJ, I mean, that was *so rude*, I mean. (She
>
> begins counting off her objections, pausing between each sentence
>
> for emphasis.) It's Stacey's coat. Stacey tries to be nice to him. All
>
> he can do is tease him. I felt mad at Stacey that he'd given him the
>
> coat because he wouldn't get it back.... I couldn't imagine Uncle
>
> Hammer, that he wouldn't give Stacey his coat because I think it

would have put TJ in his place more. That's what I wanted to see. (March 31, 1993: p. 16)

Micki is angry with TJ for taking the coat, with Stacey for allowing himself to be duped, and with Uncle Hammer for making the "deal" stick. There were no obvious immediate consequences for TJ--no justice. The only good she could see in this episode was that it was added to the build-up of evidence against TJ that finally led to his day of reckoning.

If you notice, all throughout there are events that, when Mama finally

does get fired, [Stacey's] so angry because all of these events have

been building up throughout the course of the year, that he's able to

blow up. And I think if all these events hadn't happened, then, that

one thing wouldn't have been enough for him to get really angry.

But, it's kind of like, every other thing. You know, you're kind of

building up to a big explosion. Ka-boom. (April 5, 1993: p. 30)

The "explosion" was a face-to-face confrontation with TJ and then a freeze. Stacey withdrew his friendship, at last giving TJ his just deserts. However, the justice is not a sweet victory, for TJ falls in with white boys who use him and abandon him when he is accused of a crime they committed.

Into her assessment of the situation Micki introduces complexities. If Stacey had "put his foot down" with TJ earlier in their relationship, then TJ would not have increased his disregard for others, would not have gotten Mama fired, would not have lost Stacey's friendship, and would not have been forced to hang around with

120

the white boys who misused him. For when Stacey froze him out, TJ said, *"Got better friends than y'all! They give me things and treat me like I'm a man and....and they white too..."* (p. 194). Stacey had the power to halt the downward spiral, she thinks. But in trying to figure out with Hope, Natalie, and me how Stacey could have put TJ in his place, Micki finally says it would have been good if Cassie would have told him off "because she never liked TJ." Her reasoning makes sense because Micki has a very difficult time confronting someone she likes. Even though she can speak up in front of large crowds and voice her opinion, which Leah admires, Micki admits it is another matter to confront a friend, or to disappoint a friend. "Like before [when younger], if I didn't want to do something, I was like my sister used to say: "just say no." But now I care more about what they're going to think about what I do, so I um, don't "just say no" (April 5, 1993: p. 23).

Perceptions of Female Characters. Micki had definite opinions about the female characters as well as the males, and some who elicited strong reactions were Cassie; Lyddie; the ideal mother for Lyddie; Mama, in *Roll of Thunder*; and Ma, in the *Little House* series.

1. Cassie: Cassie was not Micki's favorite character. She could have been nicer, she thinks, and she's immature. However, a year later, when listening to the conversation on tape, Micki clarified her remarks:

>I noticed it said, "I guess it's because I'm nicer." I don't think
>I really meant that. What I meant is I deal with things differently. I

don't speak my mind, I mean, I'm not nicer than Cassie is. It's just

the way I deal with it is [nicer]. (February 8, 1994: p. 5)

When I asked for a "for instance," Micki said that the way Cassie responded to

people could be "almost selfish," because she didn't realize all they were doing to

help and protect her. Micki considers it partly a function of her age (Cassie was

nine years old.) "She hasn't learned how to control her temper."

Micki identified more with Cassie's brother Stacey in age and temperament.

Cassie is the second child in her family and so is Micki, but Cassie is younger than

Micki, which she makes a point of on several occasions. She respects Cassie in

some ways, but cannot or will not identify with her.

2. Lyddie: Her impressions of Lyddie are very different from her impres-

sions of Cassie. Much of how Micki responded to Lyddie has already been

discussed in previous sections; therefore, in this section, I will make the point only

that Micki identified strongly with her. She could "really relate to her," she said.

Even though Lyddie is the oldest child in the family, she is closer to Micki's age

than Cassie, and more like her. The narration makes it clear that Lyddie has a lot

of heart, even when Lyddie does not make it clear. She is reserved, unlike Cassie.

Micki seems to like it that Lyddie doesn't "speak out in the same way Cassie

does"; she considers Lyddie more "mature" (May 17, 1993: p. 3).

3. The ideal mother: Micki's conception of an ideal mother for Lyddie is a

combination of Cassie's mother, Mary Logan, and Micki's own mother. Mary

Logan is a woman whose career in teaching came as a fulfillment of her lifelong

goal, not a result of financial necessity. She is a partner with Papa, not simply "managing" while he's gone many months, and then dropping wearily out of the picture when he returns to "take over." She is stern with the children as well as extremely understanding. She champions causes and is responsible for organizing the boycott of the Granger store, a bold and dangerous move.

Neither June Cleaver nor Ma Ingalls are on Micki's "Perfect Mother" list. The ideal mother should not be too soft, says Micki. No "sweety, little sugar mother" who goes around saying things like, "Oh, you sweet little child," will do for Lyddie. Micki explains what she means: "[Cassie's mother's] not afraid to like, get after you if you do something bad, you know. I mean, my mom's kind of like that. If I'm bad, she gets annoyed at me." Micki's mother is also very supportive, which Micki thinks is important for Lyddie (May 17, 1993: p. 5).

In the next section I describe Micki as a group member, focusing on how her enjoyment of and facility with language, her conversational signals, her humor, and her loquacity make her an interesting conversationalist.

<u>Micki As a Group Member</u>.

<u>Micki's Language Ability</u>. As previously noted, Micki is gifted in language expression and loves language, so because of that she makes an interesting group member. The following exchange is typical of her speech in its combination of quoting and interpretation. In it Micki suggests that Jeremy, Lillian Jean's brother, has discovered Cassie's secret: her pre-meditated thrashing of Lillian Jean. She pictures the scene and rehearses the dialogue:

123

Micki: ...[Y]ou know, Lillian Jean's brother? I think he found out about it somehow."

Leenie: What makes you say that?

Micki: Well, remember because he said, "Well, you know, a guy's gotta like his kin," you know, saying he really didn't like his family that much? And he said, "Well, Lillian Jean's not that bad so much after Cassie stopped being friends with her," and he was smiling and "he said it with a secret little smile," it said. (April 5, 1993: p. 15)

The actual passage reads as follows:

"But they're his kin. A fellow's gotta like his own kin, " [said Stacey.]

Jeremy thought about that. "Well, Lillian Jean's all right, I guess. She ain't so persnickety since Cassie stopped bein' her friend." He smiled a secret smile to himself. (p. 197)

Looking at the passage, it is apparent that in her evocations Micki intersperses the language of the text with her own language. Micki changes *fellow*, not her everyday language, to *guy*, a word that is. She retains *kin*, not part of her everyday lexicon, perhaps because in changing it she would lose the flavor of the line, which she usually tried to preserve. The example is only one of many such quotations that were common to her conversations. When I would hear her speak them, I would think they were verbatim, because she was able to express

the feeling of the exact words. More often than not, I and the other girls had experienced the events as she portrayed them.

To Micki, conversations are indeed speech acts: a satisfying combination of performance for herself and entertainment for us (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Her recitations include any kind of spoken or written utterance -- commercials, cartoons, comics, poems, songs, everyday speech -- all are texts to be chanted, sung, intoned, or vocalized in some way for the sound of them, or perhaps the feel of them as they roll across her tongue. When Natalie mentions the contra ("not *country*") dances she attends, Micki bursts out singing, "I feel like chicken tonight!" When she calls Lyddie's mother a real "looney tunes" everybody giggles. Noting the gradual disappearance of improper grammar from Lyddie's speech, Micki and Leah debate the causes. Micki assumes the persona of Katherine Paterson, "Oh, I can't write any more bad grammar" (April 20, 1993: p. 10)!

Conversational Style and Signals. An aspect of Micki's conversational style is her use of phrases that put her in the category of authority or expert. *If you notice, If you think about it, Well, you see, and If you read* are phrases she often uses in her conversations. "If you notice, it wasn't only TJ that teased him. You notice, TJ took away the two friends that were with him. Who were they that was with him, I'm not sure." Although this particular kind of phrasing is typical for Micki's speaking, there were to be times in future conversations where it would work to create strain and some alienation in the group.

Micki's conversational signals are usually quite obvious. Tannen (1986)

125

mentions the main ones: pausing, loudness, and pitch. Micki uses all three noticeably and somewhat predictably. It is clear when she is giving a dramatic portrayal; her voice is either appropriately low or high, loud or soft, her speech crisp or slurred. In her normal conversation, which is interspersed between portrayals, her voice is more even, unless she is annoyed. She does not express anger toward the words other group members, but I began to recognize signals of frustration that she tries to cloak in humor, sometimes resulting in sarcasm.

Micki's loquacity is a recognized problem that she tries to deal with. She believes that she can be annoying to teachers, and often upon hearing recorded sessions, she would say, "I'm never going to say anything again." Although Micki can give extended monologues, she usually remains aware that she is one of the group and once she has had a turn at "the microphone" she is able to give room to others. And though she is not *always* happy turning over the microphone she will rarely out-shout someone else, as Hope will. When the rest of us would talk over each other as we often did, she would sometimes retreat instead of fighting for space and remain silent until the conversation was ready for a new turn. Then she would make such comments as "How did we get on that topic," or "Is that how we started on that?" At other times she would pick up with her last spoken phrase and continue her thought once the floor was clear.

She said she did not like our structured times. She kept trying to interact, but was not "allowed to," which frustrated her. When she continued to interject comments out of "turn," Hope and Leah would remind her that she was not sup-

posed to speak. When we did have time limits on responses, she would remind us if we spent too long on a side track, that "we only got through two questions in a half an hour" (May 28, 1993: p. 15).

Perhaps Micki feels more in control when the times are not structured, and when she is the only one restricting her conversation. There were times at the beginning when I felt that I must cut her off and re-direct, or the others would not have had their full opportunity. She is not obnoxious, but she is so interested, and has such good ideas that it is very difficult for her to sit and listen.

Theoretical, Pedagogical, and Personal Implications

Theoretical. Like Leah's profile did and the other girls' will, Micki's presents support for current reading theory, seen in the following example. She is accustomed to reading and understanding what she reads. She has an enormous amount of taken-for-granted confidence that makes a difference in how she approaches books and how she understands them (Smith, 1985). She does not worry when she runs into unfamiliar territory. For instance, one day she recounted a particularly touching passage in *Lyddie*, and in so doing, mispronounced the word valise. She did not say "valiss" or "vay-liss"; it was "valsa." Micki may know what the word means but not know how to pronounce it, or she may not know what it means at all. In either case, she was non-plussed and glossed over it as if it were correct. Micki confirms another of Frank Smith's (1985) assertions: *"the more non-visual information you have, the less visual information you need"* (p. 14). Micki knew the scenario (she was probably picturing it), and she was reading for

127

the next emotional roadblock to be flung into Lyddie's path. She was not hesitant to use the word as she quoted the passage because the meaning of the passage was clear to her, and the emotion conveyed was the same with or without *valise*.

Pedagogical. Out of Micki's profile I have identified three basic concerns of a teacher: getting students to value reading; allowing time to talk about reading; and working with talkative students.

Micki likes to read and sees it as an important, worthwhile expenditure of time. Her parents, both of whom she admires, are readers. Her mother has more time than her father does, but both love to read. During one conversation John said that he was ready to go for two weeks without seeing his wife because she had started a new book.

At school she is allowed choice of books almost all of the time, so when she chooses books to complete, it usually means they have value for her. I suggest that her needs and choices are not all that different from other students. Much progress can be made when students see reading as adding something important to their lives.

Micki has always loved to read and will probably continue that habit. However, studying her responses seems to indicate that the enjoyment of the experience comes not from reading it only, but from talking about it as well. There's an aspect of sharing feelings that is fulfilling, "fun," in a way that a solitary reading experience may not always be.

Micki is talkative, and talkative students can present problems, for the

128

teacher, the other participants, and themselves. For a teacher, it is difficult to draw the distinction between participation and monopolization. We usually handle the difficulty by sitting through what we come to consider as monologues, satisfied that we at least did not ignore them. But in effect, we have, because over the weeks and months we often tune them out. Tannen (1986) suggests another approach, that of realizing that conversational style is not absolute, e.g. that because I would consider myself monopolizing to take the floor for an extended time then someone else who does so is consciously monopolizing. What I may need to do is step out of my style and work in a complementary fashion which may include interrupting, something I might ordinarily consider rude behavior. Classes in which discussions are a regular practice may benefit from the works of Deborah Tannen. (I realize that all problems will not be solved by metacommunication, but realizing that there is one solution may prompt us to look for others.)

There may be another problem involved in the relationship with the talkative student: sometimes they're the ones we figure we can safely not worry about, because "*they*'ll let me know!" In Micki's case, because she has such definite preferences, because she is motivated, responsible, and organized, and because she is able to express herself well, one would assume that her needs are always going to be met and, based on that assumption, tune her out.

Personal. The following concerns illustrate Rosenblatt's metaphor of literature as exploration. Micki's profile shows an exploration that involves a "range of choices and aspirations and values out of which the individual must weave his

own personal philosophy" (1938/83: p. 20).

There is something about the goody-goody, the "nice," that bothers Micki. She is well-aware of the problems with a sexist society, and perhaps the "little sugar mother" represented by Ma Ingalls spells sexism. It makes sense that Micki would recognize sexism because of her socially conscious parents. Her mother is, after all, a priest in a still-patriarchal profession, and both parents are very sensitive to issues involving inequality. Perhaps Micki is turned off by "nice" people. Perhaps she puts them in a category with Caroline Ingalls and June Cleaver. Perhaps she is frustrated by her own "nice" nature. Perhaps that issue is one worth probing in her life.

Another issue of personal concern is *comparison*. Leah compares her own courage with Micki and finds herself wanting. However, courage, like anything else, comes in different forms. What Micki and Leah take for granted -- Micki's public speaking, Leah's dancing -- look like impossible dreams to other people. Adolescents like Micki and Leah could benefit from realizing that sometimes the differences between us are not a matter of superiority or better character, such as what Leah seems to think, i.e., that if she just had more courage, she could do what Micki does. Micki wants more courage herself! Sometimes the differences are just differences.

Micki's ability to "read" people seems to be a blessing and a bane. She is able to see the different layers of "reality" in human nature and relationships, what lies on the surface and is visible to others e.g., Lyddie's aloof behavior, and what

130

takes place underneath, e.g., her heart breaking. She is able to see that Charlie only responds to what Lyddie shows him, and because she can see that, she almost forgives him for what he does, something Leah could not consider. She sees Lyddie's pain at the thought of Rachel's departure, but she also sees, as Lyddie does, that Rachel will be better off.

Complexity sometimes creates pain until it is understood, and even then it may still be painful. Micki, so intelligent and intuitive, is still not able to see herself as good enough, and her ability to see the complexities may be what hurts her. No compliment or assurance is without another, more "realistic" angle. "I was happier when I was younger," she had said (February 8, 1994: p. 12).

The last person issue is anger. Micki seems to struggle, as many adolescents (and adults, I might add) with knowing what to do with her own anger or other strong emotions.Micki is critical of Stacey for not "blowing up" sooner, and critical of Cassie for "blowing up" too easily. She says of Stacey that the events made him "able to blow up," at TJ, which is what he should have done a great deal earlier, she thinks. However, she sees that he cannot do that, and neither, it appears, can she. She repeats Cassie's loud, frustrated protest in Mr. Granger's store: "I ain't *no*body's little nigger!" and says Cassie is not as nice as she is—not referring to kindness, referring to outspokenness. She would "handle" things differently than Cassie does, she explains. However, she does relate to Lyddie, who feels deeply and rarely expresses those feelings.

Profile 3 - Hope Dunlap

Hope, the Person

A Description. Hope was thirteen years old at the beginning of the study, and was starting her ninth year at CS. Upon first meeting her, I noticed that she was friendly and eager to talk to me even though she did not know me. I found that with Hope, there is no need to break the ice; she "never meets a stranger."

The popular aphorism from the 1970's, *what you see is what you get*, applies well to her. It was easy to see if Hope was in a good mood or a bad mood on any given day, because she rarely tried to hide her feelings. The only time she will hide what she thinks, she says, is if what she wants to say will hurt someone she cares about. Hope does have a temper, she is quick to admit, and she is also quick to let her friends know if they've made her angry. Though Hope's outward manner is sometimes brash, tough, or *comme ci, comme ca*, she is also tender-hearted and sensitive. During Celebration Night '93, saying good-bye to matriculating friends brought tears that ended her speech prematurely. Before Celebration Night '94 she said, "I'm going to get all the way through this--I'll cry after" (June 9, 1993).

Interpretive Communities. There are similarities in two of Hope's interpretive communities—CS and her home, but her third main influential group, her friends on her street, seems to move in a different world. I look at CS first.

At CS Hope experiences a great deal of the independence that she enjoys at home; in fact; CS is like a second home to her:

132

See, like at this school, you're friends with everybody. Your principal is like your second mom, your teachers are like your second dad, second mom, or whatever. Your friends are your brothers and sisters and aggravate you just as much as your own family do. (April 6, 1993: p. 17)

She has been there for nine years, and though she loudly proclaimed her antici- pated date of "release," she is proud of the school. "I mean, this school is wonderful, ...it's, it's a great advantage to whatever you're going to do in life, it helps in all categories; you use the college--the college is right over there" (April 6, 1993: p.16). Having visited area public schools with her cousins, she cites the following differences: at CS, the students are not allowed to fight with one another, there is no dress code, "teachers sit down and explain homework to you," and the students are encouraged to express themselves (Interview, June 7, 1993). Hope has the idea that in public school, "they set your mind on one thing" (December 10, 1993: p. 11).

She does not see everything at CS in a positive light. She sees it as somewhat clannish: "...if you don't like one person, or if that one person doesn't like you, then everybody else doesn't like you" (April 6, 1993: p.11). Having been there for ten years, she is "sick" of seeing the same faces, and is ready to try something new.

There is a clear difference between her community of friends at home and the ones at school. She speaks two different languages, "street language" with her

home friends and "like everybody else" at CS. She will not use street language at CS because she thinks she will be branded a "hoodlum," and she does not want to be. "It's not the teachers," she said. "They don't care. It's the other kids" (Interview, June 7, 1994).

Hope's friends at home provide an important part of her social life outside of school. What she seems to enjoy most are trips to the mall where she and her friends run around scouting for mischief or "cute guys", and frequent trips to the skating rink. She describes herself as "fun to be with, hyperactive, not very quiet, and very embarrassing to be with sometimes."

Leah grew somewhat flustered one day as she invoked a category of people she called "skating rink people" to describe what she considers unsavory characters. After she said it, she stopped suddenly. "I'm sorry," she said to Hope. " I didn't mean to criticize you." With an "I don't care," Hope went on to explain to me that some of the people at the skating rink have bad records and have been thrown out of the rink several times. She insisted that she, however, does not have a bad record (June 2, 1993: p.31).

Hope's mother provides the stability in what may be Hope's most important interpretive community, her home. Angela, a single mother, adopted Hope when she was just weeks old, and since then, has adopted two more girls, Lauren, 10, and Latisha, 4. It is obvious that Hope loves and admires her mother, and says that sometimes they're more like sisters. Hope enjoys the privileges that she gets as the oldest child, "no curfew" among them, and believes that it is because her

mother trusts her. "If I say I'm in at 8, I'm in" (April 5, 1993: pp. 4-6).

Angela works two jobs to make ends meet, so Hope is often in charge of her younger sisters. Hope worries about Angela's high blood pressure, and she and her sister try to see to it that her mother takes some time to relax.

