Becoming a Teacher
is a Journey for a Lifetime:
The Biography of a Fourth-Grade Writing Teacher

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Curriculum and Instruction

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April 6, 2004
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Writers' Workshop, Teacher Biography, Teacher Development

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to see the lifetime literacy growth of one fourth-grade writing teacher, and to view her teaching from inside her classroom. This study follows the journey of an emerging teacher as she grew and developed into a professional educator. This study continues into her classroom to see her as she taught Writers' Workshop, inspiring her students to write from their own life experiences. This qualitative study was conducted using participant observation, interviews, and artifacts to gather data. Through qualitative inquiry and thematic analysis, data were interpreted to gain insight into this teacher's life and her teaching. The researcher's reflections, review of the literature, and eighteen years of experience as a teacher, brought a knowledgeable perspective that informed interpretation of the data. This study of Ruth's life and her classroom was an inquiry into the processes of teacher development.

Our view of teachers and their teaching is hidden by the nature of the job they do. Stories of the lives and work of teachers seek to illuminate the professional development of teachers and their teaching (Goodson, 1994; Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995; Schwarz, 2001). By closely studying the path of one teacher's growth and teaching, the growth and teaching of all teachers are illuminated; by "weav[ing] together the themes throughout one teacher's lifetime, [we] connect…them to the lives of many different teachers" (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. 28).

From this study, experiences of one teacher build and layer as years of teaching experience and professional development mingle together to change and enhance her knowledge of teaching and resulting classroom practice. The

fourth-grade students in Ruth's classroom were the recipients of their teacher's literacy experiences that developed over her lifetime.

Dedication

I have been on many journeys in my life, but none were quite like this one. None have changed me more, challenged every thread of my being or brought such welcomed relief when they finally ended. This was a journey of intense fortitude, stubborn determination, unending roadblocks, and many little successes that made it all worthwhile. A map of this journey, if drawn by a skilled cartographer, would wind through ice-cold lakes, into deep valley canyons, and over more dead end roads than all the politicians who have tried and failed to improve public education! This has been a journey – one I'm glad I took and one I'm glad I never have to repeat. This was my first major piece of research and I never have to do the first one again.

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my Mom and Dad who raised me, their middle-child daughter, to think and reason, and to influence my own little part of the world. They would be very proud.

And I dedicate this dissertation to my three children, Eric, Ryan, and Renee who are young adults focusing on their own passions and just beginning to discover themselves and their life direction. They supported and encouraged me throughout this process, and I am eternally grateful.

But I could not have conducted this research nor written this dissertation without the support of the passionate, understanding man I live with – my husband Butch. For five years he has listened and responded to a great variety of ideas about the teaching of writing. For five years, he has kept the TV turned way down so I could think and write. He has understood why I changed our conversations back to "writing" in mid-sentence, and grown to love looking at the back of my head as I gazed more into the computer screen than into his eyes. He is my rock. He helps me take good care of my most prized treasures: my heart, my soul, and my mind.

And most influential was Dr. Patricia Kelly. She offered me this opportunity over "Mill Mountain" coffee in the spring of 2000. She supported me as I struggled down many roads that took me nowhere, and sent me down all the

other roads I needed to experience, in order to find what I really needed to write. She sensed my passion for the teaching of writing, and she supported me until I finally expressed that passion in this research. She is a remarkable woman, and I am thankful for all that she has passionately taught me.

I am deeply indebted to Ruth Lacy who opened her mind, her life, and her classroom to spread knowledge of teachers, teaching, and her way of implementing the teaching of writing. Her years of persistent delving into the teaching of writing are evidenced in this biography. Her unending energy is best exemplified in a comment made to her by a nun years ago; “Slow down Ruth, God already saved the world!”

I have loved this journey. I do not regret using the time to complete it nor anything I may have missed because of it. It was a journey I never gave up on – it was the biggest journey of my life.

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Chapter I

CONCEPTUALIZING THE STUDY

There are more than three and a half million teachers in the United States. This research is the story of one fourth grade writing teacher. This analysis of a teacher and her teaching seeks to illuminate a profession often under public scrutiny and misunderstood by many as a mechanical process that is simplistic and technically structured (Carter, 1992). The human elements of students and teachers as they interact daily are often ignored as important decisions are made and imposed upon our nation's teachers and students. This study situates and analyzes a teacher throughout her life, as her knowledge of language, literature, and teaching, layer and thicken, from childhood to professional classroom teacher.

The Structure of this Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into four chapters and four appendices. Chapter 1 "Conceptualizing the Study," relates relevant background information that brings the reader into the essence of this research. It is the story of how this research came to be and contains a discussion of the professional literature that is embedded within this research as analysis of the data. Chapter 2, "Ruth's Childhood and Youth," describes and analyzes stories from Ruth's childhood, revealing the pieces of literacy, which began to grow in her youth. Chapter 3, "Career Experiences and Professional Development," analyzes Ruth's various employment and professional development experiences that have led her to emphasize writing in her classroom. Chapter 4, "Ruth's Writing Classroom - A Specific Look at Writers' Workshop," is an analysis of Writer's Workshop as Ruth teaches it today. This chapter analyzes the many aspects of her version of Writer's Workshop and details the many procedures her students proceed through to publish a piece of writing.

Four appendices accompany this dissertation. Appendix A is a "Timeline of This Research." Appendix B, "Workshop Procedures," is a description of the various procedures Ruth used with her students during Writers' Workshop.

Appendix C, “Ruth’s Mini-lessons” is a descriptive list of all of the professional resources, children’s literature, and lessons Ruth used to teach the many writing skills during Writers’ Workshop. Appendix D, “Writers’ Workshop: How Did We Get Here from There?” is a history of the teaching of writing in this country.

The Structure of This Chapter

This chapter begins with a discussion of the use of teacher’s stories as research. It continues on to describe details of the methods used to conduct this sixty-nine day, biographical study; it is the story of how this educational biography of a teacher came to be. (A Timeline is found in Appendix A.) It begins with a discussion of the “School Setting,” which brings the reader into the specific context of this study. Next is a discussion of “The Main Character – Ruth.” It describes how I chose her as a research subject, how I built my relationship with her, and how I, as a researcher, viewed her throughout the research process. Next is “The Structure and Use of Time in Ruth’s Classroom,” a discussion of how my time was structured and used each day during my participant observation. A description of “Data Collection” follows. This section details my various roles as participant observer and life history interviewer. A detailed description of the processes I used as “Data Analysis” end this section. Next is an analysis of the specific professional literature I have chosen to embed as I analyzed Ruth’s biography and teaching. This chapter ends with a section that explains ways this study is confirmable.

Why Use Stories to View Teachers and Teaching?

In order to understand the educational environment, we must look closely and be there among all that goes on within the realm of education as it occurs in classrooms and in the lives of our nation’s teachers and students. Murphy (1993) writes about his daughter who was born with a heart defect. One day every year she must wear a battery-powered box strapped to her hip in order to record the activities of her heart so that her cardiologist will know its strengths and rhythms. The equivalent of one hundred yards of EKG tape are recorded each hour. “That is the sort of thing researchers or policymakers need who wish to understand our work as teachers, an electrocardiogram of our lives” (p. 4).

Goodson's extensive work in the field of teacher story and biography is foundational to our understanding of the nature of teachers' lives and the influence of life experiences on teaching. Goodson discusses the importance of studies in which researchers enter the teaching environment, study teaching as it progresses, and investigate the process in order to understand the complex nature of teaching and teacher development. Goodson's work "has grown from a conviction that we require more analytical and systematic studies of teachers' lives" (1992, p. 234). It is his belief "that in understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical [to] know about the person the teacher is" (Goodson, 1992, p. 234).

Studying teachers' lives promotes growth in the understanding of the complex nature of the professional development of a teacher. Through teachers' stories we see and feel, from the inside, how a teacher's thinking and learning evolve over the years of a life and a career. "How teachers' thoughts, actions and knowledge have evolved and changed throughout their personal and professional lives will help us to understand how classrooms have come to be the way they are and how they might become otherwise" (Butt et al, 1992, p.57).

Teachers' stories facilitate visions of the classroom. If classrooms are to "become otherwise" we must see teachers from inside their lives and inside their classrooms. Biographies "…can play an important part in furthering understanding of a wide range of topics to do with education and schooling" (Goodson, 2001, p. 57). Observation and investigation of teachers' knowledge and thinking is essential in order to understand the details of their development that have led to the educational experiences they create with their students. This knowledge of teacher growth and development must be based on knowledge of the teacher as an individual. "…as outsiders and researchers, we need to understand how teachers evolve, develop and change their practical knowledge in the way that they perceive their experience of it. These arguments bring with them a regard for and interest in the teacher as a unique person, and the teacher as a learner who possesses a special type of knowledge" (Butt et al, 1992, p. 57).

A useful view of teachers facilitates more than teacher practice since "…practice is a good deal more than the technical things [teachers] do in classrooms – it relates to who [teachers] are, to [their] whole approach to life" (Goodson, 1994, p. 29). Research useful to educational progress must be centered around the life and learning of teachers. However, prior to the mid 1990s, "…much of the educational research ha[d] been developed from a foundational disciplinary discourse…far removed from teachers" (Goodson, 1994, p.33). Many of the solutions developed to fix the problems in education are merely prescriptions designed by those outside of the educational environment and are not always used by teachers in classrooms. "This preoccupation with prescription has led to the formation of bodies of professional knowledge which have been largely ignored by professionals-in-action since they have found that little of this prescriptive technology is appropriate to specific situations whose nature is uniquely personal, instinctive, intuitive, reflective and practical" (Butt et al, 1992, p. 52).

What teachers facilitate in classrooms, with our nation's students, is a complex mixture of life, knowledge, and resulting action. Each teacher's personal mixture of these elements creates the classroom atmosphere she teaches in each day. Changing that classroom requires more than a political mandate. Bauer and Garcia (2002) found that "[t]eachers frequently are asked or even mandated to take research findings and change their instruction…[however] [r]esearchers who have written about teacher change have speculated that teacher beliefs exert a major influence on their willingness to change instruction" (p. 463).Teacher beliefs are an important part of how instruction is molded and changed by individual teachers in classrooms, but their inclusion in research and consideration in policy changes, over the years, has often been missing. Nespor (1987) concurs: "…little attention has been accorded to the structures and functions of teachers' beliefs about their roles, their students, the subject matter areas they teach, and the schools they work in" (p. 317).

Even during the early 1970s, Dan Lortie, in his book, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study,* considered the impact of educational research on teachers

and their teaching. His argument, then, supported the need for qualitative research that told the stories of teachers, replacing the statistics and generalizations of quantitative studies:

> Schooling is long on prescription, short on description. That is nowhere more evident than in the case of the two million persons who teach in the public schools. It is widely conceded that the core transactions of formal education take place where teachers and students meet…But although books and articles instructing teachers how they should behave are legion, empirical studies of teaching work…remain rare. (Lortie, 1975, p. vii)

In recent years the use of teachers' stories has grown to encompass new areas of education, establishing a firm influence across the educational arena. Schwarz (2001), referring to teachers' stories as "teacher lore," describes this new, refreshed view for using biography, teachers' stories, and teacher lore as being essentially the same conception of the literature of teachers' lives:

> Although long popular and often influential in an indirect, informal way, teacher lore has only recently begun to be taken seriously by academe…Teacher lore has begun to find a formal place in teacher education, professional development, professional publications, textbooks, and even education research and policy.
>
> Teacher lore is more than a passing fad. It builds on the real knowledge and experiences of practicing teachers. Now diverse educators are creating and employing more intentional, structured uses of teacher lore. (p. 10)

Two nationwide studies have stated the need to focus on one key element of educational reform. The 1986 Carnegie Report and the 1996 report by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future name one element in education that is the key to improving schools. That element is the quality of our teachers.

> The Carnegie Report (1986) *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* targeted teachers as key to the reform efforts. The clear message

> of *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future,* by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), is that teacher quality, teacher professionalism, and the conditions in which our nation's teachers are asked to teach are what matter most to students' learning…Attention to teachers and their learning seems to be a good investment if we are serious about improving schools. (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p.2)

Studying and learning from teacher knowledge, teacher methods, and teacher's life and development are key to improving schools and education. The question is how do we best study teachers in ways to learn from their lives and their teaching?

The Complex Nature of Teachers' Stories

I do not know what it is that makes good teachers – what it is that causes some people to be able to intertwine time, information, and students on a day-to-day basis and develop those who can think and reason and remember on their own. I have seen intelligent people who wanted to teach, try and fail – they could never figure out how to organize a classroom so that learning would take place. Teaching children is not something everyone can do.

Viewing the development of a teacher is like viewing a complex kaleidoscope as pieces twirl and spin and drop in and around each other. All sorts of colors and shapes mix and overlap to form new shades of color and new shapes made from combinations of the original pieces. The original pieces remain the same, but there are thousands of permutations possible inside the kaleidoscope. Similarly, as there are many ways of teaching and learning, all grounded in the same "pieces" – the goals specific to teaching and classrooms of students. A teacher intertwines the people and experiences of her life in order to emerge as the teacher she is today. Developing teaching skills does not happen all at one time nor does it stand apart from the rest of a teacher's life. Teaching knowledge develops over time, ever changing and building, sometimes becoming more complex and sometimes becoming simplified as teachers construct

meaning from the needs of the different students they encounter. (Goodson, 1992, Carter, 1993)

Every classroom in this country has the personality and flavor of the teacher who runs it. And every individual student brings with him to the classroom his own set of needs and experiences that the teacher must discover, address, and then integrate into her personal repertoire of skills, and the curriculum of the classroom; teacher and students work together to enhance the knowledge and the lives of the students in each class. And teachers learn too. Each student brings new opportunities for teachers to learn more about how the human being learns and chances to put that new knowledge to work.

I have taught school on both sides of the state of Virginia and grew up and attended school in the northern peak, right outside of Washington, D.C. In my 18 years of teaching and my years of personal schooling, I cannot recall a single time when a school board member, a state or national legislator, or anyone from the community just stopped by my classroom because she/he was interested in seeing what we were doing. Over the years various principals have come, sometimes announced, sometimes by surprise, to do a yearly evaluation of my teaching, but seldom to just come in, enjoy the moment and stay awhile, and I suspect that my experiences are not unusual. So how is it that we come to know what teachers really do, how teachers come to intertwine time, information, and students on a day-to-day basis? How can we really know how to support teachers when we don't know first hand how they think, how they progress professionally, or what goes on in classrooms?

A few years ago, my daughter and I traveled to Sioux Falls, South Dakota to participate in my brother's wedding. At the reception I met and talked with several of his friends. We engaged in the "where are you from and what is it like there?" kinds of questions. I was proud to describe the beauty of the mountains of southwest Virginia and the wondrous view they afforded to all who see them. I described the colors of the changing seasons and the ideal, not too radical, climates of winter, spring, summer, and fall. My brother's friends looked at me in puzzled amazement, let me finish my glorious description of heaven on earth,

and then explained their version of the ideal. “In South Dakota,” they explained, “the land is flat and our view is forever – as far as you can see. We don’t have anything in the way. We can see as far as our eyes will let us. But your view of the world is blocked by your mountains seemingly pinning you in so you can’t see all there is to see.”

I think of their argument often as I gaze out our sunroom windows to the tops of mountains several miles away and more often than not I want to see what is beyond the massive structures that block my view. Occasionally I travel to the top of a mountain so that I can have the best of both worlds – nothing obstructs my view from there. I can view mountains and valleys as far as my eyes can see, until they fade with the horizon.

Certainly our view of teachers should see what teachers actually do, hear how they think, understand how they make important decisions for our nation’s children, and then use that knowledge to enhance this important part of the educational profession. It seems that we have floundered around in the valleys, between the mountains, making important decisions about and for teachers when we really could not see all that was there to see. Carter and Doyle (1996) agree:

> …becoming a teacher is all too often seen as obtaining credentials and acquiring skills. From a biographical frame, however, becoming a teacher means (a) transforming an identity, (b) adapting personal understandings and ideals to institutional realities, and (c) deciding how to express one’s self in classroom activity…this far more complex picture of the essence of the teacher…promises to transform fundamentally how teachers are viewed and perhaps even how they are valued. (p. 139)

It is not my intention to discuss why teachers have been marginalized in our society, but to know that they are, seems important here. There are those, no matter how highly educated or under educated they are, who believe that teaching is a technically skilled, pre-structured, highly mechanical activity done with children every day inside classrooms. But the work of teachers is misunderstood by those outside of the profession. It is misunderstood by some administrators who have never taught, and it is misunderstood by legislators,

policy makers, and lawmakers who make attempts at changing a profession they really know nothing about. Goodson explains it this way:

> …the interactive practices of our classrooms are subject to constant change often in the form of new government guidelines…These initiatives outside the classroom, what I call preactive actions, set crucial parameters for interactive classroom practice. Preactive action effects interactive possibilities…we need to look at the full context in which teacher's practice is negotiated, not just at interaction and implementation within the classroom. If we stay with the focus on practice then our collaborative research is inevitably going to largely involve the implementation of initiatives which are generated elsewhere. That in itself is a form of political quietism. (1994, p. 29-30)

To further facilitate full understanding of the nature of teaching and professional development of teachers, it is beneficial to integrate a constructivist view of learning that conceptualizes the manner in which teachers learn and grow professionally. Human beings, in any situation, learn from personal experiences that somehow fit into their lives. New learning and new information must attach itself and build on what one already knows. Picture a sculpture of one's knowledge, one that is pieced together with many sized configurations of information. Then hold in your hand a new piece of clay representing a new piece of information. All of us must find a place in our personal sculpture to attach this new piece of clay. We must be able to mix and integrate new ideas to who we already are, or they will simply float for a while and then fade away. Teachers too, learn from within the context of their lives and their professional development. While arguing for teachers' development in the form of stories told from inside the teaching profession, Schwarz (2001) notes:

> Constructivist learning theory argues that human beings of all ages construct their own knowledge…Teachers learn when they are puzzled or disturbed by some aspect of their own classroom practice; then they seek to gain new information, solve problems, and create new approaches.