Hope feels respected by her mother. At Celebration Night, '94, Hope's last night at CS, she did make it through her speech quite well, as she had hoped, even though her voice caught when she talked about her friends. But when she talked about her mother, she was only able to choke the words out, "Mom, thank you for believing in me and helping me to believe in myself" (June 9, 1994).

Hope, the Reader

Reading Habits. One day we were talking about the girls' siblings and how they differ. Hope, comparing herself to Micki's older sister, gave a list of what she was "into." She said, albeit somewhat tongue in cheek: "Guys, music, cars, what else!" Reading was not on the list, because although she is able to read well and likes Mary Ann's language arts class, reading does not hold the entertainment value of a night at the skating rink or mall. Nor does it compete with the language of rap music; she easily memorizes the words to that, she says. She reads at home, her mother says, and the regular fare includes these magazines: *Teen, Seventeen, Write On,* and *Merlyn's Pen.* She does sometimes find books captivating, such as *Night Chills,* which her mother has to pry out of her fingers to make her go to sleep. Hope says *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* was another special book that kept her interest, so much so that she tried the sequels, both of

which she discontinued before finishing. As far as everyday reading is concerned, Micki and Natalie find it a habit, Leah would love it but finds herself too busy, and Hope can take it or leave it.

Of Hope's journal letters to Mary Ann, I read 13 entries spanning a five month period, covering three novels and two short stories. Of the three novels, Hope showed the most interest in and appreciation of *Roll of Thunder*. "*I would love to be in this book*," she wrote, "*as the character of Cassie or Little Man*." In our discussion group sessions Hope would express the same enthusiasm for the book and the same attachment to the characters. She didn't finish the other two novels, one about a dog and one about a girl growing up during WWII.

Even though Hope does not read avidly, when she does talk about books it appears that she is quite comfortable with the medium. She speaks of the author frequently, mentioning her/him by name, as when she said, "Right now, I'm reading *Night Chills*, by Dean Koontz" (Interview, June 7, 1994). She speaks of sequels, wishing there was one to *Lyddie*, and talks about a letter she wrote to Mildred Taylor, telling her about the conversation she and Micki had about *Roll of Thunder* during our first session.

Reading Processes. The response processes described in Beach are demonstrable, but some are inconsistent[4] in Hope's renderings. I will begin with a discussion of her processes as labeled *imaging* and *constructing*. I discuss them together because of the way the visualization of characters and events impacts the reader's ability to construct the world of the text.

Both processes are noticeably clearer in Hope's evocations of *Roll of Thunder* than in *Lyddie*. Of all the girls, she seemed to construct the most balanced image of Cassie. Hope's Cassie was well-defined, down to distinguishing between the *appearance* of childishness and actual childish behavior, as Micki had characterized it. She revealed an understanding, an empathy for Cassie that was absent in Micki. When we spoke of Cassie's outburst in the Granger store, "*I ain't nobody's little nigger!*" Hope explains her response:

> Hope: In a way, you know, I just got so sick and tired of, you know, everybody being so mean to 'em, and people, you know, not respecting their feelings and stuff. But I realize you know, it was during slavery time.
>
> Leenie: It was after, but still—
>
> Hope: Yeah. At one point, you know, I felt so good about it when she told, when she finally just blew up at him. Then again, I was like, you know, she shouldn't have done that, or you know, it was in between." (March 23, 1993: p.17)

Micki's image was more condescending: "It's very obvious she's not my age." And, instead of seeing Cassie's actions as "a little out of hand," as Hope describes them, Micki sees them as a product of a "very explosive temperament" (pp. 7-8).

Concerning *Lyddie*, Hope's images were clear and not inconsistent through-out the discussion, but they were sometimes inconsistent with the text. Hope's creation of Lyddie's world seemed like a puzzle that she tried to put together

without having the picture on the box, or even all the pieces. Consequently, a picture was trying to emerge, but there were still holes and several pieces lying around with no visible connections.

> I don't like Diana very much. She's, I don't know, just, she doesn't, I don't--to me, I don't think she seems very honest. And I want Cas--I want Lyddie to go to college. I heard Betsy say something to her in the book. They were talking about it. And she said, "Don't let Diana hear me say this." And at first Betsy would really, really care about what Diana said. And now she just doesn't care at all. She's just, "Well, I don't care what she says." (May 17, 1993: p. 11).

Though she sometimes confused the characters -- *Diana* should have been *Amelia* in the 6th sentence -- that was not my main concern; the women's names were numerous and hard to keep straight for all of us. What was a concern is that she had an incomplete image to which she kept trying to respond.

Hope's *engagement* with the characters of Cassie and Lyddie was evident. She liked both characters, particularly enjoying the way the author revealed their "inner thoughts." Her identification with Cassie was evident in nearly every conversation concerning her, and her empathy for Lyddie was apparent as well. She was particularly touched by the fact that Lyddie had no real family and by her hard work. She was eager to talk about the characters and did so, even if it was just to add phrases like "That's what made me feel so bad about it" or "I hate the

way he talks, too."

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Hope's *autobiographical connections* were a constant feature of her participation. Whenever possible, solicited or not, she would use the occasion of a textual event to recall a personal experience. When we discussed Micki's wish for Stacey to rebuke TJ, Hope told a colorful story of an habitual cheater in her class two years ago. Later, discussing Stacey's stupidity in giving away his coat, Hope told us just how she would have acted under similar circumstances, even if it involved her close friend Natalie. In discussing the relationship between Mr. Sims and his son Jeremy, Hope talked about the freedom she experiences at home compared to her younger sister. One of her stories, that of her retreat into silence and withdrawal from food and water for three weeks, drew disbelieving comments from Micki, contributing to a growing tension among the four girls that day, which culminated in a fight between Hope and Natalie.

In explaining why Lyddie should go to college, Hope herself illustrates perfectly the extent to which she connects autobiographically, and how that connection is constituted by her own social code:

Hope: I think it would have made her loose, more loose, because...

Micki: That's what I thought.

Hope: because um, you know, she'd be sharing a dorm with somebody else. And she didn't realize that all she does is sit

in the room and read and work and read and work.

Micki: She's, I know, she's not going to change overnight, but I think she will change throughout.

Natalie: She'll probably change.

Hope: I know, just like, kinda convince her to come out, you know.

Micki: Yeah.

Hope: See the real world.

Micki: I mean...

Hope: Go around for awhile, have fun with us. And then after awhile I think she'll loosen up, and then she'll enjoy going out a lot more, and she won't spend her Sundays reading and sleeping like I do. (May 26, 1993: pp. 26-27)

Hope's ability to *evaluate* her experiences with texts was evident as she acknowledged from time to time her tenuous grasp of detail. One day, in the middle of a conversation about Lyddie and her roommates, Hope said, "That's the trouble. I can't remember who Prudence is" (May 17, 1993: p.1). She knew that her lack of detailed remembrance was hindering her ability to discuss the situation with the rest of us.

Hope sometimes remarked about the kind of discussion we were having on a given day, judging it in her own terms or in terms of the other class members who were not part of the study. "[T]hey would hate this group if they were in it,"

140

she said one day, referring to the boys, whom we were in fact discussing (May 17, 1993: p. 27). On another occasion, she reported to Leah, who had missed the previous session, "Micki and I had an interesting conversation about Cassie last week" (March 25, 1993: p. 9).

She judged her experiences with both books as positive ones, according to her reflections the following December. When I asked if the lack of choice in reading *Lyddie* and *Roll of Thunder* made a difference, she said, "Oh, that was fine because those books were good" (December 10, 1993: p. 8).

Hope seems to evaluate her aesthetic experiences with books as a matter of course (see #1 below); however, it is not clear to me that she has metacognitive strategies when it comes to a literary experience. From my perceptions, she over-emphasizes the sensory and experiential elements, without enough awareness of the presence of text, keeping the full benefit of the transactional experience at a distance.

Recurrent Themes in Hope's Responses to Characters

In this section I will limit the discussion of themes to one, that being *honesty*. I use the term honesty because Hope uses it almost exclusively as a catch-all for the permutations her contexts imply:

1. *Transparency:* openness or the revealing of oneself to others, with a corresponding *curiosity:* desire for the openness of others;

2. *Trustworthiness:* the ability to keep confidences;

3. *Sincerity:* or "being true," in speech and action.

141

She employs the term "honesty" in her descriptions of herself, her friends, classmates, and book characters. In addition to pertinent examples, I will highlight Hope's sense of the place of honesty in the lives of males, especially as they relate to females. I begin with *transparency*, tracing her use of it and offering my own application of it to Hope herself.

Transparency is the form of honesty Hope's text indicated during the sessions when we gave our initial responses to the characters of Cassie and Lyddie. Of Cassie she said, "I like [her] cause, you know, she's a really honest person" (March 23, 1993: p. 9). One and one-half months later her response to Lyddie was virtually the same: "I like Lyddie a lot...to me, I think she's really honest, like Cassie." I asked her to explain.

> I think she reminds me of Cassie a little bit because a lot of her inner thoughts are what she really feels, like in the part of the book where...one of the mistresses was standing in the kitchen, and [Lyddie] was just thinking what she felt about her, and it was honest, like Cassie. (May 12, 1993: p. 12)

Both Mildred Taylor and Katherine Paterson do let the reader in on the very personal thoughts of the main characters. In Cassie's case, her thoughts reveal the kinds of questions and less-than-charitable responses that children have but often keep to themselves as adults around them make decisions they do not understand; e.g., when Cassie's grandmother parks in the back of the farmer's field on market day:

142

Maybe Big Ma knew what she was doing, but it made abso-

lutely no sense to me to be so far from the entrance. Most of the

other farmers seemed to have the right idea, and I couldn't help but

try to make her see the business sense in moving the wagon forward.

(p. 105)

When Big Ma does not comply, Cassie's short soliloquy contains the unspoken

backtalk that gives some measure of comfort to the identifying reader: *"Shoot," I*

mumbled, taking one of the buckets from Stacey, "by the time a body walk way

back here, they'll have bunions on their soles and corns on their toes" (p. 105).

In *Lyddie*, Katherine Paterson allows the reader to know the pain that Lyddie

feels in the absence of Charlie, but permits no one, especially him, to see. One

example of many such passages follows.

She had worked hard since she could remember. But now she

worked even harder, for who was there to share a moment's leisure

with? Who would listen with her to a bird call, stare at the sunset, or

watch a calf stumble on its long, funny legs toward its mother?

Missing Charlie was like wearing a stone around her neck. (p. 24)

Hope, who likes to tell a good story, enjoyed the tension of Cassie's

situation, the pathos of Lyddie's, and the familiarity of the thoughts revealed by

both characters. She also seemed to particularly enjoy being privy to the usually

unspoken thoughts of another. She is curious; it seems to matter to her that the

people in her life reveal themselves to her. I offered that assertion during the

March 18, 1994, reflective session. I told her that I was characterizing her as "being somebody who likes people to be open and real, that you don't like people not to be real...." Leah, who had been tending to large poison ivy splotches all over her legs and appearing not to listen, raised her head and said, "That's true!"

The subject of honesty involves a complexity that we touched on briefly in our discussions, and to which I referred in Micki's section. Both Micki and Hope suggested that Stacey "tell TJ off," but when they considered it further, both agreed that expressing anger to a friend is quite a different story than doing the same to an enemy. Hope says, "It would be a lot harder...you don't want to lose them as a best friend, but yet you don't want to have best friends that's a cheater or, you know, if it was somebody you hate, you'd be ready to get them in trouble just like that, (snaps fingers) you know" (March 23, 1993: p.14).

In our discussions Hope moved back and forth between primarily two discourse rules, especially in this conversation. The rules are:

1. Be Real (Honest)

2. Be Nice

In discussing forms of politeness, Lakoff (1975) suggests that "certain of the ingredients of "politeness" may be combined with one another, or may coexist-- others are mutually exclusive" (p. 65). In the discourse of many people, rules one and two coexist peacefully and in fact, are insufficient by themselves. In Hope's discourse, they are nearly mutually exclusive: "If it was somebody you hate, you'd be ready to get them into trouble...." It is not certain that Hope sees her

144

statements about honesty as problematic. The impact of Rule #2 on Rule #1 is dependent on the context and climate. If Hope is in a bad mood or is in conversation with an "enemy," she invokes Rule #1; Rule #2 does not apply.

 Trustworthiness is high on Hope's scale of important qualities. When I interviewed her one day I asked her to tell me what kind of friend she is, and she replied: "Really good friend. You can tell me something and it won't go anywhere. Very trustful" (Interview, June 7, 1994).

She is quick to spot an untrustworthy friend in a book, as she did during the May 17 session, characterizing Lyddie's friend Diana as dishonest. I pointed out to her all the times she had used the word honest to describe a character or friend and asked if that was an important quality to her.

> Hope: Well, yes, because I want friends, I don't want to have friends that talk about me behind my back. And, so you know, I, I, um, I had--when I know people who have friends that talk about them behind their back, I feel probably worse than they do, but they're in the situation, so I feel worse.
>
> But I just, Lyddie, she doesn't have much of a family, well, she *doesn't* have a family, and she's just meeting new friends, and for them to talk behind their back, well, not really behind, but for [Diana] not to be honest and her to get hurt, that just makes it more harder for her, because she's already feeling sad about stuff. (May 17, 1993: p. 19)

145

Friends who can't be trusted are put on Hope's black list, which in the case of one former friend, meant getting the silent treatment. With Hope, for whom communication with friends is a great pleasure, the withholding of the same is just punishment. In the case of the friend who had betrayed a confidence she was unrelenting: "She came to me and said she was sorry but I just don't talk to her any more. When I see her, when I walk past her, I just act like she's a piece of dirt on the ground. I don't say anything to her" (June 7, 1993: p. 12).

Sincerity is a form of honesty that Hope sees as lacking in many of the males she encounters. Being sincere is a shade different than being open or transparent. The American Heritage Dictionary offers the following as the second definition, and is the one that I believe Hope means when she says that these males are not honest: *"Presenting no false appearance; not hypocritical."*

Hope knows that what you see on the outside is not always what's on the inside: For instance, "I say a lot of men try to be big and bad and hold in their sensitive side." She says that with a laugh, but when she talks about Tricia's situation, she's not light-hearted. Tricia has a boyfriend from the skating rink who is not forthcoming with his life story, but he's "cute." "That's what can really hurt yourself, cause you don't know. I mean, just because he's cute doesn't mean he's going to be very honest with you about everything. [Tricia] does not know the story that he's told us about him[self]." (June 4, 1993, p. 32)

It's not just particular guys that Hope speaks of: she generalizes to the larger population:

[H]e can be the type of guy that when he's not around his friends, you know, he's really into you, and he likes you..or he loves you. Then when he gets around his friends, you know, he likes to make wisecracks at you and stuff...and you know, be really stupid around his friends. And a lot of guys do that just to show off. (June 2, 1993: p. 37)

The behavior Hope describes only worsens as the boys talk girls into sex:

...They get you to do it and then they just dump you because you did that, when they're the one that asked for it. And then they go behind your back and they talk about you and they go to their friends and they say, "Hey, you know, you should try going out with her. She's really easy to get something from." And a lot of the guys have done that to my friends, to their friends, and a lot of other people. And, some *bad* guys can do that, Micki. (p.39)

In commenting on what it's like for her to be one of two persons of color (the other one is Billy) out of the 35 in the middle school, Hope also gives a commentary on sincerity: "I feel the same as everybody else, but still my own person." She criticizes Billy for "agreeing with everybody," something she does not believe she is guilty of. Being her "own person" includes openly claiming rap music as her favorite, significant because she feels that she is the only one who likes it at CS.

Again, "honesty," even with the three elaborations just undertaken, is a complex issue with Hope. Hope did admit to being influenced by others herself.

147

On a short questionnaire (see Appendix D) I requested self-evaluations concerning their participation. Here are the pertinent questions and her responses:

1. *What factors affected your desire/ability to be honest in your responses?* "None, because I felt one way when others felt another."

2. *How honestly did you respond?* "8 1/2."

3. *Why did you rate yourself that way?* "Because when I felt one way about a person and everybody else felt another, I would just agree."

Her answers to #1 and #3 may appear contradictory, but what it says to me (an "evocation" borne out by examples from our conversations) is that she can express difference on some occasions, and on some occasions, she allows herself to be influenced. One response is active, the other passive. She knows that there are enough times where she openly expresses a difference that she can justify the 8 1/2, but she cannot justify the 10. When she was rating herself, it may have been revealing to ask her to rate Billy as well. Interestingly enough, only Leah put a 10 for her honesty factor.

The complexity increases when considering "procedural display," (Beach, 1993) or giving back to the teacher what s/he wants to hear. Very early on in the sessions, I asked the girls if in their journal writing assignments they asked questions they really had or if they made them up. Hope answered enthusiastically one way, and Leah another. After hearing Leah's answer, Hope qualified hers. She seemed not to be certain that it was "okay" to be candid about school-related issues. At other times when she reflected negatively on the teachers at CS, she

148

would ask me if I was recording. In December we reflected on the difference my status as an "outsider" made on their responses. Thinking about her teachers and what it would be like in a group with them, she said, "And if they tell us to be truthful, I don't think they'd want us to actually be truthful..." (December 10, 1993: p. 6).

Hope as a Group Member

Introduction. In this section I briefly explore the various roles Hope assumed as a group member, certain conversational features that are present in Hope's discourse; and following those discussions, I offer applications.

Participant Roles. In this section I present Hope in her various roles: storyteller, provider of information, eager participant, and "honest" participant. A conversation with Hope's mother soon after Celebration Night '94 confirmed what I had been thinking, that Hope is a natural storyteller. From the time she was a very young child making up stories to tell to her dolls, her dog, and her mother until now, Hope has enjoyed putting everyday events into story form. This feature appeared during our discussions whenever a present topic offered the slightest connection to a past event, and became a launching pad for a story: details about her privileges at home, the boys in her neighborhood and at the skating rink, her trips to the mall, the cheater in Nancy's class, babysitting for Mary Ann's son, visits from her ultra-conservative relatives, her grandmother's death. Even when Hope was giving a response, if it was one she was sure about, it became a story, too. She just naturally seems to slip into that mode.

I call the second role, "provider of information." Hope likes people, likes to talk, and as a group member, likes to obtain and to provide information. She was the Barbara Walters ("*[I'm] in touch, so you be in touch*") of the group, in extraneous talk and book discussions alike. She is the one who cautioned me against working with the whole class for my study. "Ahh, you'll regret that, believe me," she said (April 5, 1993: p. 4). She is the one who, during Natalie's first session, instructed her to talk *loud* and then, turning to me, said, "She's very soft. She talks really, really quiet, and you can't understand her, so you have to make her talk really loud" (April 4, 1993: pp. 4-5). She informed me that Micki is paranoid about what we say in the group and about taking tests, and she commented knowingly that she could tell Leah was getting sick and tired of her Art Night project. She offered information about life at CS, about the "snobs" at Washington Middle School and South Bend School, about what happens to corpses in a funeral home, and about Lamaze.

Hope's desire to provide information was not limited to our extraneous talk, but was evidenced as we discussed the books. She tried to fill in details such as names or places when a speaker was stumbling, even if she wasn't sure of it herself. She listened intently, sometimes finishing other people's sentences.

Leenie: And this is not the same. They're never going to be able to

    have that--

Hope: family.

Leah: I mean, she would, the only like leisure time she would take

150

was just reading a book, reading her book. Otherwise, go to

work, come home, eat, go to bed, and---

Hope: same thing over and over again---

Leah: on and on and on! And then like on Sunday, when they

didn't have work, she'd just---

Hope: sleep!