> Teacher lore is one way to personalize learning and help teachers discover their specific needs. (p. 13)

For teachers the processes of teaching build and grow as each new student and each new learning situation presents teaching challenges, which must be addressed. Teachers identify student learning difficulties and work through their own "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) to integrate "spontaneous concepts" and "scientific concepts" (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 94). Wink and Putney, in discussing Vygotsky's theory, explain that "[t]he two kinds of concepts work together in a reciprocal relationship and build from and on each other" (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 94). Teachers observe student difficulties in the learning situation and "seek to gain new information, solve problems, and conceptualize new approaches" (Schwarz, 2001, p. 13) that will benefit student learning. "This process of conceptualizing is a central component of the zone of proximal development" (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 95). Teachers use it to integrate their own learning with new teaching challenges "merg[ing]…prior experiential concepts through problem solving activities" (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 95).

While the need for research into teachers' lives and professional growth is apparent, the methodology of this research is dictated by an understanding of the complex nature of teaching. Empirical research attempts to structure the teaching of our children within rigid brackets that can be reduced to mathematical measurements and seemingly produce solutions for our classrooms. Preskill (1998) explains: "The problem with more traditional forms of research is that controls are necessarily imposed to permit accurate and scientific measurement of classroom processes" (p. 345). But teaching is a profession of people – teachers and students who interact daily, personally, professionally, and intellectually. A growing, changing relationship among people is best understood through the narrative interpretation of lives on a journey. Preskill notes that "…stories are a highly accessible, very engaging means to promote reflection on the complexity and highly contextualized nature of schooling and instruction" (1998, p. 345).

The study of teachers' lives benefits our knowledge of teaching. First, biography facilitates the voice from teachers, to be heard coming from inside their own classrooms, as they teach their students. It removes the mystique of what really occurs in schools and in the lives of our teachers. Biography takes policy makers and the population, inside our classrooms to view educational processes as they develop and as they occur (Butt et al, 1992, Goodson, 1992, Jalongo and Isenberg, 1995, Schwarz, 2001). Second, visions from inside classrooms aid those interested in attempting to reform education. Biography "provides a valuable range of insights into the moves to restructure and reform schooling, into…policy concerns and directives" (Goodson, 1992, p.11). Teachers live with mandates coming from various directions – ideas designed to fix what is perceived as wrong with our educational system. Many times these mandates are only attempts to appease a disgruntled public. They are not based on teaching or education or life in classrooms because we do not have the volumes of research needed coming from inside classrooms – we do not have a broad knowledge of how teachers think or develop into professional teachers. Biographies of teachers' lives reveal the highly complex nature of being a teacher and provide a base from which to design reform (Goodson, 1992, Jalongo and Isenberg, 1995, Schwarz, 2001). Third, biographies humanize our vision of teachers and enable visions of professional educators as complex decision makers, who create personalized curriculums for students, synthesizing information, as they daily use their knowledge to benefit our nation's children (Louden, 1991; Goodson, 1994).

This study views a teacher as she teaches writing and delves into her past to link the roots of her experiences and the growth of her professional knowledge into a journey that has led her to teach writing the way she teaches it today. It provides yet another window with which to view the life of a teacher – another opportunity to see the interactions inside a classroom and a chance to see how a veteran teacher has integrated professional growth experiences into her teaching. By understanding the path taken by one teacher throughout her life and

her professional years, others can become conscious of their unique, particular pathway in efforts to extend their own professional knowledge and practice.

The Methods of this Research

We know that teachers develop through their own set of unique experiences that are affected over many years by insights, perceptions, skills, talents, and desires (Goodson, 2001,Oberg & Underwood, 1992, Butt & Raymond, 1988, Berk, 1980). In order to visualize and conceptualize this integrated and multi-layered development of a writing teacher, I had to conceive of a study that would inquire into the years of a teacher's life, and focus on the methods and underlying theoretical basis of current classroom teaching. I determined that the most effective way for me to study the complex nature of the growth and development of a teacher and to include her methods of teaching was to first, inquire into the teacher's background through personal interviews and second, to observe her current classroom teaching through my involvement as a participant observer. The purpose of including both means of data collection was not to thread together a cause and effect relationship between biographical events and present classroom teaching. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to explicitly determine that an event in a teacher's past precipitated a particular teaching method or skill in her classroom. It is understood that "[t]eachers can 'know' something in a variety of ways: directly through lived classroom experience, vicariously through the observed or described experiences of other teachers, formally through professional reading and study, or intuitively through their value systems" (Goodson, 1994, p. 15). Knowledge acquisition and decision-making processes utilized by teachers are far too complex to delineate since they relate to multiple sources of insight and inquiry, intertwined over years of experience.

Theoretical Framework and Personal Frame of Reference

Understanding the researcher's relevant background and theoretical stance is an important practice in qualitative research. For the readers, sharing my research perspective and relevant professional life reveals the perspective

from which I view this study and the beliefs I bring to the interpretation of classroom events and the biography of this research subject.

My Research Stance

"Feminists make sense of the world in a myriad of ways and bring different, even conflicting, assumptions to their research" (Crotty, 1998, p. 160-61). One view of feminism, as a theoretical perspective, encompasses a way to view a life. From this narrow view, a feminist perspective can be seen not just as a concept of natural, female biology, but also as an integration of "historical and cultural constructions" (Crotty, 1998, p. 179). Geertz explains that "[w]e are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture - and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it" (1973, p. 49). To understand a female teacher one needs to know more than the basis of what constitutes our foundational perspective as a female since "…the feminine qualities and actions we encounter in social life do not equate to the mere functioning of genes and hormones" (Crotty, 1998, p. 179). One needs to know what lies "between the ground plans for our life that our genes lay down and the precise behavior[s] that we in fact execute" (Crotty, 1998, p. 179).

Geertz's analogy of Chartres further explains this relational concept of cultural and historical elements and their impact on a life:

> Chartres is made of stone and glass. But it is not just stone and glass; it is a cathedral, and not only a cathedral, but a particular cathedral built at a particular time by certain members of a particular society. To understand what it means, to perceive it for what it is, you need to know rather more than the generic properties of stone and glass and rather more than what is common to all cathedrals. You need to understand also – and, in my opinion, most critically – the specific concepts of the relations among God, man, and architecture that, since they have governed its creation, it consequently embodies. (1973, pp. 50-51)

The feminist perspective of this research does not focus on a female or a teacher in isolation; these two characteristics alone do not furnish adequate details to understand this professional growth and teaching, but it is a view of her

life-long development into a professional teacher. Ruth is a particular female who has grown into a fourth-grade writing teacher. To understand this developmental relationship, one needs to know more than what the concepts of female and teacher might convey; one needs to know the particular circumstances that have evolved over a lifetime to create a realistic, accurate portrait specific to this one female teacher.

The use of this theoretical perspective of feminism to study a teacher is strengthened by the personal, life experiences I bring to this study. My own feminist perspective encompasses experiences as a female and as a teacher, allowing me to view this study of a teacher through my own life and my own professional development. Through my feminist lens, I viewed Ruth's professional growth and teaching, interpreting and analyzing data from my own feminist perspective. My lifetime experiences enhance the knowledge I bring to this study, and the lenses through which I view and interpret Ruth's life and teaching.

My Personal Stance

The focus of my teaching has always included writing in various ways. Over my eighteen-year career, the majority of my time has been spent teaching in the upper elementary grades, while a third of the time has been in college classrooms, and a smaller portion in the primary grades. And always embedded in my teaching have been writing and the teaching of writing. Over the years of my career, I have acquired knowledge of writing and applied it to my teaching. As my knowledge of teaching and writing grew, my classroom teaching also grew to include these new ideas and new methods. As I look back on my teaching, I can see portions of Writers' Workshop as they emerged throughout my career, but I never fully implemented Writers' Workshop as my method of teaching writing.

When I went in search of a research subject for this study, I wanted to find a teacher and a classroom that valued writing and taught writing inclusively. Cole explains that "…we research who we are. We express and represent elements of ourselves in every research situation. The questions we ask, the observations we make, the emotions we feel, the impressions we form, and the hunches we follow

all reflect some part of who we are as person and researcher" (2001, p. 89). I wanted to tell the life story of a writing teacher, integrating her life events, and portraying her teaching. The first and only research subject I considered fulfilled two visions I had for this study: first, to give voice to the life and teaching of an exemplary teacher, and second to depict a method of teaching writing exemplary of my beliefs and values. This study fulfilled my visions.

The School Setting and Context

The elementary school where Ruth has taught fourth grade for the past 18 years is situated in an older, well-kept neighborhood on a side street of a university town in the Appalachian Mountains of southwest Virginia. It is one of three open-space elementary schools in this county's school system that were built in the 1970s. There are no walls between the classrooms in this school; portable partitions are used to separate one classroom area from another. This school houses almost 300 students in grades K-5. Many students live close enough to the school building to walk to school. Three buses bring those who live farther away, and there are a number of parents who transport their children to and from school everyday.

This school was visibly student-centered. Hallway walls and glass showcases displayed great quantities of student art. Creative masks, mosaics, paintings, and drawings were always tastefully arranged to brighten the school. Often these students were involved in a drive to collect something for less fortunate families – loose change at the beginning of the year, food at Thanksgiving, mittens and socks at Christmas. Students learned the feeling of giving at different times during the year.