Leah: I mean, she, I mean, she will not let herself---

Hope: rest. (May 26, 1993: pp. 10, 13-14)

Hope was usually what I would describe as an eager participant. After the

Roll of Thunder discussions, she was not often a primary discussant unless the

turns were structured and it was her appointed turn. Otherwise, she stayed in the

background, but she was far from withdrawn on most occasions. In the written

text of her comments, I find numerous examples that she listened intently, taking

opportunities to participate: repeating a point made by someone else; highlighting

a remark or attitude of another; speaking a word of encouragement ("I thought it

was great, Leah!") or derision when Leah was incorrect ("[It's not Lyddie]; it's *lady!*

God, Leah!) ; chuckling at a funny comment; adding a joke of her own; finishing

people's sentences. It was obvious she wanted to stay in the conversations, so

much so that sometimes when she could not follow the flow, she would stop and

ask questions.

Hope was also what she would probably call an "honest" participant.

Although Hope kept herself involved most of the time, there were occasions when

she withdrew, and it is my opinion that her code of *"what you see is what you get"* was behind her disinclination to cover her feelings for the sake of being a good participant. A case in point occurred on December 3, 1993, when I went back to the school for our first reflective discussion. Arriving in the parking lot, I encountered a very stony-faced Hope with Tricia, talking to Tom, the P.E. teacher. As she and I walked into the building together, she told me that this had been a very bad day. I asked if there was anyone she needed to talk to before coming to the meeting, but she replied that she hadn't spoken to any of the teachers that day because she was angry with them. She wanted to come to our meeting, she said, but once she got there, she simply sat and listened as the rest of us enjoyed getting re-acquainted. Hope joined in only as we began to talk about the day's major event: conflict with the teachers over an incident with the school van. As it turned out, five of the middle school girls (the three of them, Tricia, and Butler) had been instructed to clean out the van with toothbrushes for their part in instigating an incident of vandalism. The primary "perpetrator," a boy in the middle school, had to pay for damages. Hope was boycotting with her silence, and though she made it very clear on the way in that she was not angry with me and in fact wanted to come, she could not or would not change her mood in order to become participatory. Hope's feelings took precedence over "politeness" or "cooperation." She is not like the adolescent girls described in Brown and Gilligan's (1992) study, who are victims of "the tyranny of nice and kind."

Voice-training by adults, especially adult "good women" undermines

these girls' experiences and reinforces images of female perfection by implying that "nice girls" are always calm, controlled, quiet, that they never cause a ruckus, are never noisy, bossy, or aggressive, are not anxious and do not cause trouble, and also by implying that such girls exist and are desirable." (p. 61)

The adult women in Hope's life do not seem to be offering such "voice-training." Her teachers (female *and* male) invite and sincerely want the participation of the students in decision-making. Her mother invites Hope to be herself, even when that entails playing her rap music within the hearing of her "really, really, really, really, really, really Christian" relatives who come to visit frequently. Hope's decision, she says, is to refrain from playing the music because she respects their feelings, not simply because she wants to be considered "nice," or in her family's case, "Christian" (June 4, 1993: p. 44).

Conversational Features. The aspect of Hope's conversational style that is of interest in this study deals with variations in response according to mode of discourse. Hope's discourse patterns varied a great deal, usually depending on the topic. Defending or explaining responses produced halting speech replete with "I don't know's" and sometimes vacillation; storytelling was done in a much more fluent, confident manner.

When Hope told stories, her speech was fluid, and her style of clipped, dramatic sentences abounded, e.g., "The tale of the cheater":

It was math class. We were supposed to have been quiet.

153

But I wasn't that quiet. And I just finally got so sick of it, you know. I told him, you know, I just told him, "DON'T CHEAT!" He was like, 'What are you talking about?' I just blew up at him. I said, "Get away from me. Don't say anything to me. Don't talk to me. Don't touch me. Don't sit near me. Just get away. (April 23, 1993: p. 12)

Her storytelling style seemed more confident as well. For example, there were no "I don't know's" in several passages where she talked about the privileges she has at home, the class, her friends, or when she was telling us about reading *Let the Circle Be Unbroken.* Nor were any present when she recounted the scenario of TJ teasing Stacey in front of the church. That passage, however, was offered without solicitation from me. I had read an excerpt from the book after which she immediately stated, "I think he was dumb to give him the jacket," and continued describing the scene without hesitation (April 5, 1993: p. 18).

On the occasions when Hope was asked to defend an assertion, she often did begin her remarks with "I don't know." Sometimes she went on to give simple explanations, and "I don't know" was used as a placeholder.

However, the following passage provides an example of "I don't know" as an indication of uncertainty Hope is responding to a question, *"Is the only reason you don't like Diana because of that one thing she did?"* put to her by Leah:

No, I don't know what it is. It just seemed like when I was reading about her, I don't know, it just seemed like, I don't know, I've just never trusted her for some reason, I don't know why. I guess,

154

I don't know. No, that's not the only reason I don't like her, to be honest. When I was reading about her, it just seemed like I couldn't trust her for some reason, I don't know what it is about her. You know how when you talk to somebody, it's just something that they say or do to make you think that they're not trustful or that they wouldn't be the type of person that you'd like to hang out with for some reason.

Leah: I just had the opposite, I had the exact opposite feeling.

Hope: Hah, yeah, *well*! (June 7, 1993).

Theoretical, Pedagogical, and Personal Implications

Many of the concerns that Hope's study raises relate to communication: factors affecting the communication of a literary experience; uncertainty in speech -- possible reasons for the use of "I don't know"; and the complexity of honesty. In addition to those, I include a section on underlife activity.

Factors affecting the communication of literary experiences. First I explore my concerns about the differences in clarity and consistency in Hope's communication of her responses to *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *Lyddie*. Hope's verbal responses to *Roll of Thunder,* more fluently expressed than those to *Lyddie*, were enhanced by "rehearsal" through journal-writing; thus, she had already experienced her responses, and had time for further reflection. In addition, there is some evidence that *Roll of Thunder* more easily admitted Hope to its world than did *Lyddie*. In *Roll of Thunder* Hope did not have to visualize to another race; the

155

Logans, like the Dunlaps, are African-American. Hope, with her close family, experiences a life closer to Cassie's than that of Lyddie, who has virtually no childhood to look back on, and no family to offer present support. Further, the experiences of African-Americans in this country are more widely discussed than the experiences of the working class women and girls in 19th century Massachusetts. Hope would have benefitted from a backdrop upon which to place the characters and events, i.e., she would have done better with the puzzle lid.

Second, Hope's evocations, and her expressions of them were hindered by lack of detail. Her responses to *Lyddie* were halting and full of "I don't know's." I have puzzled over the possible reasons, considering primarily these three: (1) Lack of background; (2) Disinterest in the book; and (3) Disinclination to cooperate which could have resulted in a disinterest in the book. The only negative reaction she expressed to me was the chore it was to move from place to place as we had to -- we never knew from session to session which room we would find available. Since she often expressed her interest in the book, I am left with at least two. As for lack of motivation, I knew that Hope did try to avoid coming to at least one session and maybe more that I was not aware of during the times we discussed *Lyddie*. Although avoidance is not out of character for her as I understand it, I have tried to figure out why. I did not see or hear of evidence that she disliked or felt uncomfortable with any one or more group members, or that she was having any difficulty making up work she was missing from class, two conditions that I would have recognized as problematic. Therefore, my best diagnosis as an

educator who has worked with this age group is that she lost some of her enthusiasm due partly to end-of-the-year-itis and partly to the difficulty of interacting over time with people whose grasp of the subject is much clearer than her own. The situation I have just described can be discouraging and simply is no fun, and because Hope is not one either to dissemble or to persist in activities that have little or no personal value, I suggest she simply dropped out at times. Though the benefits to her were many, and she cites the discussions as positive memories, I still believe there was potential for more if she could have had the kind of transaction with *Lyddie* that she did with *Roll of Thunder*.

Third, Hope is not as fluent a communicator as Micki, Leah, or sometimes even Natalie, and examination of the texts she created suggested that I overlooked her evocations on occasion. As I already noted, one of Micki's noticeable qualities is her memory for language, shown in her extensive references to texts. In earlier analyses, I was surprised to learn that I was noting Micki's (and Leah's) attention to text and not Hope's. Upon further examination, I noticed that Hope refers to the text quite often, sometimes mentioning passages no one else cues in on. Hope's quotes and textual references are not stated as confidently as Leah's nor are they set off as dramatically as Micki's. Micki usually assumes a different voice, accent, or expression, and makes her remarks distinct in some way, so that Hope's practice of attending to and remembering text can be overshadowed.

In writing theory, we advocate attention to content before form (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Goldberg, 1986; Kirby and Liner, 1981; Murray, 1990). Reflecting

on a written text is easier than reflecting on spoken text, given the constraint of time in discussion groups and the nature of the interaction, e.g., students impatient to get their say or the difficulty of adequate focus. However, if the purpose of obtaining reading responses is not simply to allow students to express, but to pursue, examine and compare expressions, then it is important as a teacher to learn to listen, and to help students learn to listen, in the way that Rosenblatt speaks of it: "the ability to listen with understanding to what others have to say and to respond in relevant terms" (1938/83: p. 71).

Students like Micki, whose speech is fluent, eloquent, meaningful, and entertaining can easily gain an audience. Students like Hope, whose speech is halting, repetitive, ("stuttering," she describes it) and enthusiastic, may get a figurative pat on the back for responding, but their thoughts must be pursued as diligently as the ones dressed in fancier style. That is not to say that Micki's gifts and work should be downplayed; it should, however, be given the same scrutiny as that of everyone else, and should not be allowed to overshadow the other.

The fourth observation I make concerns the syntax of group conversation. Hope was distressed to hear her speech on tape, especially as she listened to the following text: "Well, she, um, she was, I don't know. In a way, you know, I was, you know, in a way I just got so sick and tired of, you know, everybody being so mean to 'em, and people, you know not respecting their feelings and stuff..." (February 8, 1994: p. 7) Micki was astounded to hear and read her speech in print. As each of the girls read the transcripts and listened to their voices, they

were all surprised at the repetitions, the starting over, the discourse markers- *you know, I mean* (Schiffren, 1987). Leah said she sounded like a "major valley girl" and Hope was much chagrined, mocking herself: "I mean, I mean, I mean, I mean. One more mean!" We soon learned the difference between "real" discourse and the discourse of novels -- polished, without the "distracting" features of everyday talk.

Uncertainty in Speech -- Possible Reasons for the Use of "I Don't Know" I have identified at least four functions of the phrase "I don't know" in Hope's speech. One, she sometimes uses it as a placeholder in order to give herself time to formulate thoughts, or to "warm up." For instance, she used those words when trying to determine what she would have done in Stacey's place, a response that took time to process. Two, she sometimes used it as a literal answer -- "I don't know."

The first two possible uses -- as a placeholder or a literal answer -- are not cause for concern, in my opinion, unless the phrase is constantly used as a placeholder. Then I think it important to understand why. It may actually mean, "I'm not sure it's okay to say what I think." However, I tried to make it clear that I expected and needed their responses; and I believe Hope understood that after the first few sessions, and was able to say what she thought. The next two possibilities are more of a concern, for Hope and for women in general.

Third, Brown and Gilligan (1992) suggest that the use of "I don't know," in adolescence may indicate that the "ground of...knowledge [is] shifting" (p. 128).

I have not compared the girls' present language to what it was when they were younger, but Micki and Leah both stated that as they grew life became more complex. "Answers" may not come as readily, which as stated earlier, can be a healthy state of mind. Brown and Gilligan make an important point in that regard which serves as a caveat: When our certainty as adults, particularly female adults unwittingly puts pressure on the girls under our care to conform to our expectations, we may be discouraging exploration.

Fourth, I am concerned that habitual use of "I don't know" indicates an inability to pursue a point; in the girls' case, a response. Hope may have viewed the questioning of her responses as an interrogation rather than an invitation to exploration. Inability to pursue a point may stem from the nearly automatic assumption that a question presumes guilt; guilt, that is, of the offense of making a statement. According to studies made in the last two decades (Belenky, et al., 1985; Lakoff, 1975; and Tannen, 1990) women still have difficulty "claiming attention" by talk. Tannen admits the dichotomy in her own behavior.

> *I myself have been the guest on innumerable radio and tele-*
>
> *vision talk shows. Perhaps I am unusual in being completely at ease*
>
> *in this mode of display. But perhaps I am not unusual at all,*
>
> *because, although I am comfortable in the role of invited expert, I*
>
> *have never called in to a talk show I was listening to, although I have*
>
> *often had ideas to contribute. When I am the guest, my position of*
>
> *authority is granted before I begin to speak. Were I to call in, I would*

160

be claiming that right on my own. (1990: p. 88)

"Claiming that right" or speaking up is an invitation to others to ask for more information, substantiation, explanation. However, if a person's frame (Tannen, 1986) for questioning is interrogation, she will be cowed during discussion.

A second perspective on "cowing" derives from the difficulty in explaining an answer that has its origin in the *feelings* of the speaker. Hope's passage, containing six "I don't know" phrases, shows her attempting to invoke feelings to substantiate her point. The feelings, in turn, have an origin in an event or circumstance not mentioned, perhaps forgotten, but if the surface sign, the feeling, is ignored, the reason may never emerge. Therefore, a frame of "questioning equals guilt" cuts off hope of dialogue.

These aspects are important to consider pedagogically in that they may signal (because of their frequency) a problem, perhaps on the part of the speaker, in his case, Hope), the audience (in this case, the girls and me), or something in the context of the event.

The Complexity of Honesty. Honesty is a cardinal virtue to Hope, but in our discussions she got caught in its complexity. Even though it's a difficult spot, it's a good place to be. Should the discussions have continued, she may have been able to see the folly of relying on "meager experience and casually acquired assumptions" when making judgments about others (Rosenblatt, 1938/83: p. 16).

The theme of honesty carries with it, in Hope's case, not only complexity, but irony. She was one person who, in spite of her statements about herself and

161

her appearance of transparency, was often the most difficult to read, to trust, and to believe.

Underlife Activity. "Underlife" activity (Goffman, 1961), such as Hope's hiding, exists even in small groups, at least it did in ours. I have primarily two thoughts concerning such activity. One, Hope's avoidance mechanisms were a clue to me that I needed to consider what was happening in her experience with the group. I took it seriously and tried to figure out ways to keep her tuned in, while seeking to understand the problem. What was difficult for me was to consider the other option: letting her go her own way, leaving her alone. The school code of standardization makes for a powerful hegemony: if everyone in the "group" is not together, either they failed or I did. Neither is acceptable, but the view itself is problematic.

Two, underlife activity may be a fact of life in an asymmetrical relationship, and though ours was as equal as I could make it, it was not. I was still a teacher of sorts, even though they did not always see me as such. In such a relationship, it is important to remain passionate, but give people their "space."

Profile 4 - Natalie Tomlinson

Natalie, the Person

A Description. Natalie is a tall, slender girl with a solemn expression and long, dark blond hair that she usually wore in one or two pony tails hanging down her back. At the beginning of the study she was 13 years old and was in the middle of her third year at CS. According to Hope, her best friend at the school, Natalie is quiet, not shy. "She talks to me all the time," Hope said. "She makes a lot of funny crack-ups sometimes." Natalie says she likes people and can listen to their problems, something she thinks they usually appreciate.

Natalie's great passion is horses. "It's my whole life," she said, and her bedroom is proof of that. Catalogs, encyclopedias, novels, and magazines all devoted to horses have their places on shelves or empty spaces in the room, along with thirty-six "My Little Ponies" and trophies for "Know-Down," an oral test on information related to horses. She is, like the title of one of her favorite books, "Horse Crazy."

Interpretive Communities. Natalie's most influential community is her home, which I will discuss first, followed by CS. At the beginning of the study Natalie lived with her mother Blanche, her grandmother, grandfather, Aunt Charlotte, three dogs, and two cats in a large, old, three-story house. Upstairs are the jam-packed bookshelves that represent the literary heritage that manifests itself in Natalie's life. "Our mother encouraged us to read," her aunt told me one day in a soft voice very much like Natalie's, and it is clear she and Blanche have encouraged Natalie.

Charlotte went on: "I guess my favorite mystery author would be Agatha Christie, because of the atmosphere. I just love the settings. Dorothy Sayers is very exciting -- she's very picturesque and scholarly." She advised me to begin with *Gaudy Night* if I wanted to try Sayers, but added that it made her feel inferior because it was a story of "dreamy women" attending their class reunion at Oxford. Neither she nor her sister, Natalie's mother, have a college degree, but it is obvious by their articulate and scholarly speech that they somehow have educated themselves -- on my first visit to their home, Charlotte told me she had just checked out a "compendium of the writings of Swedenborg" (April 13, 1994).

The household is not a happy one because the relationships between the generations are somewhat rocky; however, Blanche seems devoted to Natalie, an only child, and to Natalie's interests. She sees that Natalie has riding lessons and membership in a pony club, expensive pursuits which Blanche can ill-afford. She took her to see the Lippizan stallions when they were in town, and traveled with her to Chincoteague to see the pony crossings.

Although Blanche works hard to care for Natalie's material needs, she heavily depends on Natalie for her own emotional needs. When Natalie goes on overnight class trips or spends the night with a friend, her mother sleeps the whole time so she won't worry, according to Natalie. Natalie is in one sense her mother's caretaker, and realizes it. The situation has been made more difficult with the death of her grandmother in June of 1993, and of Charlotte two months later, killed as she walked the dog on a street close to their home.

Connectionist School was an important place for the family when Natalie attended there. Blanche describes CS as "a warm nest," a place where Natalie was able to grow. She and Natalie credit the teachers for restoring Natalie's interest in reading and for encouraging her to write. Financial strains made it impossible for Natalie to continue there for her last year in the middle school. She said she would miss it.

In the "nest" there are sometimes troubles with the inhabitants, however. Natalie said that last year she had some difficulty with what she perceived as some of the other students' "judgmental attitudes." According to Micki, the "Big Three Must-Likes" at CS are Queen, a heavy metal group, Nikes, and basketball. Natalie hates Queen, is afraid to play basketball with the class because they'll laugh at her, and can't afford Nikes. Since she used to want to be like other people and do what they do, her differences used to matter more than they do now. "Now, I don't -- I still want to do some of the things that my friends do, but I don't want to be exactly like them. I want to be different" (April 5, 1993: p. 24). She said that she had come to that conclusion toward the end of the previous year.

Natalie, the Reader

Reading Habits. Before I asked Natalie to join the group I asked the girls if she was a reader. Hope said, "She's not into reading. She's into horses" (March 23, 1993: p. 1). Hope may have gotten that idea from observing Natalie's reading behaviors at school. Mary Ann said that Natalie saw school as her opportunity to socialize; she was not consistent about doing her journal letters and

always seemed to have an excuse. Knowing as she did that Natalie's life was a fairly solitary one and that Natalie was a highly skilled reader, but realizing, too, that Natalie was at school for more than socializing, Mary Ann sometimes felt the emotional tug of the dilemma.[5]

The behaviors that Mary Ann saw and understood are what Hope may have observed to be signs of lack of interest in reading. However, Hope perhaps could not understand what Mary Ann could, that although Natalie is not a conventional school reader, she is very much a reader. I understood that, too, as soon as I visited her home and saw the ease with which she acquainted me with her books and talked to me about them. She reads a great deal and learns from her reading. When I saw a thick horse encyclopedia, I asked Natalie if she had read any of it. "Almost all of it," she said (Interview, April 13, 1993).

Reading Response Processes. Natalie knows what it is to have a transaction with a book. She is aware that books provide experiences and information, and that many books, such as her Saddle Club series, provide both. Her processes seem natural, and in this section I include all of them except constructing, because that process is addressed in the "Recurrent Themes" section. In this section I explore her ability to evaluate her experiences with texts, to identify emotionally, to visualize, and to make connections from and to her own experiences.

Natalie is a conscious *evaluator* of her reading experiences. She knows what she wants in a book and seems to make her own decisions about what she

will and won't read, regardless of whether it was assigned or not. She reads her Saddle Club books over and over because they are so good, she says, believing that a good book is worth reading more than once. I asked her if she would be interested in those books if they weren't about horses. Surprisingly, she said that although she prefers to have the horses in them because she "can understand it," she finds herself identifying with all three of the main characters and enjoys their experiences.

Natalie, like Leah, wants to get all the details, but Natalie seems to want them clear in her head for a different reason than does Leah. In one sense, Leah is very much the concerned student who likes to understand her work because that's what is "good" to do. She is also interested in reading, but the desire for useful information sometimes seems to dominate over the aesthetic desire. Natalie, however, is not outwardly concerned with grades or looking like a good student. She seems to want detail so that she can capture the sensory experience more successfully. I believe this process is what Beach would identify as *imaging*, which often leads in her case *engaging*, or identifying emotionally. "I think I read slowly...I really like to get the feeling and every word" (Interview, May 29, 1993). Her empathy for characters is often evident and was, for example, in her words and in her voice as she gave us her image of Lyddie's brother Charlie:

> Gosh, I can hardly explain him because he's so smart for his age,
> and he's just so, dependent on himself, and he's always trying to
> help, and he loves Lyddie so much. I think it's so cute. He's really

strong (April 5, 1993: p. 4)!

Later, when Leah says she wishes that Lyddie would punch Charlie for what he did, Natalie is incredulous: "Punch Charlie?!" However, when she began to judge his actions for herself she decided that "he wasn't trying hard enough to keep in touch," but she did not censure him as completely as did the other three (Natalie's notes, May 26, 1996).

Concerning *autobiographical connections*, Natalie finds them in the heroines of the lighter, "Saddle Club" books. She says she can "relate so much" to them because the girls were "always goofing around, doing things with horses," and were her age:

Pretty much all of them are a combination of me. Like one knows so much about horses and one girl is kind of.....her mother kind of um, wants her to do some things, but my mother doesn't want me to, but she wants me to be able to want to. And um, the other girl is always trying to think up a scheme. (Interview, April 13, 1993)

Another series she has referred to on more than one occasion and one that Mary Ann identified as a favorite of hers is the *Anne of Green Gables* series. The main character, Anne Shirley, is one to whom Natalie could relate. She character-ized Anne as strong, meaning, in Natalie's words, "independent," almost "rebel-lious."

She identified with Cassie in *Roll of Thunder* in much the same way, because she, Cassie, and Anne Shirley are all strong-willed and because they

express their feelings, she says.

Natalie also sees Lyddie as a really strong character "because she's so shy and then comes out and reacts to things." She recognizes in Lyddie her own desire to help people as much as she can, her independence, and her desire to work hard.

<u>Recurrent Themes</u>

Themes of independence and victimization run through Natalie's discourse, whether regarding her own life or the lives of the characters. Sometimes the themes run side by side in the same character. I discuss these themes in the following sections on the characters of Jeremy, Lillian Jean, TJ, and Cassie, from *Roll of Thunder*, and Lyddie, from *Lyddie*.

<u>Jeremy and Lillian Jean Sims; TJ Avery</u>. Jeremy Sims is a white boy who likes to meet the Logans every school day and walk with them toward the crossroads that divides the paths of their two schools. He was, as Cassie describes him in the book, "a strange boy."

> *Ever since I had begun school, he had walked with us as far as the*
>
> *crossroads in the morning, and met us there in the afternoon. He*
>
> *was often ridiculed by the other children at his school and had*
>
> *shown up more than once with wide red welts on his arms which*
>
> *Lillian Jean, his older sister, had revealed with satisfaction were the*
>
> *result of his associating with us. Still, Jeremy continued to meet us.*
>
> (p. 14)

One day we discussed the differences between the characters of Lillian Jean and TJ Avery, both victims of an attack: Lillian Jean's seemingly well-deserved trouncing by Cassie, and TJ's near-death beating by white men for a crime two white boys committed. Micki had been complaining good-naturedly that Stacey forgave TJ, that TJ got away with the things he did to Mama, and that he should have received his just deserts like Lillian Jean did. I was arguing that acts of retribution would have been wasted on TJ and that he was more of a victim than Lillian Jean. Natalie, who is a person of few words, said unsolicited, overrunning Hope, "Yeah, he really was because she decided to believe all that stuff, and I don't think she judged for herself. I don't think Lillian Jean really thought about the matter" (April 5, 1993: p. 35).

Micki countered by saying that Lillian Jean was following the prejudices of her father. When confronted by the fact that Jeremy didn't feel that way, she suggested that he didn't because he was one of the middle children and didn't get as much attention, i.e., indoctrination. Natalie did not agree: "But he still, he still saw things like they should be." Natalie applauded Jeremy's independent thinking, seeming to indicate that Lillian Jean and Jeremy had a choice to judge for themselves: "She *decided* to believe all that stuff..." was Natalie's conclusion.

Cassie Logan. Natalie gave her observations about Cassie at her first session on April 5, 1993. "I think she's a real typical American girl," she said, surprising everyone. As we explored her responses, her explanation framed a different Cassie than the rest of us recognized.

Natalie: She's got some really strong feelings. Ummm ---

Leenie: Wait a minute. Tell me what you mean by "a typical
American girl."

Natalie: Just, she feels, um, like nothing should be her fault, and at
this age, you know, because I think most every girl has
thought that.

Micki (Dramatizing): Nothing is ever my fault!

Natalie: Well, you know, she doesn't want to be blamed for a lot of
things and she still doesn't understand a lot of things that are
going on.... (p. 12)

Leenie: You said she has some strong points..

Natalie: Just trying to cope with things, and just trying to, she's not
trying to make things worse. And she's just trying to help. (p.
14)

At first, the words that Natalie used, and the plaintive tone of voice in which
those words were spoken, suggest that Cassie is a victim who is "trying" desper-
ately to either help, cope, or stay out of the way. That was not the case, and the
words, "she has really strong feelings," gave a clue Natalie's reading of Cassie,
offering a different perspective than the one the rest reported. What Natalie under-
stood is that Cassie saw herself as a victim, as many children and adolescents do
who find themselves in conflict with adults or forces around them, who find that
they have very little power against them, and who inwardly rise up against them.

And Natalie "felt the same way" as Cassie, believing her to be unjustly treated, especially when Big Ma made her apologize to Lillian Jean. In that sense, Cassie, her family, and the black people of the town were all victimized by the white landowners and storeowners. But the Logans were different even among the rest of the Negroes; victims, yes, but not helpless or giving in to the oppression, rather, using the little power they had to act. Mama was a teacher who lost her job because she refused to act like she had no rights. Cassie herself acted to keep her self-respect by beating up Lillian Jean and making sure no one could find out about it. Natalie cued in on their motives in a way no one else did. She, like Cassie, knew better.

Natalie saw these actions and attitude of Cassie as typical of the American girl's experience of "going through all those changes," meaning, she said, "wanting more independence, wanting to speak out more" (Telephone conversation, June 22, 1994). As Cassie grew, she saw more and more of the violence and injustice of her times, and wanted to speak out against them. She discovered that she could only in a limited sense, but what she could do, she did.

Lyddie Worthen. Natalie sees and appreciates Lyddie's independent spirit, but she also sees her as a victim of her circumstances:

> Natalie: And I know how Lyddie feels. I can really relate to how she
>
> feels most of the time. (Sighing) And, I think she's just a
>
> really strong character, because she's so shy and then she
>
> comes out and reacts to things..

172

Leenie: Okay, um, let me ask you just a couple of things about, about Lyddie. You said you can relate to how she feels. Can you tell me any more about that?

Natalie: Um, like sometimes she just wishes that she didn't have all the troubles, that she could just quit. But she still keeps going, and um, sometimes she feels like she has to take care of everybody.

Leenie: Do you feel that way sometimes?

Natalie (Letting out her breath in a rush of air): Uh-*Huh*. And sometimes she feels so lonely that she just can't stand it.

(4 second pause)

Leenie: That's a lot of responsibility for a young girl.

Natalie: Yeah. We're both the same age. I, well, when I heard the name of the girl, I thought, "I wonder if her real name is Lydia?" My middle name is Lydia. (May 4, 1993: p. 3)

Natalie's Lyddie is trapped, with no hope of release in sight. The language of imprisonment is clear: Lyddie *wishes* she didn't have troubles; she *wishes* she could quit; she *is so lonely she can't stand it*; and she feels like *she has to take care of everybody*.

Because Lyddie's inner feelings are revealed, even as early as the first chapter, a reader such as Natalie can safely make most of the statements that she did, resting on evidence in the text. For instance there are several occasions

173

where Lyddie reveals that in the physical absence of her father and the mental and emotional absence of her mother, she does feel like she needs to take care of everyone. When a bear visits the cabin, Mama whimpers in terror, needing comfort and direction from Lyddie; she even obeys Lyddie. When on the next day Mama announces that they are going to move in with her brother and sister-in-law, Uncle Judah and Aunt Clarissa, and await the end of the world, Lyddie decides that she and Charlie will stay: *"I can't leave the farm,"* Lyddie says, and she and Charlie stay on through the winter. She makes the decision about what they'll do with the calf when they leave, and she bargains with the elder Mr. Stephens in the sale of the calf.

There are occasions in the first three chapters from which Natalie may be drawing her inferences about Lyddie's sorrow, a sorrow deep enough to discourage her. For instance, on p. 9 the reader can find this line: *"But Charlie laughed, and so she began to laugh, though it was the kind of laughter that caught like briars in her chest and felt very much like pain."* Lyddie's sorrow and determination often remain unexpressed to the other characters, but available in a general sense to the reader. *"She wanted for a minute to put her arm around [Charlie's] thin shoulders, but she held back"* (p. 11). And later, when it is time to part from Charlie, the reader is again privy to her feelings. *"She didn't want Luke Stevens watching while she bid Charles good-bye, but again maybe it was better. She might weaken if they were alone, and that would never do"* (p. 13).

What is interesting is the extent to which Natalie cued in on and extended

Lyddie's responses in the manner in which she did: "Like sometimes she just wishes that she didn't have all the troubles, that she could just quit. But she still keeps going.... And, sometimes she feels so lonely that she just can't stand it." She is the only one of the five of us who identified so clearly and so personally with the sadness that Lyddie seemed to feel and the only one who translated the sadness into defeat or resignation.

It is understandable how Natalie could infer resignation, but it is not clearly supported by the text. Lyddie's heartbreak is clear, yes, but her stubborn, sometimes seemingly heartless resolve in the face of that heartbreak is what keeps her going until the end. Natalie is reading Lyddie as she must often read, accurately or not, her own situation: the constant need for money, the exchange of the parent/child role, and the loneliness.

> Natalie: Yeah, I live on Murray Lane. And, um, there's no, there's no
> kids around there. Katherine's down two blocks; Blair lives
> like, I don't know, she lives on maybe Murray; maybe a little
> farther down. But see, I never see them! I never see either
> one of them!
>
> Hope: I don't think you wanna see Katherine.
>
> Natalie: No, but---
>
> Hope: I mean, my friends---
>
> Natalie: I don't care! Just somebody! I don't care! (April 5 1993: p.
> 42)

<u>Natalie as Group Member</u>

In this section I give a general description of Natalie's discourse characteristics, and I show how she offers unique perspectives through her independent thinking and persistence.

<u>A General Description</u>. Natalie describes herself as a quiet person, which is how she was most of the time in our sessions. She does not seem bothered by it; she does not *have* to talk, it seems, to feel comfortable. Listening to one of the recorded sessions, Leah remarked, "Natalie didn't talk much!" and it was true. On the positive side, her tendency toward silence makes her a better participant because she listens well. She has time to formulate her responses, so they usually are substantive, less halting than the others, less full of "I don't know's." On the negative side, her silence deprives her of the benefits of entering the exchange taking place, that is, exercising her own voice and contributing to her own and the thinking of others.

In general, Natalie was soft-spoken, but her volume would change, often depending on the topic. In the passages quoted above it was soft, but at other times, such as when we discussed what the girls called the "Big Three Must-Haves" at CS, she grew louder and more expressive. When she talked softly she ran the risk of being out-shouted by the rest of us, who were eager to talk. Natalie sounds very much like the women in her home: soft, nearly whispery. On the tape recordings I could clearly "hear" Natalie in her aunt's voice, and her mother's style is evident in Natalie. Sometimes Natalie's speech was slurred, and though she

may have a bit of a speech impediment, it was more noticeable on some occasions than on others, seeming more slurred when she talked quietly about sensitive topics.

Natalie is accustomed to speaking with articulate adults at home and at school. At both locations she finds herself respected as a person by the adults in her life. Therefore, she often responds with adult-like conversation. For instance, instead of plunging in with a response when addressed, she indicates verbally that she heard, something the others did not do. "That's a very good point," she said one day in response to a question I asked. The difficulty in responding that way is that the succeeding thought may be derailed because she took a breath and someone else jumped in.

Independence. As a group member Natalie displayed an independent thinking process that often offered us unique perspectives, that stood up against Micki's forceful rhetoric, and that took charge of the conversation when she was part of it and didn't like how it was going.

Her unique perspectives on Cassie were discussed in the previous sections and were important for us to consider. Cassie is not a one-dimensional character, and it took Natalie's comments to provide the means for deeper discussions than would have been possible without her. She provided the same in her discussion of Jeremy and Lillian Jean.

Her ability to think for herself allowed her to present her alternative perspectives even in the face of Micki's persuasiveness. She countered Micki's arguments

177

about Jeremy and Lillian Jean, and disagreed with her when Micki suggested that *Lyddie* could not have been written by an English professor.

> Micki: Maybe the grammar, the library, I mean, it's obvious this was
>
> not written by an English professor.
>
> Hope: Yeah, really.
>
> Leenie: Now, now—
>
> Natalie: It could have been, actually.
>
> Leenie: Why do you say that?
>
> Natalie: Because they can tell the difference.
>
> Micki: But I've read books that said, like, in the back of the book if
>
> you read it, it's written by an English professor, and they
>
> never write bad grammar.
>
> Leenie: Okay. But what is the bad grammar written for?
>
> Micki: It's written to—
>
> Natalie: fit the character.
>
> Micki: fit the character. (April 20, 1993: p. 12)

In the above conversation Natalie actually interrupted twice; she broke in to speech begun by me and by Micki. She did so quietly and confidently.

There were instances where Natalie took charge of the conversation if she did not like the direction it was taking; for example, when we were on the topic of Stacey's reaction to TJ's teasing about his new coat. Stacey responded to the teasing by giving the coat to TJ. I asked the girls how they would have

responded.

> Natalie: I wouldn't, if they think that, that's their problem.
>
> Leenie: Okay, what if it was Hope who said that to you. Of course,
>
> > okay, let's try to picture it. It's a little bit hard. Say---
>
> Natalie: I can picture it. (Laughter)
>
> Leenie: I see!
>
> Micki: What if Natalie wears bell bottoms?
>
> Natalie: Bell bottoms! No way!
>
> Hope: Bell bottoms---
>
> Micki: Corduroy bell bottoms.
>
> Hope: Jeans.
>
> Leenie: Okay, go ahead.
>
> Micki: That are brown, with an orange shirt.
>
> Natalie: Well, let me think of something that would be more in my
>
> > style. (April 5, 1993: p. 19)

Natalie did think of something that she would wear, leggings, and the conversation continued.

When Leah and Micki had the running debate over whether or not Lyddie needed a mother, it was Leah who persisted in the argument until there was some sort of resolution. However, it was Natalie who raised the issue in the first place. When I had asked the students to respond to the comments of others by commenting themselves or asking questions, this is what Natalie cued in on:

179

Natalie: You said that in you, in your segment, that you thought that, um, Lyddie needs a mother.

Micki: MmHmm?

Natalie: [You said,] "She understands a lot for her age, but she needs a mother. What kind of mother do you think would go with her? (May 17, 1993: p. 4)

There were times when Natalie's independence seemed to be exerted in another form -- resistance. She lagged behind the others in her reading of Lyddie and did not seem terribly moved to hurry. I checked with her from time to time to set up a livable schedule of reading, but she still remained behind the others. She reads slowly, she said, but that I do not believe was the cause this time. Mary Ann said that Natalie resisted assigned reading unless it had something to do with horses. Assigned reading in Mary Ann's class still involves a great deal of choice, and usually is implemented for a particular purpose, such as "Black History Month." Even with choices, Natalie resisted, and although I cannot be sure, there seemed to be some resistance on her part with Lyddie.

There are at least two other plausible reasons that I considered: (1) Natalie's grandmother grew ill and was in the hospital from the time we began Lyddie in late April until her death in early June. When Natalie spoke of it, she was clearly upset and worried, more when she discovered that her grandmother was also afraid and worried that she might never return home. Natalie's home was topsy-turvy during those weeks. (2) Lyddie may have been a disturbing book and not one that

Natalie was interested in delving into it in front of all of us at that time, because of the parallels to her own situation. I was sometimes surprised that she was as open as she was about it.

Theoretical, Pedagogical and Personal Implications.

Theoretical Implications. As we look at Natalie's reading experience as a transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978), we can see how Natalie could have interpreted Lyddie's emotions as she did. Natalie brought to the text experiences of helping her mother make decisions and a sense of responsibility for her own mother's happiness. What the text evoked in her were the feelings that she must sometimes experience in her present situation.

Natalie sometimes wrote about Lyddie in her journal letters to Mary Ann, who had several insights about Natalie and Lyddie. Mary Ann related those insights to me in an interview:

> In a lot of important ways...*Lyddie* gave her another role model for
>
> dealing with adversity. I mean, Lyddie took charge. I think there was
>
> a point at which Natalie was able to see that. I think that in a lot of
>
> ways, Natalie's mother, in her own way, has done that, has stood up
>
> for herself in some small degree. And that there is a part of Natalie
>
> that we always wanted to build on, that was willing to do that, that
>
> didn't just say, "Oh, poor me, there's no way out. There are no
>
> choices." (May 30, 1994)

Pedagogical Implications. The issues involved in Natalie's reading experi-

ence present dilemmas for a teacher and/or researcher because Natalie will read what she wants to. On the one hand, it is my opinion that, left to herself, Natalie may limit the range of experiences she has with books. I agree with Mary Ann's observation that "[b]ecause of her environment at home, reading is an escape," so she reads her horse books over and over and the same old fairy tales. When at school, where she has an opportunity to broaden her range, she is more interested in the social offerings. She is a skilled reader and a reflective person, however, and the most important benefit, in my opinion, would be time spent in discussing issues with others on a less personal ground -- through book discussions.

On the other hand, *Natalie is reading*, and though my preferred medium for the research was *Lyddie*, her personal preference was *Horse Crazy*. What I would do as a next step, if I were continuing, is have book discussions using the same approach but with the medium of the participant's choice.

Natalie loves the Saddle Club books, and after my first visit to her home I knew that she stayed up in the wee hours of the morning the night before reading one of them while *Lyddie* sat untouched on a nightstand. When I left that day I asked to borrow *Horse Sense* to read. At the next session she asked excitedly what I had thought of it. She was disappointed to learn that I had not had time to read it yet. I did read it, however, but by the time I talked to her about it she had lost some of her enthusiasm.

I think it is important to read the books my students are interested in, for

several reasons. Reading a favorite book of a student is a means of getting to know that person as well as providing an opportunity for general communication and specific book conversations. However, this "bargain" I made with Natalie was, I must confess, somewhat manipulative. I took *Horse Sense* largely because I wanted Natalie to read *Lyddie* because it is a good book, but more so because I wanted her contributions to the study. If I had read and talked to her about *Horse Sense* sooner, I think it may have actually made a difference in how quickly she read *Lyddie*.