A sense of community was created with multi-class gatherings in one of the school's three mini-amphitheaters. These theater rooms have walls around them and were included in this school building as places for privacy, where classes could gather for various purposes.

Teachers and students frequently traveled long and short distances to take advantage of opportunities offered by their community and their state. In the Fall the entire student body traveled a short distance to watch a university

volleyball game – a fieldtrip planned by the P.E. teacher. School groups traveled to the University campus to view a science magic show and a wood science show. Just before the Winter Break, the student body took over the entire local bowling alley for a morning of fun and bowling. In the spring, the fourth grade classes traveled to eastern Virginia for a two-night stay in Colonial Williamsburg. During a school day in April, everyone dressed in colonial attire to celebrate Virginia and its history as manifested during Colonial Day. Woodworking, basket weaving, Indian crafts, Appalachian stories and crafts, and other skills demonstrated by community people, created a day of fun and learning for students. And every morning these students said the Pledge of Allegiance and the school pledge: “I pledge to treat others as I want to be treated. I will show respect to everyone and will be responsible for my actions.” These students were frequently shown other parts of their world and everyday pledged to treat it with respect.

The Main Character - Ruth

Choosing Ruth to be a Research Subject

Several university professors recommended Ruth Lacy, a local fourth grade teacher, as a possible research candidate. In April 2001, I wrote her a letter introducing myself and explained that I wanted to study the way she taught writing to her students. I explained that I would need to be in her classroom for an extended period of time taking notes, observing, and talking with her students about their writing. I included my phone number within the letter so Ruth could call me at her convenience, to ask any questions, and to discuss her decision about participating in the study.

Several days passed before Ruth called. When she did, her enthusiasm was immediately evident. She expressed her sincere interest in participating in my study, yet, at the same time, was very modest about her abilities to teach writing. She informed me that she was still a work in progress and was always reading new literature and trying new methods with her students. Ruth did not feel that she knew the correct way to teach writing. Instead, she was always adding to her list of possibilities so she could meet the varying needs of her

students. I felt then that she was a teacher whose story needed to be told, and I wanted to be the one to tell it.

Ruth and I agreed that I would begin my study during her workweek the following fall and continue the study until Winter Break. If I were to obtain a complete picture of her Writers' Workshop, I needed to be there at its inception at the beginning of the school year. I wanted to be there as she worked to set up her classroom before the students arrived. I wanted to be there as she worked, to inquire and collect data.

Building My Relationship with Ruth

In order for this study to show the development of Writers' Workshop from its inception, at the beginning of a school year, I began spending time in Ruth's classroom during workweek, beginning on August 20, before the 2001-2002 school year began. Knowing that there were no walls between classrooms, I wanted to see what the classroom area looked like after a summer of cleaning and rearranging, and how it took shape as workdays progressed. What I found when I first arrived was a fully carpeted area with student desks shoved together into the middle of the room and partition components standing in various places. This classroom showed the effects of summer cleaning and rearranging. Ruth was working to regain her space since some of her dividing pieces had been placed in a way that made her classroom considerably smaller than it was supposed to be. We worked together to move several bookcases and a portable bulletin board into positions that restored some of the taken space.

I wanted to meet Ruth and begin my relationship with her before the students arrived. "Introductions are crucial steps in life history research. They are the beginning points that often make or break the power of a researching relationship to bring forth illuminating understandings of the life and phenomenon being explored" (Cole &Knowles, 2001, p. vii). I did not know Ruth, and I knew that once the students arrived my time with her would be limited. Those days without students were important to my research process. They set our relationship in motion and helped build a foundation that let both of us get to know each other in a personal as well as professional way. Cole and Knowles

concur: "…intimacy and authenticity in relationship are foundational to research quality and to knowledge production, which is what research is about" (2001, p. 27). My goal was to learn everything I could about Ruth and her teaching and to initiate our relationship in a positive way. "When two…lives come together in readiness for research conversations, the onus of responsibility for developing the relationship rests on the researcher" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. vii). During those workdays various learning opportunities arose during casual conversations, and I learned about some of Ruth's professional experiences. We also discussed the professional literature and how we integrated writing concepts into our teaching. Ruth and I discovered that we had both taken the Writing Project from the local university. Sharing our stories of this intense writing experience gave our relationship a firm foundation on which to build and share our ideas about the teaching of writing. Our bond of common literature and experience was important to know about ahead of time. We were about to begin a journey together. Knowing we were on the same road would enhance my understanding and interpretation of what Ruth was doing in her classroom.

The Structure and Use of Time in Ruth's Classroom

My observations of Ruth's teaching began on August 22, 2001, the first day of the school year. I observed from 8:30 a.m. until 11:50 a.m. every school day until Winter Break on December 20 – 69 school days in all. From 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. teachers and student teachers did morning chores. We prepared lunch sign-up, put chairs down from on top of desks, ran copies, straightened materials, discussed world events, told jokes, etc. At 9:00 a.m. the students arrived in the classroom. The time period from 9:00 a.m. to 10:20 a.m. was used for Daily Oral Language and Writers' Workshop, which included share time, and workshop. I observed and participated in various ways during this time period. From 10:20 a.m. to 10:50 a.m., students went to another fourth grade teacher for science while Ruth taught social studies to a different group. From 10:50 a.m. to 11:50 a.m. students returned to Ruth's classroom for their reading class. My observations and participation continued during this reading class each day.

While Writer's Workshop continued each morning until 10:20 a.m., reading did not begin until 10:50. Because of the way the fourth grade schedule was designed, the time block from 10:20 to 10:50 had to be scheduled for science and social studies classes. Ruth apologized many times for this gap in my observation time, but it became a very useful piece of time for me. I used this time to write and reflect, collect artifacts, and make copies of documents and student writing.

Data Collection

I utilized two methods of inquiry to collect data:

1. My role as participant observer inside Ruth's classroom was to obtain the details of her teaching of writing to fourth graders. I wrote journals to record, reflect, and make sense of what I observed, and I conferenced with students as they chose writing topics and wrote poetry and stories. I used Wolcott's (1995) concept of "casual or conversational interviewing" (p. 106) during this time as a participant observer to gain insight into Ruth's teaching. All of this information was used to analyze Ruth's teaching of Writers' Workshop found in Chapter 5.
2. I used Wolcott's (1995) concept of "life history/life cycle interviewing" (p. 106) to obtain data about Ruth's life. My interview with her was by appointment with a specific time, place, and interview guide. This information was used to write a life history of her literary and professional development, from childhood through her adult life, and is found in Chapters 3 and 4.

My Role as Participant Observer

One of my two primary methods of gathering information was that of participant observation. Wolcott (1995) describes participant observation lightheartedly as "being there," meaning that a researcher takes up space and is actively there, observing the happenings of a classroom (p. 95). He adds, "The key to participant observation…is to take seriously the challenge it poses to

participate more, and to play the role of the aloof observer less" (p. 100). My intentions in this classroom were twofold:

1. To "be there," to observe and record what went on as Ruth conducted her Writers' Workshop, and
2. To participate with individual students as they went about their many tasks of being a writer.

My purpose in observing and participating in Ruth's classroom was to learn how she teaches writing. I wanted to know specifically what she did with students to initiate their thinking about writing and how she organized time and materials in order to motivate students to write.

Writers' Workshop in Ruth's classroom was divided into two parts:

1. "Share time," which came first and typically lasted ten minutes, and
2. "Workshop," which lasted for about the next hour.

I wanted only to observe during share time; therefore, I did not make comments or address the class unless Ruth specifically asked my opinion. This was a time when students shared their writing, and it was also when Ruth taught various writing skills. There were several occasions when she looked to me and we discussed a word usage or grammar issue, author or piece of literature, in front of the class. However, most of this time I spent observing and writing in my journal.

"Workshop" was different. It was a time when each student went about doing whatever was needed to make progress on a piece of writing. During workshop I was an active participant, collaborating with students about their writing and working to help this time be useful and productive for individual students.

Observing During Share Time

Each morning Ruth began Writers' Workshop by calling students to the front area to sit on the rug in front of the dry erase board for share time. Ruth sat in a small chair in front of the board, facing the students. During this time I moved to a front row desk, just behind the students seated on the floor, where I observed and wrote notes while students took turns reading aloud from their

writing journals. With the entire class gathered together, this was Ruth's moment to have a quick one-on-one conference with each student. As students read a short passage they had written the night before, Ruth expressed sincere encouragement, asking questions, digging for more details, and suggesting possible uses for each piece of writing.

During share time I observed Ruth as she showed great excitement. She loved to laugh and point and pat students on the head or shoulder. She found a positive response to every idea a child shared. Also during share time, Ruth creatively integrated writing, sharing, and a great variety of literature to get students thinking about their own writing. Ruth told stories and read excerpts from children's literature as well as excerpts from professional literature to the students as motivational incentives to write.

Share time was also a time to discuss procedures and materials used in Writers' Workshop. Ruth's organization of materials and student writing is a system that takes many explanations to initiate and constant reminding so students work through the system to get full advantage of it. A complete analysis of this system is found in Chapter 5. (A description of workshop procedures is found in Appendix B)

Ruth took students outside for share time several times during those first days to teach them to look and listen and observe their world. I always went outside with the class to observe and record the interactive activities of the lesson. I watched students as they sat on tree limbs, playground platforms, and exercise equipment. They sat with pencil and notebook looking at the world and writing about what their eyes saw.