More importantly, Natalie *was ready to talk* to me about *Horse Sense* the next time she saw me after loaning it to me. I believe it would have been healthy for her to have someone to talk to about it. Further, I believe I would have gained many insights from such a discussion -- I did during the few moments we discussed it at her house.

Natalie's reading habits raise another issue and a dilemma about the difference between reading in school and reading at home. Natalie is an excellent reader, but Mary Ann was concerned by her lack of reading at school, and this past year, at Washington Middle School, Natalie came close to flunking language arts. (She is also an excellent writer, and to get even a "B" in language arts is nearly unthinkable.) At CS the students are not graded, so Mary Ann did not have to deal with assigning her a grade that she knew was not representative of her ability. That is and probably will be a problem for her in the coming years at school.

Chapter Four Summary

I quoted Louise Rosenblatt in Chapter One as I discussed my own story and the stories of others whose school experiences were disconnected from our own lives. Rosenblatt spoke of literature whose "words do not represent keen sensuous, emotional, and intellectual perceptions" (Literature, 1938/83: 50), and therefore do not make any meaningful, positive impact on the reader. She suggests that an important missing element is that of "personal insight and experience," to aid students in making sense of literary works. Through profiling the girls I have attempted to highlight the unique ways in which they called on their personal insight and experiences in their transactions with the texts they read. I also showed that the texts we read and discussed, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and *Lyddie*, made connections with the girls according to their individual experiences, interests, and attitudes.

As they sometimes struggled to come to terms with their feelings and opinions of characters and events, they brought those views out into the open. It was at that point that the rest of us joined in that struggle to help our compadre understand herself or to work out our own relationship with the text.

Responses of a nature *that will make changes* in perceptions need a certain climate in order to expose themselves; some conditions encourage responses, and some discourage or prevent them from being given. Some of those conditions were identified in Chapter Four as individual gifts, preoccupations, or needs; others came as a result of the group interaction that took us beyond the places we could

venture alone (Vygotsky, 1978). Chapter Five, "Constructing Meaning in the Social

Setting," centers on both the content and structure of our group interactions: char-

acteristics, effects of variations in format; negotiation of differences; challenges of

group talk; and my role and perspectives.

1.   *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is the story of the Logans, a black family living in the segregated South Carolina of the 1930's. It is told through the eyes of Cassie Logan, a nine year old who, at the beginning of the book, is uninitiated into the harsher realities of life for the black people of her day. The book is the story of her growing up in those hard times.

Characters:
> The Logans - Mama, Papa, Big Ma (Grandmother), Stacey, Cassie, Christopher John, and Little Man.
> Neighbors - The Averys. T.J. Avery is Stacey's "best" friend.
> Jeremy Sims, who wants to befriend Stacey; his sister, Lillian Jean Sims, who treats black people with scorn or condescension.
> Mr. Granger - A white man who owns much of the surrounding land.

Lyddie is the story of a young adolescent girl of the 1830's who is hired out by her mother to work in a tavern in Vermont. She soon leaves for factory work in Lowell, where the rest of the story takes place. Like *Roll of Thunder,* the story is seen through the eyes of the main character, who is also an independent-thinking female.

Characters:
> The Worthens - Ma, Lyddie, Charlie, Agnes, Rachel, Uncle Judah, and Aunt Clarissa.
> Neighbors - the Stevens', a Quaker family. The son, Luke, tries to be a friend to the family.
> Factory workers - Diana, who trains Lyddie on the looms, heavily involved in the women's worker reform movement; Betsy, Amelia, Prudence - Lyddie's roommates.

2.   I use the following conventions for dialogue in this and following chapters:
        a. Three dashes at the end of a speaker's line indicate she has been interrupted by the speaker to follow.

Example: Hope: I really liked Cassie. She seemed so---
            Leah: I thought she was immature!
            Hope: honest.

        b. Two dots at the end of a speaker's line indicate a trailing off; no omissions; no interruptions.
        c. Three dots indicate an omission.

d. The dialogue is written as it was spoken.

3.   Micki is realistic 100% of the time, nor is her view always superior. I present her view in contrast to Leah's and Hope's, already explored. I also present them in order to understand her better by placing them in opposition to other positions she defended throughout the course of the discussions.

4.   By characterizing images as inconsistent, I do not intend to imply that a reader's image should not develop and change; far from it. Investigating and developing constructions of our initial evocations is a primary consideration in reader response. What I speak of is an arbitrary change of mind based on the persuasiveness of others' arguments, not on a thoughtful review of the text.

5.   Even though neither Natalie nor Hope is an avid reader, both seem to have benefited from the program of reading taught at CS, sharing with Micki and Leah a familiarity and ease with books. I suggest that part of the reason is that books have been made accessible to the students, but not simply in terms of the ample provisions in Mary Ann's classroom; in addition, books seem to become psychologically accessible. Many collective efforts are made to enable students to appreciate literature, both as "an art form," and one "that deals with and ministers to human life and needs," to use Rosenblatt's terminology (1938/83: p. 28). To foster the process, Mary Ann spends time discussing the lives of authors, reading biographical sketches to the students, presenting authors as people whose life experiences have relevance to the their lives. She encourages the students to write to authors and invites actual writers to class. Her guests have included Lee Smith, Nikki Giovanni, and William Mashburn. In addition to personalizing the books from the perspective of the writer, she does so from the perspective of a reader -- herself. She says:

> I think to some extent because I love to read I've been able to share the way that I think about books and the way that I talk about books. Somehow modeling always helps. But having the journals as a way to do that one-on-one with students and asking them to reflect on what the characters bring out in their own thinking, asking them to problem solve, asking them to just share reflections, I guess, has probably helped.
>   I really get excited and love it when kids who are reluctant readers begin to like to read. So I think I communicate that reading is a value and that and I, I, think that I try to communicate that it's not so much that there is one way of reading or one kind of reading to be done, but that finding what excites you and really stimulates your own thinking is what's important. (Interview, May 30, 1994)

CHAPTER 5

Reader Response in a Social Setting

Because the response process begins with the individual response (Rosenblatt, 1938/83) and is affected by each person's particular lived through experiences and interpretive communities (Beach, 1993), I provided individual profiles of the girls in Chapter Four. However, the main goal of this research has been to study literature as a medium for exploration within a group setting. Therefore, in addition to an analysis of individual characteristics and actions, I showed the connections that existed or were created among the girls. In this chapter I extend the examination of connections by exploring some of the issues that were a consequence of our social interactions, issues that have implications for a classroom involved in such discussions.

Constructing meaning from texts on an individual basis[1] is different from constructing meaning in a social setting. Adding the human element is an invitation to complexity and therefore, the possibility of misunderstanding (Tannen, 1986), but also greater achievement than we could otherwise realize (Vygotsky, 1978; Beach, 1993). This chapter treats both possibilities as they emerged in the interactions and includes the following aspects of our effects on each other: the composition of the group; differing reading habits and processes; similarities attributable to their attendance at CS; social class differences; and each person's different needs, preferences, and expectations.

<u>Interactions among the girls: the effects of difference</u>.

In chapter four I showed the similarities and differences of the girls as individuals. In this section I discuss the impact of those characteristics on their relationships as group members.

<u>Group Composition</u>. The group included two sets of friends, Natalie and Hope, both in their second year of middle school, and Micki and Leah, both in their first. Having two sets of friends in the group was often an advantage; in fact, seeing the friendship between Micki and Leah was the impetus to find a friend for Hope. We scheduled most of the sessions during recess and lunch, and I was concerned that Hope would not be separated happily from her friends as well as from social time for long.[2] Hope and Natalie "need each other," and though it seems that Natalie is more dependent on Hope than the reverse, they seemed to appreciate each other as well.

It turned out that the friendships did offer support and not polarization. In fact, sometimes it happened that discussions would occur between different pairs of them, or trios, and often it was a matter of choice. The third or fourth party was not obviously left out but seemed content to listen and think. For example, on June 4, Micki and Hope shared an enthusiasm for a conversation that Natalie and Leah did not. We discussed conceptions of a romantic view of life, and Micki and Hope were fully involved, stories and opinions tumbling out on top of each other. Leah sat quietly listening until I asked why she was quiet. She did not agree with them, she said. She was not sullen or ignored; she was able to let them have their

fun, but she did not want to participate during those moments.

Overall, the girls exhibited politeness, perhaps caring, in their disagree-ments, and usually refrained from sarcasm. The humor they enjoyed together was a result of Micki's wittiness, Hope's sheer enjoyment of people and her ability to tell a story well, Natalie's unexpected, dry remarks, and Leah's forthright, blurting confessionals.

Differences in Reading Habits and Processes. The fact that Leah and Micki were often ahead of Hope and Natalie in their reading was a problem because we did not want to "spoil" the story by discussing parts some of us hadn't read. When we did wait, Micki and Leah were a bit stifled, but they did not appear frustrated. The differences were not always a problem, however. They sometimes served to pique the curiosity of the others, especially of Hope, and caused her to want to read on. The different ways the girls read offered varying perspectives, and certain salient points raised by one person were those that may not have otherwise been explored by the group. The group pushed each other to think, not intentionally perhaps, but because most of them were interested in the topics they were pursuing, and because some of them were not hesitant to disagree. The phrase "I just realized this" was often spoken, a result of someone's questions to the speaker.

Attendance at Connectionist School. At the time of the study all of the girls were students at CS. Because the school is an alternative to the public school system, the students understand, in varying degrees, that there are at least two

190

ways of thinking in the world: traditional, which they are not, and alternative, which they are (Smith, 1993). What the girls had in common in that regard is a partially feminist view (Belenky, et al.1986; Smith, 1987) which they quite successfully related to literature and learning: freedom of choice, awareness of inequities and inequalities, and a desire to encourage voice. The girls thus had a common linguistic-experiential reservoir relative to the school ideology. For example, their phrases like "not that I'm racist," "not that I'm sexist," "he's so sexist," and "that's so racist" were common and, at least on the surface, were understood by each of them.

    <u>Social Class Differences</u>. Although none of the girls can be considered wealthy, there were class differences. Micki's parents are both professional people; her father is a teacher and her mother is a priest. Hope's single mother works two jobs in order to provide for her children; they are working class. Natalie's single mother works as a clerk, and supports her father and Natalie. Leah's mother and father own and operate two restaurants in the River City area. Since my primary focus has not been on class differences, I cannot strongly suggest a correlation between class and confidence in school as it applies to the girls; however, after working with them for over a year, the following characteristics were consistently evident in our conversations:

    Leah - looks confident and secure though she professes not to be; tries to

        be and is a "good student;"

    Micki - at ease in the school setting;

Natalie - soft spoken, tends to stay in the background; believes she cannot

acquire full membership in the CS student network because she does

not subscribe to what she sees as the Big Three. She says that she

does not have to belong; she likes being different; and

Hope - often an enthusiastic, inconsistent student; seems to want to prove

her membership in the group or her disdain for that membership.

The girls' understandings of each other's personalities worked together with their understandings of differences. Because the middle school is small, and they had known each other at least a year, they did not have to take a great deal of time to form an identity as a group. In addition, there was a solidarity that all of us enjoyed from being co-participants in a "research project." I suspect, however, that the girls' understandings of each other's personalities and capabilities came from a constructed image of each person's behaviors in school alone; this perspective may have limited what each of us was allowed by the rest of us to be (Beach, 1993). Examples include instances when Micki's excellence in language caused others to be predisposed to accepting her interpretations; and when Hope's lesser eloquence could (and did, unfortunately) cause others to overlook hers. Further, I believe that had we continued with our group discussions, we would have soon found it necessary to engage in meta-communication, or talk about how we talk to each other (Tannen, 1986). As I will show in the next section, the more we worked together, the more opportunities were created for misunderstanding.

Preferences, Expectations, and Needs. When the girls and I began our group discussions, all of us seemed excited about what would unfold. Micki and Leah love to read, and talking about books was a pleasant prospect to them; Hope loves to be with people and seems to need to belong, so a special group project with Virginia Tech status seemed to please her, as it did the rest; Natalie was happy to be with Hope and, as a closet reader, was happy to be in a book group. As for me, I knew that I had a chance to work with girls who were used to being given a voice in matters of importance at school, who reportedly were not bound by "tradition," and who would be the means to my achieving some goals in which I was highly interested: researching adolescent literature, pedagogy, and development.

The line between anticipation and expectation is probably a bit blurred, and over time, as we got to know each other, the anticipations suddenly *were* expectations, fraught with possibilities for fulfillment or frustration and denial. The times of fulfillment were characterized by the "good feeling" of accomplishing something meaningful to everyone and having fun at it, such as the April 20 session when we sat out on the lawn and just talked about books with strong female characters: *Annie Oakley*; *Caddie Woodlawn*; and *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. After re-listening to that conversation the following winter, I wrote a log entry that was wistful for a way to legitimize such "chit-chats" in schools.

Sometimes the expectations were unfulfilled, at least for some members of the group. Some of those days I drove home complaining to my tape recorder,

and the girls would reveal later that they left with varying impressions of the day. One such day was May 17, which I recount in some detail for the following reasons: (1) it is a clear illustration of the odd combination of satisfaction for some and dissatisfaction for others that discussions provide; (2) it shows the effect of our differences on each other; (3) it is an illustration of good intentions gone awry because of faulty assumptions and preconceptions; and (4) it is a picture of the way group expectations reveal deeper needs, like needing to belong and needing to be heard. In addition there were several instances of sustained, undirected (by me) dialogue through which the girls expressed their disagreement with one another, and through which they explored their topics of interest.

To tell the tale of May 17, and make it useful, I use the response process as a metaphor for the experience. I borrow Ben Nelms' (1988) interpretation of the process as a series of Chinese boxes, "each one opening up the possibility of yet another one, each one reflecting upon and enriching the others" (p. 6). The process involves the evocation of the poem, response, interpretation, and criticism.[3]

Preface to May 17. This was a curious day -- as it unfolded, and every time I thought about it afterwards and saw yet another of its many layers, some, I'm sure, still unrevealed. The girls' responses to the day were mixed: for Leah it was "so much fun" that she wished we could stay all day; for Micki and Hope it was frustrating; and for Natalie it ended in seemingly undeserved conflict with Hope. It appears now that the expectations we brought to the meeting were not comple-

194

mentary but at cross purposes with each other. I will explain how those purposes were deflected or fulfilled throughout the conversation, and how they collided toward the end of the meeting. First of all, though, the *text* itself, or the events of the day, must be made known. I tell the story using Hope as the pivotal character, because it is she, of all the girls, whose actions I understood the least at the time, and because the consequence of my lack of understanding was perhaps the most serious where she was concerned.

The Text. May 17 was the second day of a structured agenda: an orderly turn-taking of responses guided by me toward the participants' responses from the previous session, responses I had summarized and distributed (see Appendix F). I was envisioning that each girl's uninterrupted responses would afterwards be energized by comments, questions, or disagreements from the others.

When I arrived that day, Hope and Leah were already talking about *Lyddie*. Having read three more chapters in the days since the previous session, Hope was talking excitedly. She and Leah had a disagreement about details, but undeterred, Hope continued on. Neither Micki nor Natalie joined in the talking which was unusual for Micki at least. However, she knew what the agenda was and wanted to stick to it. I "let" Hope and Leah talk for one and one-half minutes more, but knowing that they also enjoyed talking about the characters when they were given allotted time, I soon began enforcing the agenda I had set out to accomplish.

Micki's turn was first, and though it was supposed to be uninterrupted, she

had to deal with eager Leah, who could not contain her protests and comments. No problems resulted, only a slight increase in drama because of the girls' strong and differing opinions about Lyddie's need for a mother. Hope and Natalie did not participate in Micki's discussion with Leah about Rachel because neither of them had read that far.

When Hope's turn came next she protested that she had already talked. Nevertheless, she began with great enthusiasm: sharing her opinions about Charlie, re-telling favorite parts of the chapters she had read, offering a few opinions. She seemed to be enjoying herself. Then Micki challenged a statement she made about Betsy and Diana, and Hope lost a little of her enthusiasm. I begin in the dialogue now where Hope is taking her turn and Micki puts in her differing view, followed by the ensuing discussion:

> Hope: Um, I don't like Diana very much. She's, I don't know, I just, she doesn't, I don't, to me I don't think she seems very honest. And, I want Ca--I want Lyddie to go to college. I heard Betsy say something to her in the book. They were talking about it and she said, "Don't let Diana hear me say this." And, at first Betsy would really really care about what Diana said. And now she just doesn't care at all. She's just, "Well, I don't care what she says."

> Micki: Oh.. Diana, Diana? Why would Diana mind if she went to college?

Leah: Yeah.

Hope: I don't know. It's in here, can I see your book?

Micki: Yeah, sure.

Hope: Okay (pauses to look).

Micki: Would you like for me to look for that while you go on talking?

Hope: No, because I'm finished talking!

Leenie: Okay.

Micki: (good naturedly) Well, fine!

Leenie: Anybody have any questions for Hope?

Micki: (mischievously) Yeah, why don't you like Diana?

Leah: Yeah? (pp. 11-12)

Hope continued looking through the book and soon discovered from the book that she had mixed up the name, thus, her statement applied to someone else. She was further frustrated because she almost lapsed into calling Lyddie "Cassie," something she had done on several earlier occasions. Since her time was not up and, not wanting her to be cut off prematurely and not get a chance to further express herself (I obviously missed her cue), I asked her about her mistrust of Diana. She explained:

Hope: Diana was helping her to learn how to read that book,

Regulations or something like that?

Leenie: Yeah.

Hope: That weird little book.

Micki: Oh, *Regulations*!

Leenie: But you, that made you not trust her or something?

Hope: Oh, no! And they said, "Has she tied you up or something, and threatened you to join the something, something club or something?"

Leenie: Mm. Mm Hmmm.

Hope: And that's when I was, that's when I stopped trusting her as a friend.

Leenie: Oh, really? Do the rest of you think---

Micki: Oh, "tied you up, tied you up" -- they don't mean literally, Hope.

Hope: I don't care!

Micki: It means like, "Have they, has she made up your mind for you?"

Hope: Oh, who cares. (pp. 16-17)

But Hope did care. Corrected by the same peer who had earlier pointed out her incorrect use of a name, she tried to pass it off as unimportant. What she might have been able to shrug off more successfully in another setting or another time was not so easy on this day. The conversation continued with Leah taking her turn, Hope gamely trying again to participate. When Micki tried to interrupt Leah, Hope assisted Leah by playfully pointing out that Leah was getting irritated. "Leah's like, 'It's **my** turn!'" Hope said with a chuckle. But the little bit of oomph

she gained from coming to Leah's aid was lost when Leah herself expressed her disagreement with Hope's previous comparison of Lyddie to Cassie.

Leah: I see a little resemblance, but not much---

Hope: I'm not saying exactly alike.

Leah (Raising her voice): ---not that much to *mistake their names*.

　　　(She says this mischievously, referring to Hope's frequent use

　　　of "Cassie" instead of "Lyddie.") Just kidding.

Leenie: Okay.

Hope: I'm not saying that they're exactly alike, just as far as honesty

　　　and how the book's always telling their inner thoughts and

　　　their---

Leah: Yeah. (pp. 22-23)

The previous occasions when Hope kept calling Lyddie "Cassie" were not particularly funny to her, and this one was no different. Amazingly, Hope did not retreat. She kept herself in the conversation, but the enthusiasm and playfulness she had earlier displayed began to take on a sharper, more combative edge as Leah continued.

Leah was commenting about Micki's responses from the previous week concerning Lyddie's need for a mother, with which Leah disagreed. When Micki tried to answer one of her challenges, Hope told her to "Shhhh," reminding her, "It's her turn." However, soon afterward, Hope herself intruded on Leah's turn when she was reminded of her grandmother's death.

199

Hope: I know when my grandmother died, I just went into this inner

stage. I mean for like three weeks. I went to her funeral, I

didn't see anything, I didn't eat anything---

Micki: For three weeks?!!!

Hope: Yes, for three weeks. I didn't eat, I didn't talk. All I did was

sit in my room, look at pictures of her and listen to my music.

(p. 24)

Hope continued the story about her grandmother with Leah making sympathetic overtures until Micki finally blurted in, "You can't go five and a half days without water!" Somehow, though it was loud, that remark was not taken up by the whole group and the conversation continued as they talked about Brigid and Diana, and whether or not it was a reader or another character in the book who would find it hard to dislike Lyddie. Hope also continued to enter in, especially clearly when Leah and Micki were discussing Lyddie's greed:

Hope: Personally myself, I don't think Lyddie could be a character

that you would hate, because---

Natalie: Personally myself. (This is a light tease to her friend.)

Hope: Personally myself! (lightly, with a chuckle). (p. 26)

Finally it was time for Leah and Micki to leave for radio play practice. Micki left first, but Leah dragged her feet and kept hanging around.

Leenie: Leah, when do you need to go? Now? Okay. (Leah sighs.)

Hope: Hah, hah!

Leah: I don't want to, though.

Hope: (With renewed enthusiasm and ignoring Leah) Now! Like *I* was saying---

Leah: I just wish, I just wish we had like a whole day---

Hope: Oh, get *out* of here!

Leah: That would be so nice. (She leaves.)

Hope: I say that we should, not we, but I say she should write another sequel to *Lyddie*, and have it where, let it finish off where it is, and then go on for like, have it go on for like, a couple more months---

Natalie: Oh, I know!

Hope: (increasing her volume) where she is in a factory, and then---

Natalie: I know! We can write to her!

Hope: No. *You* shut up...and then write, and then, have her um, have Lyddie find a family like, um Charlie did, have the same advantages that he did and go to school, and whatever.

Leenie: We'll have to write to her.

Hope: Okay. (She is whispering loudly.)

Leenie: Why don't we just do that sometime?

Hope: I'll write to her. (She is still whispering, a bit silly. She seems embarrassed, perhaps by her remark to Natalie.)

Natalie: That was my idea.

Leenie: What was your idea?

Natalie: That was it.

Hope: Oh, oh, okay. (Still whispering.)

Leenie: Natalie, we'll start with you next time, give you time---

Hope: Well, we can still keep going. (She starts talking again instead

of whispering.)

Leenie: Well, we only have a few minutes anyway.

Hope: We can go fifteen more minutes.

Leenie: I told Mary Ann---

Hope: Who cares? She doesn't care.

Leenie: Yeah. You do [though]---

Hope: No, I don't---

Leenie: Because you believe in honesty.

Hope: [Mary Ann] doesn't care.

Natalie: I think she would care, Hope.

Hope: Do I care?

Natalie: No, Hope just likes honest people. She doesn't have to be

nice, to be honest with those. (Natalie is ribbing Hope good-

naturedly; Leenie plays along.)

Leenie: Natalie!

Hope: Oh, yeah? Well, I--- (Hope takes a marker and slashes a

long line over a sketch of a horse Natalie has drawn.)

Natalie: It's a blue flair! (She screams, jumps up, Hope runs out of

the building with Natalie close behind.) (pp. 31-32)

The Evocation of a Poem. As I was experiencing the events of May 17 I

was also trying to "read" them. I knew something was amiss, but it was difficult to

both "read" and participate. We began on a congenial enough note, and I thought

I was being somewhat flexible to let Leah and Hope talk (until I clocked it at one

and one-half minutes). As the turn-taking commenced and progressed, I was not

aware of what I have now come to understand as Hope's intentions or of the

needs of Micki, and how Leah and Natalie figured in. We had a successful first run

at turn-taking the week before, and we were all set to go again, or so I thought.

Things did not go as planned. One of my many memos concerning the day tells

the "story" I began to evoke as we moved further into the session:

Micki was acting flippant, Hope and Natalie were trying to get in their

own conversation, and they weren't taking notes on what people

were saying. I had asked them to jot down questions or comments

they had or wanted to make during each person's allotted speaking

time, but it seemed to me that they just wanted to blurt out their

comments while the other person was talking instead. If they didn't

get to (which I didn't let them), they seemed to shrug and not bother.

Leah was the only one who seemed at all interested in jotting things

down. (Journal, May 26, 1993)

Here we were with all this marvelous potential for dialogue, I thought, and nobody except Leah seemed to be fully engaged. The ending of the story, Hope's actions toward Natalie, I read as surprising, but not shocking. It seemed par for the course that day.

The Response. My immediate response was bewilderment and discouragement. I remember just sitting there a moment after Natalie and Hope chased out of the building, not knowing quite what to make of it all. And as I drove home, I did not speak to my tape recorder as was my usual custom, because I really didn't know what to say and didn't want to talk about it. I was angry at the girls and at myself for not handling the situation better.

I had already planned a meeting at Mary Ann's house the next day to discuss a portfolio project that we were working on together with the middle schoolers. So I "casually" mentioned the previous day's events, complaining that the girls weren't doing what I had asked them to do, that Hope and Natalie were reading slowly, etc., etc. Mary Ann told me that she did have problems with both of them that way, and we talked a few minutes about a possible next step.

The Interpretation. My interpretive frames in analyzing the event at the time were centered on notions of authority and responsibility that I was still trying to sort out from my not-so-old days of being a teacher and then a principal. Therefore, I saw the situation as lack of cooperation on their part, lack of ability to motivate on my part. Another portion of my log makes that clear: *I think it resurrected old feelings of "failure" or at least struggle that I waged continually at first as a new*

teacher...: being too nice, i.e. expecting too much from myself and not enough from them (May 26, 1993).

As I mulled the situation over, I kept applying those same frames. I became determined to be more assertive in what I needed from them. At the same time I realized that as a graduate student and an outsider in that particular setting I was in a unique position to learn to teach "without authority (control)," but though I knew that didn't mean "loosy-goosy," I didn't know all what it *did* mean, so I did a fair amount of stumbling during the next few weeks. It was not until my writing of the profiles on each person that I was able to re-read the situation, apply a different frame, and make some sense of it. [4]

A Re-reading. The girls did behave the way I described in my log, and I did respond the way it looks that I did. But now, after distance and some opportunities to re-read the situation, I can interpret our behaviors differently, and in fact, have made a new "poem" which I relate in a later section. A very important part of the re-reading process was a literal re-reading of the transcripts when I was analyzing them for the profiles. Re-reading the transcripts, re-listening to the tapes, writing the events from each girls' perspective in my notes, and finally doing the write-up for each gave me several different ways to view the day. Seeing the day from those different perspectives prepared me to be able to see my own role differently as well, as I re-read the transcript in preparation for this writing. I was ready to adopt a new frame and write a new story. The old one wasn't very satisfying. Before I tell that story, though, I want to tell what hindered the "evocation" in the

205

first place.

   The Critical Look: What Was Hindering the Evocation. According to reader response theory and reading theory, our assumptions about literature, ourselves, our world, and our immediate surroundings, are a part of what impacts the reading experience and makes an evocation unique for each individual. In addition, our cultural understandings, implicit or overt, play a major role. A teacher also knows that sometimes it's simply a practical issue, e.g., lack of time, that hinders the evocation.

   In my case, it was many of those influences. The culture of "teacher," which I will explain in a later section, impacted me not just because what I knew was changing, but because "teacher" in any definition became "researcher." The situation was further complicated because what the girls were used to as "teacher" was still somewhat unclear.

   I also had a partial view of research. There were times I pushed for results instead of staying alert to what was actually taking place and seeing what I could learn from that. As much as I knew in my head to do that, I did not always recognize that I was not practicing it. Time was a pressure; it seemed to fly by, and I wanted to make it count, for the sake of what I considered an important piece of research, but more immediately, because I "needed" them rather urgently to provide me with *something* to write about!

   A partial view of Hope was another hindrance. I simply did not see what was going on. In my mind she was hovering between categories labeled

206

"pleasant but unmotivated," "sometimes makes a good effort," and "just likes to talk," and she did sometimes *look* like all three. I was examining the situation from my old perspective as a teacher. I was looking at old fears as if they signaled a problem. They were phantom pains that I might consider ignoring and looking for other alternatives instead.

These conditions worked to contribute to a pattern of behaviors much like those described in Gregory Bateson's notion of "complementary schismogenesis" (Tannen, 1986: p. 129), a series of behaviors that begin with a misunderstanding of an initial behavior or thought, eliciting a corresponding response that aggravates instead of alleviates the condition. Increased applications of the same behaviors by both parties in an effort to clear things up or to understand are met with frustration and often anger. In our case, many behaviors were misunderstood and others were not counted as important. Understanding that has helped me in the creation of a new "poem," a happier one in the sense that I think the evocation provides richer, more accurate view of what was taking place.

The New Poem. The first and probably most important thing I missed was that Hope was trying to show she had read more in the book. She understandably wanted credit, but I, eager to "give everybody their fair turns," was blind and deaf to it. What I saw was time slipping away, and what I heard was chatter. But what I knew at the time is that Micki loved to talk, Natalie rarely did, and if I didn't make a space for Hope and Leah, they might not get to have their say, so I protected that space. However, when it came to Hope's turn, and I offered her that space,

207

she was surprised and said, "I already talked!" I hadn't "read" her chat with Leah as taking her turn. I was oblivious to how she was demonstrating her reading *in a way that she felt comfortable*, before the "official" beginning, and by re-telling. So I asked her to go ahead anyway. I used the turn-taking structure that she may have been trying to avoid, in order to give her an opportunity, but it only created another problem when she could not defend herself against Micki's questioning. Then, I called on structure *again* to keep things moving, thinking that might diffuse some of the tension for Hope. However, what I did was create another problem area. My question to her about Diana became the interchange where Micki said, "She didn't mean that literally, Hope." The pot began to simmer, and each successive interchange turned up the heat.

Secondly, speaking from Micki's perspective, it is clear how her expectations, and perhaps some needs weren't met. She was out of her element, hindered by a structure of turn-taking that she didn't enjoy: "I had so many things I wanted to comment on, but I knew I couldn't because it was somebody else's time" (p. 28). The problem was not that the structure was necessarily wrong, but that I didn't know she felt trapped in it. Micki, who probably remembered the story as well as anyone else, who knows herself well, and is willing to be wrong when she understands why, tried to speak up to defend herself against Leah's opinions. Hope and Leah, enjoying playing together within the structure, prevented her from doing so, twice. It must have been further galling when Hope defended her opinions against Leah's challenge, using Leah's time, as Micki was not permitted

to by the two of them.

Third, we see Leah who, freed by the structure to speak her mind and heart, was gathering steam as the conversation progressed, her intense engagement with the book increasing her desire to discuss it. She felt confident and happy, and no matter whose turn it was, kept a lively dialogue going as she responded to each person's comments from the previous week. In striking contrast to Hope, it was one of Leah's best days. Even with her confidence and ease with the structure, though, Leah was as blind to Hope's needs as I was, and couldn't resist taking a little dig: "I see some resemblance [to Cassie], but not that much to mistake their names!" She said, "Just kidding," and bounced right back into her usual kind frame for communication, fairly oblivious to Micki's frustration, my disgust, Natalie's silence, and Hope's growing discouragement.

And finally, what about Natalie? She stayed on the periphery, which is what she often did, but this time her behaviors were accentuated by the format, because even though our session that day lasted over an hour, we only got through three people's turns, and the straw she drew indicated that she was last. Therefore, although she interacted some during the other segments, she was the most participatory after Micki and Leah left, which is when she was also chastised for it. Natalie, appearing to be the *least* culpable in contributing to Hope's unhappiness of the day, received the brunt of the attack.

And so it happened that none of us, with the possible exception of Leah, left happy or satisfied that day, and it was worse for Hope than the rest of us. Eager

to show that she had read, that she knew what was happening in the book, she was still hampered by the lack of detail, and felt the sting of all of the remarks. Instead of seeing her participation for what it was -- a genuine attempt to belong, to have full participation in our group -- we looked at the surface features, all of us, and responded accordingly, with teases, corrections, and silence. She alone had the knowledge that *she had read the chapters*, but her language did not permit her to prove it. Then Micki corrected her in front of all of us, which is not so unusual, but her use of Hope's name, which is a more unusual practice for her, signified superiority, just when Hope was trying desperately to belong. She continued by adding more information from the story for the benefit of Hope, who did not ask for it. This may have hurt Hope for another reason. During the first session, before Natalie joined and when Leah was absent from school, Hope and Micki talked with me about *Roll of Thunder*. Hope was especially pumped up by it, the next week telling Leah, "Micki and I had an interesting conversation about Cassie last week" (March 31, 1993: p. 9) as if it was a trophy. She then went on to tell about the letter she had written to Mildred Taylor in which she had expressed how frustrated she and Micki had been by the mistreatment of Cassie, her family and friends. I do not think that any of us knew how significant that comraderie was to her.

On May 17, there was no relief for Hope, in spite of the fact that Micki and Leah left early for the radio play practice. There should have been at least fifteen minutes more before Natalie and Hope had to be at practice, time enough to get

in some good conversation. However, my alarm had not gone off when it was time for Micki and Leah to leave, so they were late and we had only a few minutes left. Hope did not realize that, and just as she was beginning to talk excitedly about a sequel to *Roll of Thunder* and beginning to enjoy some attention, not even permitting Natalie to share the spotlight (*"You* shut up," she said), I announced that it was time to go. Then I unwisely teased her about "deceiving" Mary Ann, and Natalie, astute and a lover of dry humor, joined in. Hope had obviously taken all she could. She disguised her discouragement with harshness, taking out her frustrations on her best friend, the one over whom she felt a small sense of power, since she likely felt that she couldn't lash out at me.

"A curious chemistry takes place when you put three or more people together to make a family, a class, or a corporation: those people begin to exert complicated powers over each other" (McGinnis, 1985: p. 3). It seems that most of us came to the meeting that day needing different things, even happy Leah, needing to feel confident. And because the needs did not happen to be complementary, we each did what we had to do with the power, great or small, that we had.

At first glance, it may seem that the structure was a major contributing factor to the difficult events of May 17, but that was only in a small sense as I understand it now. That is, I did not grasp what was happening in the undercurrents, and I allowed the structure to push me. If I had not taken as much for granted, if I had not felt the constraint of time, perhaps I would have listened with more accuracy

211

at the beginning to what was taking place between Hope and Leah and, as Jane Tompkins (in Beach, 1993) said, "taken the temperature" of the group to see if they needed or wanted the structure that day.

I was, in many ways, in a role that was shifting. At the beginning of the study with the girls I was looking for something in particular with them -- I wanted to find out their conceptions of growing into an identity through the study of strong female characters. Therefore, my questioning was more directed; I often framed questions in terms of development and asked them for experiential data as it related to the text. I was concerned with accepting their responses, but primarily as a way to investigate identity. When I began a turn-taking structure to see that each participant was given time to articulate her own response before being interrupted, the attention to matters of identity shifted to the background. Even though I call those subsequent meetings "structured" they were actually much less so than those earlier meetings, and it was during the later meetings that we began to learn to speak and to listen.

What I have begun to see through the times when there was no specific agenda is that the girls wanted time to talk, and that literature offered them a medium for talk. We talked about many things through Luke and Lyddie, through Charlie, through Mrs. Worthen and crazy Aunt Clarissa. We talked about sexism, racism, romance, religion, their homes, and their perceived personal faults. We talked about other people, some who were classmates, some who were teachers.

And through those talks I can now see many of the potentials and dilemmas inherent in "real talk." I summarize those in the next and final chapter.

Translation Into Effective School Practice: The Challenging Issues of "Real Talk"

In the first chapter I highlighted a portion of the high school experience of

Mike Rose. In this section, I highlight a different story, a rare one, even for the

author, Natalie Goldberg:

What I adored in Mr. Cate's class was the opportunity to talk,

not just myself, but as a whole class, to have a discussion. Some-

one said something, another person disagreed or elaborated, and all

our minds were free, thoughts were free and equal. You had a mind

and you thought. You had a right to form the nebulous energy

racing through you into words, to form those words with tongue,

teeth, jaws, lips, to move your mouth and speak. This might seem

elementary. I'm not talking about high-level debate. I'm talking

about a scrawny brown-haired girl whose braces had just been taken

off her teeth, who sat in a big public school classroom and was

suddenly sprung to life. Her mind and feelings had a voice and she

spoke words into the empty space between herself and Mr. Cates,

and for her every word -- even "the" and "any" -- were huge. (1993:

p. 11).

The picture of vitality is in sharp contrast to Mike Rose's picture of

somnambulance. Goldberg "sprang to life" as Mr. Cates sat on his desk top and

tossed out questions such as, "Who would you rather be, Dmitri or Alyosha in the

Brothers?" The class gave ideas which she said they would discuss "for days," and from this class she discovered that "thought had energy" (p. 12). In her reflections she uses derivatives of "freedom" and "life," words not usually associated with school. She also hints at the spontaneity -- the stream-of-consciousness talk -- as well as the dialogue.

The kind of discussion Goldberg describes is a teacher's dream but can easily become a nightmare when students say things without thinking necessarily about how the words will be taken. In this chapter I address two relevant concerns: (1) what happens when students really talk; and (2) what conditions are necessary to and sustain an atmosphere for it? These concerns emerged from an analysis of the girls' comments regarding our discussions and observations from our times together, and must be addressed when considering translation into the classroom. Included in the treatment of the concerns are questions that arose as a result of the study, and which call for further research.

<u>What Happens When Students "Really Talk"?</u>

When students are invited to speak what they feel, think, and believe, and when they listen to each other in like conversation and, as Rosenblatt (1938/83) said, "respond in relevant terms," that to me is "real talk." Belenky et al. (1986) say real talk "includes discourse and exploration, talking and listening, questions, argument, speculation, and sharing" (p. 144). We had instances of real talk in our group discussions, and we had many times when I believe real talk was just out of reach because we had not yet worked out some of the difficulties that stand

in the way. Analyzing our group conversations showed me the kinds of issues that must be considered if we are to have genuine conversations. This real talk could include talking about other teachers or other students in the school; using words that might be considered inappropriate for school; using words that hurt; differences in conversational style; privileging certain languages over others; handling sensitive issues; and getting "off the subject." I will briefly illustrate each one with examples from our conversations.

Talking About Others in a Negative Way. From time to time the girls complained about something one of the teachers had done or made some other generally negative comment. My immediate instinct was to defend the teachers in some way, or at least offer an explanation, and sometimes I found myself doing so. Aside from the issue of not wanting to encourage "disrespecting elders," there was the issue of allowing them to talk about someone who was not there to defend herself. There were occasions when they complained about other students who were not present to defend themselves either. Did that mean that they should not have been allowed to say the things they did, for instance, about classmate Pauline Woods, who according to Hope, talks about everybody behind their backs and is not trustworthy?

"Inappropriate Language." The girls used the words "pissed off" once-in-a-while, fairly normal language in some middle schools, unacceptable in others. The first time one of the girls said it my mind raced through a question: "Would they (teachers at CS) want me to allow the girls to speak this way?" I answered myself

quickly: "They probably wouldn't mind, or at least they wouldn't make a big deal of it." So I tried to keep even an eye muscle from twitching and moved on mentally with the speaker. I did not have anyone to answer to, and the words were not heinous, but in other circumstances, "inappropriate language" is not a small matter, so this is an issue to be reckoned with.