Observation and Participation During Workshop

My active participation in classroom activities came during "workshop" when students needed an editing conference with an adult. On most days "workshop" consumed about an hour of the time set aside for Writer's Workshop each day. Students frequently came to me during this time to conference about their ideas and their writing. I also observed students conferring with one another during this time. That was a rather tenuous situation to observe since I could not

always be sure that students were comfortable when they knew I was watching and listening.

I also used this time to help students go through their writing journals to find several related entries to include in a poem or picture book. Eli was interested in cracks. He studied and wrote about cracks in the sidewalk and cracks in a tree trunk during outside share time. A few days later he could not go swimming because there was a crack in the bottom of his pool. During a conference, we found several entries scattered in his writing journal about cracks. When it was time for him to write a poem, with my help, he went through his journal and chose ideas to use in his poem. I assisted many students at various point in their writing process in this manner during "workshop."

I chose to be an active participant during "workshop" in order to learn more about students' thinking and their writing processes. I felt that my interaction with individual students did not affect the overall workings of the classroom, but it did help students move through the processes of this Writers' Workshop more quickly when I was available for adult edits.

Observing During Reading Class

Believing that the teaching of reading and writing are inseparable, I also observed Ruth's reading class. My interests were not in how she actually taught reading, but in how she extended her writing lessons into students' reading.

Ruth taught reading with Accelerated Reader novels. Each student was always reading a novel chosen from the school's Accelerated Reader list. As students finished reading a novel, they took the computer comprehension test for that novel. Ruth added other requirements to the reading of novels. During reading class the integration of reading and writing became apparent for students. Ruth's belief in Katie Wood Rays' (1999) ideas in *Wondrous Words* about "reading like a writer" and "writing like a reader" were incorporated into this reading classroom. Ruth had students use post-it notes (she called them sticky tabs) to mark places in their reading that showed a variety of writing styles and possibilities. As ideas in Writers' Workshop would build students' skills as writers, Ruth had students look for the same skills in their reading. For example, as

students learned to use strong verbs in their writing, they looked for strong verbs in the novels they were reading and marked them for possible future use in their own writing. The activities and findings in reading class were threaded back to writing, while the writing was threaded into the reading of novels. My observations during this time period included the writing of fieldnotes, reading with students who needed extra help with their novel, and helping students choose novels from the library and from classroom bookshelves.

My decision to observe during this reading class was a personal one. I viewed this experience as one that was necessary for me. It provided me with the one piece of Ruth's language arts class that was related to writing, but not included in her Writers' Workshop. Ultimately the data gathered in fieldnotes during this time was not included in this dissertation. It did, however, provide me with a complete view of Ruth's teaching of language arts.

Writing Fieldnotes

As I observed during share time I wanted my fieldnotes to include details of conversations between Ruth and her students. I wrote furiously in my journal in order to capture as many conversations as I possible could. Most of the time I found myself writing and listening simultaneously, capturing what was said on paper while listening for the next line. In addition, I made notations in my journal to remind myself to copy student journal pages or final copies of students' written work. Many times I looked over a student's shoulder to obtain a page number from his/her journal so I would not have to spend time searching for the writing I needed. This system of recording fieldnotes helped me capture a realistic view of this classroom and the interactions between Ruth and her students.

Additionally two other means of recording information helped me to interpret and record the activities and conversations from this classroom. First, as previously stated, I used the forty minute period following Writers' Workshop, when Ruth was teaching social studies, to write, reflect, and gather additional information. Second, I typed my handwritten journal notes each night, reliving the day's events and adding details I remembered, but may not have recorded in my journal. In essence, each day was lived as it happened and then revisited during

two different time periods, insuring that a large portion of what actually occurred was in written form, ready for future analysis.

I recorded my handwritten observational notes in three journals during my 3 1/2 month study in Ruth's classroom. My typed notes number 80 pages and are housed in a two-inch loose-leaf notebook along with copies of student writing, artifacts and the procedural handouts Ruth used to organized students as they wrote. These documents were used to write Chapter 5, which describes the procedures of Ruth's Writers' Workshop, the relevant literature I used to analyze them, and the essence of Ruth Lacy as she interacts with young writers.

Informal Interviews

During my stay in Ruth's classroom, I conducted many informal interviews, what Wolcott (1995) refers to as "casual or conversational interviewing" (p. 106), the content of which was recorded among the notes I wrote in my journals. Ruth was always willing to talk about a method she was using or a strategy she knew would benefit students with their writing. Occasionally, as she instructed her class of students, she would pause to direct conversation toward me. She wanted to ensure that I was aware of the background and origin of her teaching materials and that I had recorded authors, book titles, and page numbers. I regularly inquired about procedures she utilized to teach writing. Many times during informal conversations Ruth chose a book from her shelf, turning directly to a page where specific teaching information was located. (Appendix C details the literature and references Ruth used to teach writing)

Life History Interview with Ruth

My formal interview with Ruth came during the spring following my participant observation in her classroom. We chose to begin our interview early one morning to insure ample time before a lunch break. The interview was conducted in Ruth's classroom so that literature and materials were readily available. A week before our interview, I sent Ruth a list of discussion topics. I wanted her to consider these specific interview topics:

- Life as a young girl – the values of writing you held when you were young; the ways you used writing even before you formally learned anything about it.
- Life as a school pupil – stories and memories of writing and writing instruction as a student; ways you used writing on your own and as assignments in school.
- Life while preparing to become a teacher – stories and memories placed on the value of writing as you learned about teaching.
- Life as a professional teacher – stories and memories of your development as a writing teacher.

When I arrived at the interview, Ruth informed me that these topics were not useful for her. We put them aside, and I continued our interview by asking Ruth for a brief sketch of her life. Ruth started from the very beginning, as a baby, and continued on with stories about her childhood. Each story reflected a part of this woman and a part of her remembering. She told story after story of her life, explaining positive experiences as well as times that could have been better. Cole and Knowles (2001) explain that "[t]he stories we remember and tell about our lives reflect who we are, how we see ourselves, and perhaps, how we wish to be seen" (p. 119). The interview was an experience of reflection, for Ruth, remembering, and integrating the details of her life. From this interview I gleaned the many details of Ruth's youthful love of story and language, and I have a detailed progression of professional experiences in her adult life. From her life experiences, Ruth chose the stories she wanted me to hear. Cole and Knowles explain that "[t]he participant engages in the very first level of analysis. They sift out, from their wealth of experience, stories to tell us" (2001, p. 119). Each story Ruth told added to the portrait of her as a teacher of writing.

This interview was intense work. Lawrence-Lightfoot explain: "Listening *for* story in interview – attending to what is said, marking down key words, and in one swift moment incorporating those phrases into a next question –is demanding and absorbing work" (1997, p. 122). Our interview lasted three hours, and I recorded our conversations on both sides of three microcassette tapes.

During the interview, as Ruth told me about her life, I wrote down key words and phrases, recording the sequence of our interview and marking those items I still had questions about, with a star. This list served two purposes for me: first, because I had marked certain items on the list during the interview, I could easily identify those items, ask additional questions, and gain additional clarification from Ruth. Second, this list was beneficial during transcribing. I kept the list in front of me as I typed. It reminded me of the broad topics within our conversation, and it helped me know where I was listening within the sequence of the interview. Transcribing for me was much easier because I knew where I was within the content of the interview.

Analyzing Data

Analyzing the Life History Interview

I transcribed the interview into a 52-page document. I did my own transcribing because I thought it was important to ensure accuracy in every detail of Ruth's words. I was writing her story as she told it. It was important to not only hear her words, but to hear how she said them. Lawrence-Lightfoot explains: "When transcribing on-site tapes, [researchers] may be surprised to discover all that transpires beyond the active and absorbing co-construction of story. The pauses and changes in tone of voice…are often overlooked in the moment of interview" (1997, p. 122). Transcribing it myself allowed me to revisit our conversations and picture the event again while hearing my voice and Ruth's voice as we spoke.

With this transcribed document in hand, I contemplated possibilities for themes of analysis within its content and a broad organizational plan. Since this is a biography, a chronological order of life experiences seemed to be the best organizational pattern to follow. Though Ruth's story, as told in the interview, took twists and turns and doubled back as reflections do, two large sections emerged: "Ruth's Childhood and Youth" and "Career Experiences and Professional Development."

I read the transcribed document many times. Lawrence-Lightfoot explain: "…each juncture in listening *for* a story offers a range of opportunities…to mount

an interpretation that will follow one or more different pathways of understanding" (1997, p. 122). During my first reading of the transcribed document, I looked for stories from Ruth's youth. Ruth began our interview with stories about her youth, but because of my additional questioning and her desire to add more information at other times, the details of those stories were scattered throughout the whole 52-page document. As I read and found the stories, I color-coded each piece of her youth with a pink post-it marker. I then went through the entire document and copied and pasted only those stories about her youth into a separate document. What I had then was the text of our verbal conversation about her youth, but much of it was out of order. From that document I found all the pieces of each story and copied and pasted them together so that my new document now had all information about each story, accumulated together in sections.