Words That Hurt. As Leah became more and more comfortable speaking her own voice, she made some hurtful comments, such as the instance discussed in Chapter Four when she spoke derogatorily about "skating rink people," in front of Hope, who loves to go to the skating rink. On other occasions she made comments that reflected negatively on Micki's dad, and although the rest spoke once-in-a-while about another teacher (not often), the fact that this remark was about Micki's dad made it an awkward, if not hurtful moment. Then at another time she made a comment about a girl on "Phil Donahue," who had recently been given a makeover, turning her "really pretty" blond hair to red. "I would not want my hair dyed red," Leah said, as red-headed Micki sat silently next to her (June 4, 1993: p. 10). On that same day, Micki told us in dramatic tones of a man on a daytime talk show who was a transvestite "love-line" operator, pretending he was a woman.

Micki: And people really thought he was a woman.

Leah: Oh, my God.

Micki: He was actually an African-American male. (June 4, 1993: p. 12)

I was immediately uncomfortable for Hope, just as I had been for Micki a few minutes earlier.

217

Conversational Style. In Chapter Four and in the "May 17" section I worked through many examples of the four girls' conversational styles. Here I'd like to talk a bit about my own. I did not usually have formal questions prepared, and I would sometimes ask a question that took a few too many twists before it was asked. For instance, here is one long question in the first session which Micki finally interrupted with her answer:

> Leenie: Have you ever had to do anything like what Stacey eventually
>
> did, which was sort of, I don't know if you could call it con-
>
> fronting TJ, it was real mild in a way. But have you ever had
>
> to do something like that with a friend, or have you ever
>
> thought about it? Like having to somehow tell a friend you
>
> thought they were wrong, or that you weren't going to---
>
> Micki: No---
>
> Leenie: go along with something like that? (March 23, 1993: p. 11)

My response to being in this new situation was to talk too much. Another response was to try to bring a kind of closure to conversations, or to reply "meaningfully" (i.e., verbosely) to each idea in order to acknowledge it appropriately.

Privileging One Language. "Whose language is privileged?" was an issue that came up indirectly. When the girls discussed *Lyddie*, their language was what is considered feminine: emphasizing personal connections (Belenky et al, 1986). Of Charlie's betrayal, Leah said, "I'd feel a lot better if he'd have said good-bye, or given her a hug...." Of Charlie himself Natalie said, "Gosh, he's so smart I can

218

hardly describe him. And he loves Lyddie so much." From what the girls said about the attitudes of the boys (to be explained further in a following section), I am not sure they would have felt free to express those things in front of them, or perhaps even *feel* them. Along those same lines, I believe that Hope's confidence in speaking was made more difficult because everyone else was quite fluid in speech. (Although each of us was horrified on first viewing her own speech in print, we did not notice those things while conversing.) And because Hope mixed up details, it was sometimes easier for others to feel "smarter," not intentionally, but smarter nevertheless.

Sensitive Issues. I was comfortable talking about most things with the girls, and they seemed to be comfortable as well, but I was surprised by my concern and uncertainty whenever we approached issues that I believed would disturb one of the girls, such as the talk about red hair, comments about Micki's father, etc. In a larger classroom setting, the discomfort and the risk to the girls would be multiplied.

There was also an issue that was more perplexing, even in the small group, and that was "difference." I could interact with Hope easily as a female, a member of the working class, as a social person, and in the teacher-student relationship most of the time, but I discovered that I did not know always know how to interact with her as an African-American. I had the uncomfortable feeling that I was trespassing the few times I tried to interact "openly" with her about issues of race, and I most likely was.

Getting Off the Subject. Sometimes our discussions were not serious book talks, but "fun" talks, and on those days, I learned a great deal about the girls. On April 6, I learned about their views of their lives at school and what affects them there. On June 4, I learned about their preferences in the world of popular culture, and later in the discussion, about their conceptions of romance. On that particular day Hope was very reluctant to come and made only cryptic comments for the first thirteen minutes, but when the other girls began to talk about the "dumb boys" in the school, she began to engage in the conversation. "That's the problem with this school. That's the main problem with this school. We cannot find any decent guys to come to this school. They're all nerds here" (p.22). And with that, the talk among them was nearly non-stop for the next forty-five minutes.

Then there were times when we did not talk much about Lyddie or Cassie, but we talked a lot about books. On April 2, Leah's and Micki's discussion of their ways of reading gave me insights as I analyzed our conversations, but beyond that, gave me ways to make literary and personal connections with them.

The above issues presenting varying amounts of difficulty in our small group would, I believe, be magnified in a classroom setting; some issues may seem unimportant but, left ignored, can become hot buttons or can prevent dialogue. They are issues that must be addressed if we are to make room for real talk in the classroom. I believe they indicate a need for the following: keeping channels of communication open; finding a way to include students in decisions about conversations, including an open look at power and privilege; a re-imagining of our

220

role of literature; and a re-imagining of our roles as teachers.

What's Needed To Encourage and Sustain "Real Talk"?

What follows is a list of ideas that is by no means exhaustive. There are other conditions, many of them practical, to be reckoned with: time, curriculum demands, administrative "approval," and resources, to name a few. The ones I address emerged specifically from this study.

Keeping Channels of Communication Open. In order to keep communicating with students, we will have to find ways to deal with sensitive issues. In *Ten Mistakes Parents Make With Teenagers (And How to Avoid Them)*, mistake #9 is "Failure to Discuss the Uncomfortable" (Kesler, 1988, p. 119). Kesler's emphasis was on parent-child relationships, but the "uncomfortable" shows up in many discussions in schools, varies across individuals, and as sure as it found its way into our group, so it would in the classroom setting. Sometimes the solution may be a simple matter: getting used to talking to one another, getting to know one another, realizing that students may not be half as uncomfortable as we are. But often it isn't that simple. For example, I understood some things about myself only as I analyzed and reflected. We don't have time for that extensive a look in the classroom, but we can find ways to hear and see ourselves. Taping and transcribing a conversation isn't practical, but taping and listening is more so, and then talking about what went on. There are other ways to hear and other ways to see, especially through the medium of literature itself, not just in responses through conversation, but dramatic interpretations of important works that will help us see,

hear, and feel the power of words.

While I am dealing with my own discomfort with the sensitive issue of racism, I will do so privately, away from the students initially, in order to learn without hurting someone else in the process. For my particular issue, I'm seeking some ideas from books such as Nathan Rutstein's *Healing of Racism in America* (1992). Until I do, I will be cautious about *initiating* potentially destructive discussions for which I am not prepared.

Concerning issues such as talking about other teachers and classmates or using "inappropriate" language, we will have to discover where to draw our own lines. But if we do not find ways to keep communication open, we may send any one of a variety of unintended signals to the students: their thoughts aren't "right," which translates too often to "worth speaking"; they cannot be trusted to handle serious conversations; or that we are unable to deal with the issues that are important to them, and cannot help. It is obvious from May 17 that I made mistakes, but in spite of them, the girls' responses to the discussions were over-whelmingly favorable. They still liked being able to talk, no matter how many mis-takes we all made. On a questionnaire asking them to evaluate the discussion groups they expressed themselves in terms of freedom and lack of stress (Appendix C):

> *I liked it better because you could say what you really felt.* (Micki)

> *What I value most about this discussion is that you can say anything without it getting back (confadintual) and you don't have to worry about anybody saying anything or getting mad or frustrated.* (Hope)

222

...[T]hey are very relaxing and help me think about things in life differently. (Natalie)

I always felt like I could be myself without feeling ambarrassed.... (Leah)

<u>Including Students in Decisions About Conversations</u>. First, we need to know what the problems are in conversations *according to the students*, because the perspective from the student role is often very different from the teacher role, even if the students and teacher are side by side, in a circle. It helps to be in a student's actual role to get a student perspective sometimes, something I realized once with a boisterous eighth grade class. I was starting to get disturbed by what I thought must be distracting noises. Then one day a student was giving a presentation and I was sitting with the other students as she was leading class, leading me. What I noticed was the usual restlessness, the usual "can I borrow a pencil," and more, but I also noticed that it wasn't distracting, and that perhaps I was making much ado about nothing.

I realize there is an extent beyond which it is no longer wise to apply that day's "lesson," but the lesson remains an important one because at the bottom of it is the realization that we've pitted ourselves against ourselves when we continue to make all the decisions for people who should be our partners. Perhaps the best conversations are the ones that take the shape of the class, but not even the best teachers know what that shape is without the participation of the class. If the class is able to recognize problems when they arise and work out solutions, they may be able to see their importance in the community while learning the messy practice of democratic conversation.

The invitation to participate may include looking at some models for conversational guidelines. Garrison (1992) provides such a model in "Elements of a Free Conversation" (Appendix G) that students can use in order to formulate one of their own. The invitation may include a look at different conversational styles and signals (Lakoff, 1978; Tannen, 1984, 1986, 1990), or temperament inventory analyses such as those developed by Kiersey and Bates (1984). Understanding the different ways people communicate is helpful in dropping the labels that we give them: too talkative, too quiet, not smart, smart. Instead we may begin to see their lives and begin to communicate with that other person instead of with our image of that person.

Taking An Open Look At Power and Privilege. The boys at CS Middle School outnumber the girls and usually have over the years, Mary Ann said, a phenomenon the faculty has sought to understand. In addition, they are "leaders" -- sure of themselves, persistent, and louder (Interview, May 30, 1994). Their absence was one of the major contributing factors to the freedom of expression each girl experienced in our group. However, the girls did not want to be isolated from the boys -- "It would be boring without them," Micki said. Her comment seemed to represent the opinions of the other girls, judging from their remarks on other occasions. What they did not like, and what can and should be addressed, not just with them, but with students in other schools is the way the girls feel embarrassed by them, and sometimes, sexually harassed. Bringing "Nancy Drew" and "Agatha Christie" books to school elicits the comment, "Ooooo, sex novels!"

When Natalie and I were discussing the factor of the boys, I pointed out the day (April 5, 1993) that Allen was in the art room when we were talking. She said that his presence didn't bother her because he "didn't have all of his obnoxious friends there to make fun of me" (Interview, June 22, 1994). Hope and Micki were certain the boys would not want to talk about romance the way we did, and their "dirty minds," and "fine humiliating power" make it difficult for the girls to want to carry on discussions in their presence. The boys are not the only ones with "dirty minds," one girl told me, and the relationships between the sexes are positive overall; but the experience of the girls points to the fact that students need to be assisted in learning how words affect people and how those in positions of power, even slight power, speak words that have a more powerful effect (Delpit, 1993; Dyson: 1994).

Re-imagining Literature. Louise Rosenblatt's conceptions of a reader response approach to literature provided the primary theoretical underpinnings in this study. Over fifty years ago, she re-imagined literature, envisioning it as a "potent force" (1938: p. 276) in the life of the reader. In this study I saw the force of the literature the girls and I read together demonstrated in the way the books evoked strong emotional responses and provided the means for cognitive and emotional growth.

Rosenblatt's view of the act of reading as a transaction necessarily included the reader's life. In this study I saw how my life and the lives of the girls, often unbeknownst to us, mediated in our individual and collective responses to litera-

225

ture. I also saw how the confluence of the books, the setting, the girls' lives, and mine moved us beyond where we were when we began.

Rosenblatt's metaphor of literature as exploration is one I sought to apply practically in my work with the girls. Exploration leads to understanding and validation of the readers' knowings through the expression, pursuit, examination, and evaluation of one's own ideas. Chapters Four and Five revealed the consequences of a vision of literature as exploration.

Through a valuing of the girls' responses I have learned many things about the literature, the girls, and myself; many of those lessons have made their way into this document. What I also have come to understand is that a practical application of reader response theory, and thus a re-imagining of literature, must take into account the following questions for further research:

1.   How can we give attention to the "missing language arts:" talking and listening, and the question of bringing them "into balance" (Belenky, et al., 1986: p. 144)?

2.   Part of re-imagining must be a consideration of the kinds of books that will make connections with students. In the process the following questions arise: What kinds of methods can be developed that will work with students of varying ages, abilities, and preferences? How can teachers be a resource for creating positive matches between books and kids, i.e., among the millions of books and hundreds of kids we encounter, how can we read enough and learn enough to be helpful? How, in the matching of books and kids, will we address the issue of

censorship when it arises?

3.   What can we do regarding our responsibility to assess student learning?

        Re-Imagining Our Roles as Teachers. "'The sense' of a word is 'the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word'" (Vygotsky in Rosenblatt, *Writing*, 1988: p. 9). For most of us who are teachers, the "psychological events" surrounding the word "teacher" include our memories of how we were taught and how we were expected to conduct ourselves in school. Those memories exert a powerful influence over us, in many ways because we did well through that system, so much so that we wanted to be some part of it. Psychological events are also constructed out of words like "accountability" and "responsibility" and become part of our conceptions of "teacher." Add to that the psychological event that standardized testing evokes in the teacher as she finds herself being judged as well as the students. Then when she wants to try something different there is the psychological event that starting over signifies: being new, being uncertain, living with dilemmas again even after she's been teaching for years. All of those single events and more add up until we have one massive, nearly inviolable psychological event called "teacher" that successfully keeps itself from being re-imagined.

        We can start to re-imagine, however, when we realize that a need exists, or we get pictures of different realities: of what was and of what could be. For me, some of the pictures are of me, with Chryso in 8th grade English; some are of Mike Rose, sitting through class in a trance until teacher Jack McFarland came

along; some are of Natalie Goldberg, waking up in high school English. There are other kinds of pictures too, of kids who don't make it through school, not because they're lazy, stupid, or unwilling, but because it is difficult to find anything to relate to, and because their lack of ability to memorize, take tests, and otherwise fit into the dominant school structures doesn't allow them to succeed.

Re-imagining is only the beginning of change, and there are many changes to make. The most notable shift may be in the view of teacher as "the one with the goods," and the job of the teacher to transmit those goods to the students. Reference requests for teaching applicants always include a section on "knowledge of subject matter," and naturally, the teacher has studied for her particular field and so should have plenty of "goods" available. We're irresponsible and I believe uncaring if we do not. However, what my responsibility is with regard to the dispensing of goods is another matter. As a teacher I have become used to providing answers, providing closure. Part of the reason is the notion that doing so demonstrates my knowledge, thus, my right to teach. Plus there is something disturbing about leaving what I might consider an untruth, half-truth, mistaken notion, incomplete idea hanging out in the air without a rebuttal. The implication is that I support it. Changing patterns of thinking that underlie such practices is challenging, but necessary work.

Graves (1993) and Atwell (1988) discuss the idea of "nudging" students in writing, and it is an apt way of describing our role in conversations. We can nudge students in their writing when we know them and have ideas about what directions

228

they might like to try. Likewise, we can nudge students in their thinking when we begin to see points at which they are willing and able to consider new ways of thinking.

Belenky et al. (1986) provide a fitting metaphor in their picture of teacher as midwife: "Midwife-teachers help students deliver their words to the world, and use their own knowledge to put the students into conversation with other voices -- past and present -- in the culture (p. 219).[5] I must have knowledge -- of literature, of life, of my students, of the events that impact our existence -- because that's what I use to put them in connection with others who will help them learn, grow, and "deliver their words to the world."

Part of re-imagining the role of the teacher is learning to live with uncertainty. There is uncertainty in an approach that is predicated on student needs and interests; and most of us who are teachers and administrators do not do well with uncertainty, probably because it signifies unpreparedness, lack of knowledge. But we already live with uncertainties, "unknowns" because we always have to work with new material -- the students. Part of uncertainty is facing new dilemmas, just when we were beginning to be able to "breathe," if we'd been teaching any length of time. Patricia Kelly (1994) has an apt rebuttal: "[W]e all have days when 'it's not working!' But I had those days in my traditional classroom too; so going back won't take away that dilemma" (p. 98). And it will leave us with the nagging doubt that maybe we could have done more for the students.

Another task of re-imagining the role of the teacher is to take a look at how

much being part of an institution causes us to behave in ways that are not good for kids. We have sharp divisions between what's okay at home, but not in school, things such as "having fun," but the fact that school is not fun is at the heart of the problem of waste. I hasten to define "fun," however, because using the word calls up images of irresponsibility and frivolity that I do not mean to imply. Leah used the word in the way that I mean it when she wrote an evaluation of the sessions: *I absolutely loved discussing [Lyddie], because it was a great book and it was fun to discuss it.* (See Appendix C). Leah, almost by nature a model student, was the most conscientious of the group in preparation for group time, and she was not one to get so silly that she lost control. But she described the talks as "fun," which means there was some element of excitement and some element of meaning present. Natalie described the talks as "relaxing" which, in her difficult and stressful circumstances, is a victory. Sometimes we were downright zany, which Hope enjoyed: *This is more fun and we can talk about the book more and be silly at the same time.* However, "silly" did not characterize our discussions -- nor do I think it should -- but neither should it be taboo.

Sometimes "fun" means free, which was easier to be in the small group. On December 10, when as a group we took a look back at the experience, Micki made the following comments that speak to the desire for "fun" but speak also to other challenges in translating our work to the classroom:

Micki: I really like it because in a smaller group, I mean, it was easier

for us to talk more. And we could still be goofy and we could

230

get, I mean, we could get stuff done. I mean in a big group if you're goofy you don't get stuff done, but if you're in a little group you can goof off and still get stuff done.

Leah: Yeah.

Leenie: Because why. Does the goofiness slow down the whole process or something?

Micki: No. When you have a big group, if you have one person goofy, the whole class gets goofy. And then there are so many people being goofy—

Leenie: that you lose the—

Micki: that it's really hard.

Leenie. You do.... Do you lose the train of thought or what happens?

Micki: You just don't get really anything done because the teacher yells and then you quiet down. Then they give a lecture for the next half-hour. (pp. 4-5)

The girls went on to say that certain conditions made it easier to talk openly in our group: it was small; there were no boys; I was an outsider; they felt that they could talk to me because I seemed younger and "wore clothes that matched." What that suggests to me is that they felt a certain freedom with me that they enjoyed. That they felt freer because I was an outsider is understandable, but should not be dismissed simply as an illustration of "familiarity breeds contempt."

Their perceptions were that I was "cooler," which I am not, or more able to "understand them," which I am not, and my clothes matched. Well, they did most of the time, but so do the clothes of their teachers. The difference, I believe, is in perception. Although they knew that I had been a teacher and a principal they didn't seem to connect me with the institution of schooling.

It is important to say that I believe one reason the girls were able to talk to me as openly as they did is due to the way they are respected at CS, and the way they are given choices and certain abilities to move around the campus freely. There are not the sharp divisions between home and school that exist in many school cultures, and at CS the asymmetries of power are not as striking as in their more bureaucratic counterparts (Smith, 1993). Therefore, I believe the differences between our group and Mary Ann's class are slight, and in fact, Leah said that she would be able to talk to Mary Ann about most of the things we discussed. However, the other factors are still in place and do present obstacles, and more so when teachers have the added burden of struggling in a steeper bureaucracy.

"Without playing, conversing, listening to others, and drawing out their own voice, people fail to develop a sense that they can talk and think things through. (Belenky, et al., p. 33). The *institution* of schooling, both public and private, with its structures and rules, many of them necessary, but many of them saying "We can't live like we normally would; we're in school" often robs us of the time and means to "play, converse, listen to others, and draw out their voice." It prevents us from doing "good work" (Kincheloe, 1991). Perhaps we can think of ways to

make the institution of schooling less of a system and more of an organism. Perhaps we can find ways to de-institutionalize ourselves.

The last task of re-imagining that I will address is to re-new our faith in the learner (Dewey, 1938.) Having faith in the learners in our classrooms means we can trust them to be able to learn how to communicate and to learn from communicating with others; therefore, we can invite them to shape those conversations in the following ways: allowing them to be a part of setting ground rules; drawing them out; accepting their responses; and "nudging" them further. Saying what you mean and being reinforced that it was a worthwhile thing is important psychologically, for feelings of mattering (Adams and Gulotta, 1992; Belenky, 1993) and cognitively, for understanding (Beach, 1993). Having faith in learners means that we believe they can learn to discriminate for themselves and that they do not need the constant confirmation or disconfirmation of ideas by us, in order to know what to believe.

The research of the past year and a half has uncovered issues that, when addressed, have the potential of making teaching make more sense, and learning in schools more meaningful -- learning how to listen to kids, showing them how to listen to each other; teaching them how to speak up, with others in mind, but not in the way. Teaching how, in the richness of an experience with a text, a poem can be created, examined, and changed; and how that can change the reader.

As befits this type of research, there are more questions than answers. Teaching and talking about teaching are perplexing and invigorating pursuits.

What I am hoping is to pursue this search even further, with others joining in. As we pursue the search perhaps we can think of teaching, as MacDonald suggests, as "the crafting of a response to uncertainties that elude definitive settlement" (p. 8). The crafting of a response is just a beginning, but what a beginning! To own a response, then to speak it to others, provides a basis for "real talk" with all of its challenges and frustrations and possibilities.

1.   The use of the word "individual" does not connote "private," or "without the intervention or presence of others." In both constructivist and critical views, even a lone individual does not act alone. She is acting under the influence of societal and cultural forces that are present from the moment of entrance into society and culture through birth. In the context of the sentence, individual means without immediate, local intervention from other individuals or as a result of immediate interaction with other individuals.

2.   The students at CS Middle School have many opportunities for socialization; they have a fruit break for 15 minutes in the morning; half-hour lunches and half-hour recesses. In addition, the classrooms are informal and collaborative. Talking is not taboo.

3.   Here I summarize what Ben Nelms describes as the response process in "Sowing the Dragons Teeth, pp. 8-9:

> *Evocation* - the reading the reader is doing inside her head as she reads, before she makes a verbal response. The reading that takes place, i.e., what the reader makes out of the verbal symbols that the words on the page represent, according to her own linguistic-experiential reservoir, is what Rosenblatt terms the *poem* (*The Reader*, 1978: p. 12).

> *Response* - the feelings, thoughts, or opinions that the text has evoked within the reader, and that the reader formulates into words.

> *Interpretation* - discovering the significance of the text through questioning, the raising of hypotheses, inferring meaning from the text, eventually creating texts about the text. Most readers, Nelms says, do not fully engage in interpretation, but end up with "an evoked text followed by almost random conversation, private or public.

> *Criticism* - the work of "placing the text within larger contexts," , seeing it as a part of a broader scheme, such as critical and social theories; using it as a means of questioning assumptions and values.

4.   What I have not shown from the discussion of that day were the inter-changes, especially with Leah involved that could actually be considered dialogic, e.g., Leah hammering away at Micki's opinions causing Micki to have to do some rethinking. Although the day looked like a fiasco, and the subsequent meetings were not ones I would want on a documentary, many of what I consider the "gems" of the research came from those meetings. Quite a few came from May

17 and are cited in Chapter Four.

5.   Belenky outlines the concerns of the teacher-mid-wife from Ruddick's (1980) work on "maternal thinking": "preservation of the vulnerable child; fostering the child's growth ('What you're thinking is fine, but think more'); helping to make the student's private words public; focusing on the student's knowledge, not her own; and encouraging students to use their knowledge in everyday life" (pp. 218 - 219).

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241

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Appendix A - Handout Given to Students at Connectionist School

Organizing Your Portfolio According to Multiple Intelligences

What are "multiple intelligences?" Howard Gardner, an educator, has developed a theory which states that you and I may be intelligent in more ways than we think! For instance, in school, it's usually skill in math and language that brings us success. According to Multiple Intelligence (MI) Theory, there are additional ways (five more) to think about what it means to be intelligent. Those (plus verbal and mathematical) are what we'd like you to consider as you sort out your portfolio. They are listed below:

1. *Verbal/Linguistic* - related to words and language, written and spoken.

    Examples: Reading, vocabulary, formal speech, journal/diary keeping, creative writing, poetry, debate, humor/jokes, storytelling.

2. *Logical/Mathematical* - deals with numbers, the recognition of abstract patterns, deductive thinking and reasoning. Often called "scientific thinking."

    Examples: Performing calculations, number sequences, problem solving, pattern games, abstract symbols/formulas, outlining and other methods of organizing material, deciphering codes.

3. *Visual/Spatial* - relies on the sense of sight, and the ability to visualize an object and to create mental images/pictures.

    Examples: Guided imagery, active imagination, color schemes, patterns/designs, painting, drawing, pretending, sculpture, pictures.

4. *Body/Kinesthetic* - related to physical movement and the knowings/wisdom of the body.

    Examples: Folk/creative dance, role playing, physical gestures, drama, martial arts, body language, physical exercise, mime, inventing, sports games.

5. *Musical/Rhythmic* - based on recognition of tonal patterns, including various environmental sounds, and on sensitivity to rhythm and beats.

    Examples: Music composition/creation, instrumental sounds, music performance, rhythmic patterns, vocal sounds/tones, singing, tonal patterns, percussion vibrations, whistling, humming, environmental sounds.

6. *Interpersonal* - deals with person to person relationships and communication.

    Examples: Working cooperatively in a group (includes giving and receiving feedback), sensing others' motives, communication skills, empathy.

7. *Intrapersonal* - deals with inner feelings/thoughts
    Examples: silent reflection, thinking strategies, concentration skills, higher order reasoning, thinking about thinking.

Appendix B

Consent Form

This is an invitation to you to participate in a study of adolescent females' responses to young adolescent novels that have strong female characters. Through discussions, analyzing written work, and interviewing each of you I hope to discover which characters make connections to your real-life experience, and why they do. I would like to find out from you reasons why what you read in school and out of school does or doesn't affect you in a positive way. What I would like you to do is help me understand how you think as an adolescent girl, how you respond to the literature I read with you and how your response compares to mine as an adult female.

I believe that as you and I work together on this that we all will benefit! I am conducting this study in order to learn more about ways teachers can make reading an important part of the everyday lives of our students, so much so that it even helps students understand themselves better. I hope that by participating in this study you will learn new ways to think about reading, about school, and about yourself.

Your participation would consist of the following: 1) reading and writing about one or two young adolescent novels; 2) participating in a series of discussions/interviews conducted between now and the end of school, centered around your reading habits, preferences, and interpretations of literature in general, and the books we are reading in particular; 3) allowing me to read your journals and other written work related to our study; and 4) allowing me to make observations of you at school.

Since I will be recording our interviews and discussions, you are invited to read the transcripts of the tapes when they are finished. I will not identify you by name in the documents I turn in to my professor, or in articles I write or seminars I give, unless I have your permission. Your participation in this study will not affect your grades or standing at Connectionist School.

You may discontinue participation at any time, and in order to do so, you or your parent may contact me or any of the Virginia Tech personnel involved in this study (numbers listed below). Your grades at Connectionist School will not be affected should you need to discontinue. Please sign below and have your parent sign as well. Your signatures indicate that you have read the information given and are willing to participate in the project. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call any one of us.

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_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Signature of Parent (Please check
                                                 the blank if you agree to an interview___)
_____
Principal Investigator's Signature

Appendix C

1. How does the experience compare to other discussions you've had in school about books?

   Natalie: It seems to be more thorough and cover more of the book. Helps you understand what the person is thinking in the book.
   Leah: I liked it better because it was with small groups, and only girls that helped. It was more organized than just talking to a friend about it. I really enjoyed it. I wish we could have read some more books though.
   Hope: This is more fun and we can talk about the book more and be silly at the same time.
   Micki: I like it better because you could csay what you really felt. The question, and discussions were much more interesting. I also liked the small groups.

2. What did you gain from our discussions about the books?

   a. From *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* -

   Natalie: I saw the comparison of myself and (name?) the main character.
   Leah: Pearsonally, I liked discussing Lyddie better. Maybe it was because I liked it better. We also read in class not with Lynnie, and that had effect on it because we couldn't remember sometimes.
   Hope: I don't exactly know what I gain from the book *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*.
   Micki: I learned more about the book and also its meanings, and characters.

   b. What did you gain from our discussions about *Lyddie* -

   Natalie: Again, I saw that Lyddie and I are similar. (Hard working, likes to help people as much as she can. Independent.)
   Leah: I absolutely loved discussing it, because it was a great book and it was fun to discuss it.
   Hope: I gained that she is very strong in a lot of ways. And very determined of what she wants to do and needs to do.
   Micki: It helped me understand how I felt about the characters, and the book. It may [sic]

3. What do you value about our discussions in general?

   Natalie: That they are very relaxing and help me think abourt things in life differently.
   Leah: I always felt like I could be myself without feeling ambarrassed, and I really like discussing books so I loved it.
   Hope: What I value the most about this discussion is that you can say anything without it getting back (confadintual) and you don't have to worry about anybody saying anything or getting mad or frustrated.
   Micki: I really valued the freedom we had. It gave us a chance to say what we really thought of it.

4. What were some problems with our discussions?

Natalie: ?
Leah: The only problems I had was that sometimes I was to occupied in class and didn't feel like talking.
Hope: There are none what so ever. I love the discussion groups.
Micki: Sometimes I felt that it could be an interuption since it wasn't scheduled in our day.

Questions for 2/8/94

1. What factors affected your ability/desire to be honest in your responses?
    Natalie: N/A
    Leah: I think I was always honest.
    Hope: None, because I felt one way when others felt anothe.
    Micki: I think the way other people answered affected some of my responses.

2. How honestly did you respond? (If it helps, rate yourself on a scale of 1-
10).
    Natalie: 8 1/2
    Leah: Probably a 10.
    Hope: 8 1/2
    Micki: 7

3. Why did you rate yourself that way?
    Natalie: Only because some things didn't come to mind. Others didn't change me, but they
                made me think.
    Leah: I really told the truth the whole time.
    Hope: Because when I felt one way about a person and everybody else felt anothe I would
                just agree.
    Micki: I rated myself that way, because sometimes I would change my answers.

4. Had you read the book well enough so that you didn't have to "bull?"
    Natalie: Yes
    Leah: Yes, I did. enjoyed it to.
    Hope: Yes
    Micki: Yes.

5. Were there times you felt uncomfortable? When and why?
    Natalie: No
    Leah: No
    Hope: No
    Micki: No not really

6. Do you have the same opinions now that you did last year about Cassie?
    Natalie: N/A
    Leah: Yeah, I think so, although my memory on the book isn't that good.
    Hope: Yes
    Micki: Yes, when I can remember

7. Do you have any new insights?
    Natalie: N/A
    Leah: No
    Hope: No
    Micki: No

Appendix E

Questions for Mary Ann

1. The students read *Roll of Thunder* as a group. Did they have a choice?

2. Did they regularly have choices?

3. Did you ever have class and/or small group discussions about books? Why or why not?

4. How have you made writing and authors so accessible to the students? (The girls evidence an ability to read as an author; they slip in and out of "book talk" (their language is "I met Betsy," "at the end of the book," "in parts of the book" easily).

5. Micki and Leah seem to have a bountiful collection of book references, and make them easily. To what do you attribute that?

6. Micki says the students in the class read differently, mostly the guys. Can you comment on that.

7. Please comment on each of the following areas:

MICKI - Reading habits:

   As a student:

LEAH - Reading habits:

   As a student:

NATALIE - Reading habits:

   As a student:

HOPE - Reading habits:

   As a student:

8. Do you have a message or messages that are priorities of yours to communicate? If so, what are they?

9. Can you comment on the issue of gender as it applies to the ideology of Connectionist School?

Appendix F

Here are the summaries of what we said last Wednesday, in the order that we spoke:

<u>Leenie</u>: She likes the character of Lyddie. Lyddie seems to be very mature, is hard-working, has guts and is sensible. She reminds Leenie of the governesses she used to read about in romantic novels, who would go work for a rich master and catch his eye. Lyddie was the romantic heroine who was finally appreciated and known for who she was inside. Sometimes Leenie thinks Lyddie is like she wanted to be when she was a teenager. Lyddie also reminds Leenie of Mary Call in *Where the Lilies Bloom.*

<u>Natalie</u>: She thinks Lyddie is a really strong character and can relate to how she feels, like how Lyddie keeps going in spite of having so many troubles and wishing she could quit.

Lyddie is the same age as Natalie and Natalie's middle name is Lydia. Natalie also thinks Charlie was very smart for his age and is impressed by how much he loves Lyddie.

<u>Leah</u>: Leah thinks Lyddie is strong and stubborn, but sort of stubborn/sweet. She reminds her of Caddie Woodlawn: responsible and a tomboy.

She would have liked Lyddie to wind up with Mrs. Bedlow's brother more than with Luke.
She was really mad at Dr. Morris for what he did.
She wished Lyddie would have either married Mrs. Bedlow's brother or lived with Diana.
She hopes Lyddie goes to college.

<u>Hope:</u>   When Hope reads about Lyddie she is reminded of Cassie. Lyddie is honest like Cassie. Hope likes to read about Lyddie's inner thoughts, and they are expressed openly by the author, just as in *Roll of Thunder.*

Lyddie works hard and a lot of the people she works for like her for that.
Hope did not like the idea of Luke and Cassie getting together, and thought a better match would be Lyddie and Mrs. Bedlow's brother *or* Ezekial. Even though Hope believes a match between Lyddie and Ezekial would have caused problems back then, she still thinks they had more in common than Lyddie and Luke. If Ezekiel were too much older, it wouldn't work either.

<u>Micki</u>: In the first part, Micki thinks that Lyddie is really generous, but as time goes on she notices a change, especially as Lyddie works longer in the factory. She becomes over-careful with her money, and although Micki understood her desire to get the farm back, she still thought she changed. Lyddie was hard-working and very nice. She was hard to get to know (with Brigid, for example), but was nice once she did get to know someone.

Micki does not like what Charlie does in the end; it changes her opinion of him.
Micki thinks Lyddie understands a lot for her age, but thinks she needs a mother. She did a great job growing up, but wouldn't have had to so quickly if she'd had a mother.
She did like Luke, but thought he'd be better off to go to college. Lyddie was his first love, and Micki feels that if he has a chance to meet more people he might see that there are others he likes.

Appendix G

Ingredients of a Free Conversation

(Class notes, 2/26/92, "Analysis of Educational Concepts," Dr. Jim Garrison, Virginia Tech, interpreting John Dewey):

1.   As many groups as possible should be able to participate.

2.   As many varied interests as possible should be shared.

3.   Tolerance of all but the intolerant.

4.   All participants should speak in turn and listen carefully.

5.   All speakers should be allowed poetic expression, and playfulness is encouraged.

6.   People should be encouraged to use their own words, to name their obstacles.

7.   The conversation should be a multilogue, not a dialogue. (Most of higher education is a soliloquy, he says.)

8.   Natural silences whouuld be respected; unnatural silences of oppression should be sought out and voiced.

9.   Idle chatter is okay.

10.   Good manners are important.

11.   Storytelling, narrative is important.

VITA

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction, August 1994, Virginia Tech, with coursework from Radford University, Radford, Virginia: Highland Summer Conference in Appalachian Literature. Reading Specialist Endorsement.

M.A. Curriculum and Instruction, 1988, Virginia Tech, with coursework from University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Southwest Virginia Writing Project, 1987. Special emphasis in writing for adolescents and writing across the curriculum.

B.S. English Education 7-12, 1979. Tennessee Temple University, with coursework from Mansfield State University.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE

Graduate Assistant, Virginia Tech, August 1991 - May 1994

Instructor, Teaching in the Secondary School: Language Arts Methods (EDCI 4744), Spring, 1994.

Instructor, Teaching Content Area Reading in Middle and Secondary Schools (EDCI 4404), Fall, 1993. Launching of field experience component.

Instructor, "Graduate School Graduate Teaching Assistant Training Program: Training the Future Professoriate." Conducted microteaching workshops designed to increase teaching effectiveness of graduate teaching assistants across the university departments, 1992 and 1993.

Instructor, Elementary and Middle School Perspectives course (EDCI 2110), Fall, 1992. Supervision of sophomores and juniors in their field experience, Giles County Public Schools.

Supervision of sixty student teachers in Roanoke County Schools, Roanoke City Schools, and Giles County Schools, three years. Conducted occasional seminars.

Middle School Principal, Roanoke Valley Christian Schools, February, 1989 - June 1991.

Responsible to lead the 6th - 8th grade faculty, staff, students, and parents in the transition from elementary/junior high to a middle school structure. Included the development of the middle school philosophy with faculty in-service.

Supervision of eight middle school faculty and 125 students, oversight of instructional program, development of curriculum with the middle school faculty and parents, coordination of student programs and activities, newsletters, weekly faculty meetings, and teacher certification.

Classroom Teacher, Roanoke Valley Christian School, August, 1984 - May, 1989. 6th grade language arts teacher, four years; 3rd grade, one year; assisted elementary principal, 4 years.

Classroom Teacher, Shades Mountain Christian Schools, August 1979 - June, 1984. Four years self-contained 3rd grade classroom, one semester self-contained 6th grade classroom, one semester 7-11 English.

School Secretary, Shades Mountain Christian Schools, January - August, 1979; summer, 1980 and 1982.

PUBLICATIONS

Carico, Kathleen M. "Reader Response Theories: A Review Essay." Virginia English Bulletin, Fall, 1994.

PRESENTATIONS

Carico, K. and panel. "Portfolios and Profiles: What's Happening in Alternative Assessments in Virginia Schools and Classrooms?" My portion included the presentation of work in a local middle school on portfolio arrangement according to Howard Gardner's (1987) Levels of Intelligence. Virginia Council of Teachers of English Fall Conference. Roanoke, Virginia, October, 1993.

Carico, K. "Issues of Identity in Adolescence." Appalachian Regional Middle School Conference. Wise, Virginia, April, 1993.

Carico, K. *"Reading Young Adolescent Literature: Making Meaning from Different Perspectives." Appalachian Regional Middle School Conference. Wise, Virginia, April, 1993.*

Carico, K. *"Working with Middle School Students." Guest lecturer in education class, Alyson Costner, instructor. Roanoke College, Roanoke, Virginia, May, 1992.*

Carico, K. *"Working with Middle School Students." Guest lecturer in "The School and the Student," Barbara Smith, professor. Radford University, Radford, Virginia, September, 1993.*

Carico, K. *"Making Writers out of Your Students." Association of Christian Schools International Southeast Regional Conference. High Point, North Carolina, April, 1989.*

Carico, K. *"Making Writers out of Your Students." Association of Christian Schools International Teacher's Convention. Williamsburg, Virginia, February, 1988.*

Carico, K. *"Reflective Reading: Teaching Children to Think." ACSI Teacher's Convention. February, 1987.*

GRANTS

"University-Local School Collaboration: Sharing Written Responses to Adolescent Fiction." Southwest Virginia Writing Project Grant, 1994. $100.

HONORS

English Education Faculty stand-in representative for the North Carolina A & T McNair Scholar recruiting visit; 1993.

Graduate Student Representative for Division of Curriculum and Instruction, Focus Groups in the College of Education, May 1992.

Instructional Fee Scholarship Recipient, Virginia Tech 1991, 1992, 1993.

Fellowship to Southwest Virginia Writing Project, 1987.

Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi appointment and membership, April 1987.

AFFILIATIONS

American Educational Research Association
National Middle School Association
National Reading Conference
Virginia Association of Teachers of English
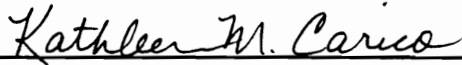Special Interest Group Network for Adolescent Literature
Other: Scorer/Trainee for the New Standards Virginia Scoring Conference. Radford
   University, Radford, Virginia, July, 1993.

SERVICE

Accreditation Team member for Mitchell Road Christian Schools, Greenville, South
   Carolina, April, 1986.

Chair, Virginia Association of Teachers of English Fall Conference, Title: "Children's
   Books: They're no longer just for children. Never really were." 1993, Roanoke,
   Virginia.

Heart Fund Volunteer, 1991 and 1992.

Kathleen M. Carico

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