My task was then to go through the verbal conversation of each story and revise it into text that was suitable for reading. When I was transcribing our verbal conversation, it was difficult to organize thoughts into sentences. Some of the conversation rambled, many times going off into different directions. I removed many repeated words and there were numerous places where Ruth began a thought, but then abandoned it for a different thought or better wording. In those places, I eliminated or rearranged words in order to create complete sentences and readable text. The content of the finished stories was not altered; only the flow of some of the words was different.

I used the same procedures to compile the stories from Ruth's adult life only this time I divided the stories into two parts: college life and professional life. I color coded stories in the transcribed document from Ruth's college life with blue post-it markers and her professional life with green ones. Dividing Ruth's adult life into two sections made the material easier to handle since there were numerous adult stories. I copied and pasted all of the information about Ruth's adult life and organized all of the stories into a suitable, chronological order. I then rearranged and revised the wording into readable text as I had done with the stories of Ruth's youth.

At this point I had two documents: one of the stories of Ruth's youth and one of the stories of Ruth's adulthood. I then organized all of these stories, from Ruth's youth and adult life, into one document putting them in the order in which they occurred. My document now contained isolated stories that spanned fifty-eight years of life. My challenge at that point was to create one continuous story from these many stories. I read through this document many times, drawing on my knowledge as a teacher and my knowledge as a researcher. My challenge was to create transitions between stories and relate professional literature where it was pertinent. With each reading I created more and more transitions connecting and relating the stories of Ruth's life.

During my writing of Chapters 2 and 3, telling the stories of Ruth's life, I emailed her four different times with questions about details I needed to complete her story. I needed specific information including the year her school was built, how many years she had taught there, and when she began teaching the fourth grade.

When my writing of Ruth's life was complete, I sent her another email and attached Chapters 2 and 3 to it. She read over the chapters, sent an email back saying that she was very pleased with the story and asked if I wanted to get together with her for a peer edit. We met together in her classroom once more after school in April 2003 and spent two and a half hours going over the forty-three pages of Chapters 2 and 3. The changes we made were word choice and comma corrections, but there was one story from her high school years that troubled Ruth. She had told me the story about her visit to an Indian reservation and described it with words, which have new meanings today. While keeping the context the same we agreed on updated words to relay the same meaning. (At Ruth's request I will not reveal the words in question). It was a situation where using words appropriate in the 1970's could create an uncomfortable, negative message when read today. We both agreed that changing the original words from the transcript really did not change the meaning of the story, and since it was Ruth's story, we changed it to her liking.

Analyzing Writers' Workshop Data

My analysis of data for Chapter 4, "Ruth's Writing Classroom – A Specific Look at Writers' Workshop," progressed in three main phases. First was an initial analysis that began during data collection and extended into a content analysis after the study was complete. The second was a broadened content analysis of the data done entirely after the study was over, and finally a narrowly focused thematic analysis. I describe the significant contributions of each level of data analysis as they relate to the findings of this study, the representation of the findings, and my understandings of the processes of analysis.

The first level of analysis progressed each day during my participant observation in Ruth's classroom. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. As classroom activities progressed each day, I recorded data in my journal, interpreting my observations into fieldnotes. Each day I reread my fieldnotes adding additional interpretations, reflections, possible future avenues of inquiry, and noting initial identification of repeating themes during classroom activities. Thus during data collection the first level of analysis was ongoing, what Miles and Huberman term "first level coding" (1994, p. 69). I collected data, and as I analyzed it, "first level coding" patterns began to emerge in the content. Miles and Huberman explain that "*[f]irst level coding* is a device for summarizing segments of data. *Pattern coding* is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of sets, themes or constructs (1994, p. 69). As I read and reread my fieldnotes daily, patterns of classroom activities surfaced. When my sixty-nine days of observation time was over, I finalized the coding system for the data collected during this research study into these seven "pattern codes":

- Ruth's Points of Emphasis – Words of Wisdom
- Teaching focus and Implementation
- Share Time
- Structure and Procedures
- Keeping Things Under control – Dealing With All Kinds of Situations
- Student Watch – Progress Made By Certain Students
- Assignments

With data divided into these “pattern codes,” I began to test them as a method of analysis. I organized the data by copying and pasting each entry into documents of common data. Data identified from the sixty-nine days of observation as “Ruth’s Points of Emphasis – Words of Wisdom” was assembled into one document. The same was done for the other six categories. This analysis was helpful in structuring the collected data into a clear picture of classroom activities. However, I determined that further analysis was needed in order to portray the whole, rich picture of Writers’ Workshop in Ruth’s classroom.

To diversify my perspective of the data, I analyzed it a second time from a broadened view. I put the seven pattern codes aside and analyzed the raw data again using a more general thematic analysis. This time I was looking for broad structural themes that would organize the data found in the seven “pattern codes.” What I found first became a temporary, structural format for Chapter 4 – a time structured organization based on the progression and thickening of layers of writing activities and instruction in Ruth’s classroom. This initial, second level of analysis established the following as the broad structure for Chapter 4:

- Days one and two
- Days three through eight
- Days nine through sixty-nine

Using these time segments ordered the data into a usable structure that focused each time period as a necessary piece of this classroom’s structure. Each segment contained accumulating content and each segment was a necessary part that thickened and enriched the portrait of the teaching of writing in Ruth’s classroom.

To complete this phase of analysis, I again analyzed the data, seeking to further structure the time segments. Two broad areas of analysis emerged: “Beginning the Writerly Life” which encompassed days one through eight and “Developing as Writers” which encompassed days nine through sixty-nine. These two broad sections organized the data into a progression of Ruth’s teaching representative of the structure of classroom activities.

The final phase of analysis was a more specific, thematic analysis of the data. To analyze data for this third phase, I again examined the raw data, looking for stories to create vignettes exemplary of Ruth's teaching and exemplary of students' responses to her teaching. There were many stories to be told from inside Ruth's classroom. Lawrence-Lightfoot explains that "[t]he data must be scrutinized carefully, searching for the story line that emerges from the material. However, there is never a single story – many could be told" (p.12). This level of analysis searched for those stories that needed to be told – stories that provide this teacher and these students a voice to be heard coming from their life, in their classroom. The stories extrapolated from this data, during this phase, combined to add the rich descriptions of activity and student work necessary to see the interactions of teacher and students in the classroom. Data from this phase of analysis brings the life of this classroom to the research.

During this final thematic analysis, an additional focus of data emerged. Within this data were stories, specific to the challenges and triumphs of teaching writing in a Writers' Workshop environment. These vignettes are analyzed in the final section of Chapter 4, This final section is the portraits of six students. Analyzed are their individual situations as they utilized Writers' Workshop and Ruth's teaching to develop as writers.

The following section details the theory and practice I employed to analyze Ruth's life and teaching.

Overview of Literature Used in the Analysis

The process of gathering relevant literature to interpret Ruth's life and teaching was one that was "infused throughout th[is] research process" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 61). During all stages of my research process, I searched and read numerous authors, studies, and related topic areas, interpreting the literature and determining its relevance within my developing study. "…it [was] not possible to know in advance the kind of theorizing that [would] eventuate or the bodies of literature that [would] inform that theorizing…" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 64). As this study progressed and my search for useful literature broadened, I integrated, into my research, those references that "generally

inform[ed] [my] perspectives and understanding of the contexts surrounding [this study]" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 62). While my search of the literature encompassed many large influences on my work, the following are the specific areas I have chosen from the literature that informed and substantiated the analysis of Ruth's life history and her teaching of Writers' Workshop found in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Vygotsky and the Social Nature of Learning

My decision to analyze data using the work of Vygotsky was based on his conceptualization of the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1962) and his beliefs, as a constructivists, that all learning "presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88). In Ruth's classroom, students wrote and then conferenced with their peers and/or adults. The purpose of the "social nature" of this classroom was to develop writers. Students benefited from interaction in their "zone of proximal development" as was evidenced by their increasing ability to look critically on themselves as writers and develop the skills necessary to create written pieces worthy of publication. The interactions and role responsibilities within Ruth's Writers' Workshop, as discussed in Chapter 5, resembled the analogies of those depicted in this discussion by Dipardo and Freedman (1988), of a writing classroom based on Vygotsky's beliefs:

> …a Vygotskian vision of individual development suggests a cooperative environment wherein power is productively shared in a classroom that could more properly be called a resource room, its teacher more properly a knowledgeable coach, its students more properly one another's colleagues. Learning in such an environment becomes more a matter of following teachers' directive and more a matter of teachers and students mutually engaged in talking and reading and writing, in giving and receiving feedback across varied audiences and at varied points in the writing process. (p. 144)

The environment in Ruth's classroom was like this classroom described from Vygotsky's theory. Ruth was a "knowledgeable coach," supporting and

guiding students who were “one another’s colleagues.” Teacher, students, and adult volunteers were “mutually engaged,” supporting and extending the writing processes of students. Including the work of Vygotsky in my analysis of Ruth’s teaching establishes theoretical support for Writers’ Workshop methods. When we understand the social nature of learning and experience its successes, our classrooms will reflect that understanding and our teaching will embrace the value of student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions in the writing process.

Dewey – Meaningful Student-Teacher Interaction

I include the work of Dewey in my analysis to strengthen the importance of meaningful interaction between a teacher and a student, and to cultivate the importance of teacher response skills. Ruth responded to students’ writing everyday during share time, knowing the importance of individual, specific, positive response to writing. Ruth’s response skills are substantiated in this discussion by Dewey (1933) of a resourceful and knowledgeable teacher who is tuned into students’ individual moods and draws on her perceptions of the moment:

> The teacher must be alive to all forms of bodily expression of mental condition – to puzzlement, boredom, mastery, the dawn of an idea, feigned attention, tendency to show off, to dominate discussion because of egotism, etc. – as well as sensitive to the meaning of all expression in words. [S]he must be aware not only of their meaning, but of their meaning as indicative of the state of mind of the pupil, his degree of observation and comprehension. (p. 275)

My observations of Ruth, in her writing classroom, revealed a knowledgeable teacher who listened to student ideas and responded in positive, productive ways. My analysis of share time responding depicts Ruth as she skillfully draws ideas from students and coaches them to integrate their developing ideas into their written pieces.

Elements of Writers' Workshop

The literature I determined that best analyzed the elements of Writers' Workshop in Ruth's classroom, originated primarily from two sources: *The Art of Teaching Writing* (1994) by Lucy Calkins and *In The Middle* (1998) by Nancie Atwell. These two teacher/authors are renowned in the field of teaching writing. Their published works tell the stories of their personal and professional growth, as well as their in-depth knowledge of how best to facilitate writing for students. Additionally, utilized within my analysis of Writers' Workshop data are the works of Donald Graves, Georgia Heard, Ralph Fletcher, Barry Lane, Linda Rief, Katie Wood Ray and Anne Lamont. Each of these authors poses their own influence on the field of writing, focusing on various genres of literature as their areas of expertise.

The Complex Nature of a Teacher's Development

Discussions within the literature, detailing the complexity of a teacher's development are pertinent here and illuminate the purposes of this research. Goodson (2001), Oberg & Underwood (1992), Butt & Raymond (1988), Berk (1980) and others, all reiterate the fact that developing teaching skills is an integrated, complex process that develops over a lifetime.

A major piece of research in this area is a study by Raymond, Butt, & Townsend (1992). It is a study of eighty teachers' autobiographies. This broad study details the influences teachers bring from their lives into their teaching:

> From analysis of our collection of over eighty teacher autobiographies, regardless of subject, grade level and other contextual teaching factors, we can discern that various sources and influences (parents, relatives, schoolteachers, the nature of the family, home, ethnicity, religion and location) from the teachers' pre-professional life history are continually evoked and reconstructed to establish a firm emotional and moral ground that helps form teachers' professional commitment and identity (p. 151).

The study reveals that what occurred previously in a teacher's life is taken into the teaching experience and utilized, in many different ways, by the individual teacher. Rather than narrowing developmental possibilities, these experiences

seem to open broad areas teachers explore and consider for classroom use. Raymond, Butt and Townsend (1992) go onto explain:

> These early grounds for teacher development can subsequently be reshaped in various conscious and unconscious ways and, in turn, can influence classroom practice in many different ways. Yet, regardless of all these transformations, teachers do no appear to loose track of where they come from. (p. 151)

Analysis within this research refers to the impact of Ruth's childhood and pre-professional experiences on her teaching. Raymond, Butt and Townsend explain that "[t]eachers' stories clearly illuminate the way in which teachers' early personal experiences and personal development have a profound influence on who they are and who they become as teachers" (Raymond, Butt, & Townsend, 1992. p. 159). This was true for Ruth. Her childhood and school years show a firm foundation of storytelling and language usage, which she relates to her teaching today. Ruth has many stories to tell about her childhood. She giggles as she tells stories about doing chores – she was always assigned the toilets and the windows to clean! "I can remember to make time pass more quickly, I used to make up songs. I liked singing and I would just make up my own words and my own tunes" (Personal Interview, August 8, 2002). These acts of literacy, which emerged in Ruth's youth, are foundational to her value of story and writing and the teaching of writing to her students. Ruth is a classroom teacher today, but her professional growth is threaded from throughout her life. Analysis within the biographical and teaching data, integrates Ruth's complex growth as a teacher.

Critical Incidents

Within the life of a teacher are "critical incidents" (Goodson, 1991) that seem to direct a major impact on teaching. Goodson (1991) explains that "…work on teachers' careers points to the fact that there are *critical incidents* in teachers' lives and specifically in their work which may crucially effect perception and practice" (p. 42).

To her admission, the Southwest Virginia Writing Project was highly influential as Ruth sought new ways to include writing in her classroom. For her,

this experience brought together an abundance of ideas she had read about and considered for use in her classroom. As is evidenced in her biography, Ruth's life experiences centered around the use of language, but it was not until she experienced the Southwest Virginia Writing Project that the confidence to teach writing using Writers' Workshop emerged. "The issue of effective teaching and the question of the take-up of innovations and new managerial initiatives" (Goodson, 1991, p. 43) become apparent within Ruth's story of an emerging teacher.

Polanyi – Tacit Knowledge

"Tacit knowledge…the dominant principle of all knowing," (Polanyi, 1958, p. 13) is an important concept for me to consider in the analysis of Ruth's writing classroom. Tacit knowledge is an important part of the human being that surfaces in individual writing when teaching facilitates it. Tacit knowledge is an accumulation of many factors that create the surprises that emerge from within us. It "appears to be a doing of our own" (Polanyi, 1958, p. 12). The characteristics of personality, ancestor influence, genes, and chemical make-up mingle together to create the intuitive nature of humans that can affect writing and surprise us at anytime. Writers' Workshop is a supportive method of teaching writing and makes room for these surprises. It facilitates "…the accumulation, the pondering and reconsideration of various subject matter…[that are]…seen to be a tacit…process…which can be done only in our heads" (Polanyi, 1958, p. 25). Inclusion of this concept in my analysis of Ruth's teaching illuminates her belief in the importance of drawing personal experiences from students' lives into their writing. Ruth's teaching reflected Foster's interpretation that "…individuals learn their powers and come to terms with their experiences differently, as a function of their distinct and separate personalities" (1992, p. 196). Because Ruth's students chose their own writing topics they quickly learned that power over their own ideas and their own writing was theirs alone. Polanyi reiterates "…our tacit powers achieve...results by recognizing our experience so as to gain intellectual control over it" (1958, p. 20). Every morning, shortly after school began, Ruth called her entire class to the front of the room for share time. In quick, individual

conversations with each student, Ruth learned something new about each student as they shared an observation from their writing. Students felt safe as they saw Ruth's excitement and shared the surprises of their lives with the class. This biography views the many ways Ruth enticed students to explore their "tacit knowledge" in the safe environment she created in her classroom.

Confirmability of Study

The trustworthiness or confirmability of a qualitative study rests in the methods employed by the investigator to integrate the emerging data and the investigators interpretations of the data. For the qualitative researcher, the challenge is to gather, organize, and analyze data into a thick, rich description of lived experience that meets the expectations of the research community. The researcher must confirm that the findings represent the lived experiences as they occurred. Qualitative "researchers seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Miles and Huberman (1994) would ask this question as a basis for determining confirmability of this study; do the conclusions depend on the teacher and her teaching or do they depend on me, the researcher? In order for this study to be confirmable, the answer must be that the conclusions must depend on my study and not my influence on the study; confirmability depends on the connection between the study's data and my interpretation of the data.

In qualitative research triangulation is used to establish confirmability or trustworthiness of a study (Merriam, 1998). This study was triangulated in several ways. First, in this study data were gathered from many sources: participation, observation, teacher interviews, student interviews, conversations, artifacts, and emails. Second, relevant literature was triangulated into the research perspective and into the data analysis.

Member checks (Merriam, 1998) were conducted as data accumulated. Email, phone calls, and conversations were used to communicate and clarify details and interpretation of data between the researcher and the subject. Furthermore, "Long-term observation at the research site" (Merriam, 1998, p.

204) allowed me to identify teaching practices over an extended period of time and add an important element to the confirmability of this study.

The following chapters are the portrait of Ruth's life and teaching. Chapters 2 and 3 depict Ruth's life and professional growth, while chapter 4 depicts Ruth as a writing teacher. Within each chapter, the literature relevant to Ruth's life and teaching is embedded as appropriate information is revealed.

Chapter 2
RUTH'S CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

This chapter tells the stories of Ruth's childhood and youth, derived from my personal interview with her. I gathered together information from throughout the interview that was relevant to each story, and sequenced them together in chronological order. I use Ruth's voice to tell the stories in order to depict an authentic portrayal of her childhood and youth. It is important to hear her enthusiasm, her excitement and at times, her disappointment as she relives these experiences. This chapter is divided into three sections: Youth – Ruth the Child; High School and College; and Final Thoughts on Ruth's Childhood and Youth.

Intertwined in any life are those pieces of a person which seem to become dominant and rise up to lead us through many situations – they are the characteristics that are visible from many angles of a life. Ruth Lacy's young life was full of her playful versions of story and song and language. The story of how they accumulated throughout her childhood and youth is the story being told in this chapter.

For Ruth, these pieces of literacy can be viewed as they began to accumulate in Ruth, the little girl. This chapter views her in her childhood, as she created her own stories and songs to entertain herself and the children in her neighborhood. Throughout these years, various pieces of literacy multiplied and integrated into Ruth's life. The pieces of literacy multiplied again for Ruth, the teenager, as she became involved in school and church service projects. The foundations of the person she was becoming can be found in her youth, and then followed into her classroom today.

In understanding who a teacher is today, it is important to know the teacher when she was a child. It is important to know the nature of her family and the events of her childhood. There is strong evidence to show that teachers continually weigh their classroom decisions against events and people from their childhood (Raymond, Butt & Townsend, 1992). The 1992 research of Raymond, Butt and Townsend revealed that teachers "continually evoke[d] and

reconstruct[ed]" (p. 151) events in their lives as they made decisions in their teaching. "Informal and formal professional activities, challenging innovations or teaching experiences all seem to be assessed against this personal ground, even at later stages in these teachers' careers." (Raymond, Butt & Townsend, 1992, p. 151)

In order to understand Ruth the teacher, we must first understand Ruth the child.

Youth – Ruth the Child

This story actually begins before Ruth was born. Ruth's mother was raised in a Swedish household where English was not the spoken language. In fact, this area in northern Minnesota is a direct settlement from Sweden, full of Swedish culture and values. Ruth's childhood was greatly affected by her mother's use of the Swedish language and the work ethic her mother knew.

Ruth – See, I really didn't have a leisurely sit down read and write kind of life because mother was a farm girl from northern Minnesota. She was born in a log cabin on a farm and her work ethic was sunup to sundown you kept your hands busy. I can remember feeling guilty in fact, sitting down to read a book because she would come through and put me to work. I mean she was a sweet lady, but her work ethic was that if you were sitting around, you were loafing.

I never took naps. When I was older, if I tried to lie down and heard her coming, I'd jump up so it would look like I was doing something. My brothers and I talked about this and we laughed. If we wanted to go out to play and Mom would have us busy doing things, we would have to arrange it so we could sneak out. If we were out of sight and out of mind, then she didn't worry about the fact that we were playing, but if we were there in the house not being actively busy, she would put us to work. If we wanted to go play ball or something, we would sneak out and meet somewhere. Once we were playing we were fine and especially when the neighbor kids came over and joined us, played ball with us, then she didn't call us in or anything. So I really didn't have this leisurely read and write kind of childhood growing up, but Mom was very supportive when I had

schoolwork - she was very supportive about letting me do my homework. She didn't take me away from that.

So as far as writing and reading when I was little, they weren't encouraged - that wasn't how you used your spare time according to Mom.

When Mom was growing up she spoke Swedish at home. She spoke some English but it was poor English. She grew up in a Swedish neighborhood. Though they taught in English at school, she spoke Swedish at home, so when they did speak English it was grammatically incorrect. Mom only went through the third grade. She was the oldest child and had to wait two years to go to school - she had to wait for her older brother to be old enough to walk with her across the field to get to the school. And then later she had to stay home and take care of the next baby. But she is pretty bright. She is self-taught through newspapers and whatever. Even now at 92, when it's convenient, she'll sit and pick up a headline from the newspaper or the large print Readers' Digest - she'll sit down and read that. There are short articles in another publication, something like Upper Room that we get in large print. They are short, short stories and she will read them.

Ruth was born in Minnesota, but she and her bothers and her Mom and Dad moved a few times before they finally settled in Southern California where she grew up.

Ruth - I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I lived a couple years, in my little tiny life, my ones, twos, and into my threes, in Maryland. I have a couple of memories from there - a memory of a house that I described to Dad one time. He said, "Yep, that was the house in Maryland," and I remember driving on a road with tall trees down either side, I was just so impressed by it. Those are my only memories of Maryland.

And then we moved to California and lived with my aunt while my Mom and Dad built a house. I can remember being in the neighbor's garage - our neighbor loaned us their garage for a couple of days while the work was getting done. We slept in their garage and toted our potty down to the gas station. Then

after a few days, we camped out inside our house. I remember the tarpaper being about three feet up on the walls at the time. My dad and my two uncles built the house so it was really a family thing, and then my uncle plastered it and stuccoed it. That's where I grew up.

Ruth's childhood was full of mixing story, song and play. Her lively imagination brought creative twists into whatever she was doing.

Ruth - There weren't many girls in the neighborhood - there were two who lived way at the end of the block. They were kind of close and played a lot together. I had two older brothers so I played a lot of ball…a lot of football and a lot of baseball and I had my own little world. I think I had a lot of girl's things I did when I was by myself, like the imaginary games I would play. And as I got a little older, and this is maybe where the teaching part starts to come in, I can remember there were two younger boys who lived right next to our house, and I used to do puppet shows for them out of my bedroom window. I just made up stories for my shows. I remember a shoe repairman in our little town had one of these black, Felix the cat or whatever it was – there used to be a cat's paw – that's what it was – a little black leather puppet that he placed in the window. I saved up my money, and he sent for it for me with the money I had saved up. I remember my hands would get so sweaty inside that leather puppet that I loved so dearly. And so I used that and whatever I came up with to put on puppet shows for the kids next door. That's the first I can remember about storytelling and making up things. I used original stories in my puppet shows.

And I'd play house in the backyard. I made playhouses everywhere - in Dad's tool room, under his tool bench, from the dog window, from my door, and I did a lot of that outside I guess because southern California was always warm and dry - I did a lot of it outside or in the garage or out in the back. We had a peach tree and an apricot tree, and Dad put down a slab of cement to put a picnic table on between them. I took the picnic area in the back and I just pushed the picnic table out of the way and that was my playhouse area. I remember my brothers, for my birthday - I was so excited it was one of the best birthday

presents I ever got - they had gotten an apple crate and a peach crate. The apple crate was longer - they don't really use those so much anymore, the wooden two-part apple crates. Anyway, they turned it on its side so it became taller and that became my cabinet. Then they had a peach crate turned on end and they had nailed down tin can lids to make burners and put a knob or something on the front - some kind of knob off of something, to be my stove. Then I had a little wooden table and Dad gave me a bowl, a basin of some kind, a round basin, so I had all the makings for a playhouse and my uncle made a doll crib out of wood. So you, see I was set. I slid those things into place and I just thought I was the fanciest thing in the world. And at Christmas time I would salvage the neighbors Christmas trees. I would stack them all around my playhouse…crazy I know. I just loved Christmas trees and kept them until they turned brown.

And I used to help mom hang up the clothes. I was never tall enough to get up to the clothesline so I always had to put a chair out there and I'd climb up on the chair to hang clothes. I remember that. And I used to hate that because I had to stretch so much. I would pretend I would get a penny for every piece of clothes I hung up. I'd pretend it. I never asked Mom for the money because she didn't have any money but…chuckle…one penny for each piece of clothes I hung - it gave me incentive to keep working.

Saturday was cleaning day. It was very sacred at our house and I always got my chores doled out to me. I got the toilets and the windows! Those were the things Mom didn't want to do! I can remember to make time pass more quickly I used to make up songs. I liked singing and I would just make up my own words and my own tunes - kind of like ballad singing.

Ruth's love of story and song were a part of who she was as a little girl. In spite of a household where books and story were not plentiful, Ruth felt a need to include them in her life. As Ruth grew older she met a teacher who saw her as a skillful mentor for children.

Ruth - I remember being in sixth grade in elementary school tutoring a lot of the lower kids. I did that back then - you know you have your top kids read with

your bottom kids. I remember my sixth grade teacher telling me, “You need to be a teacher” and I said, “No. I’m going to be a secretary”. “You need to be a teacher,” he said, and he just stuck to his guns. I remember after I graduated from college with my credentials, I went back to see him and said, “Guess what? I’m a teacher!”

High School and College

During Ruth’s high school and college years she took advantage of the many activities her church youth group participated in.

Ruth - I was very busy in high school. We had a really big church and our youth group was big. We made trips to Mexico and we’d do Vacation Bible School kinds of things for the kids. In the slums in Mexico City we got the kids together and set them down to read and sing and tell stories. I used my rudimentary Spanish to communicate with them - that’s when I relaxed about Spanish and decided if the kids could make grammatical errors I could too. They were very patient with me. And we also went to migrant farms and did Vacation Bible School with kids. Back then you had left over families, genetic remnants of the dust bowl believe it or not, red haired people, the whole bit. We would go and take the kids and read stories to them. They were very little though because the older kids were out in the fields working to earn their keep. I remember seeing a little girl, oh she must have been four years old maybe, and I asked her if she wanted to come to stories and she said, “No. I have to take care of my baby,” and I said, “Where is your baby?” The whole family was out in the field and I came in and the baby was in a crib. They had a little cinder block, four room house, no bathroom facility, they all shared that down the way, and then there was a make shift crib and this baby just covered in feces and flies and I just – one of those memories you don’t forget – and she had to stay and take care of the baby.

We also did work in prisons. We would go, it was usually Sundays and we’d do a Sunday School or a church type thing. I did a lot of singing, so I would lead them in songs or teach them songs. I remember leading the group in singing

and playing a few hymns on the small portable organ they had. I took less than a year of piano, so I could only play certain songs (the ones that my grandmother used to sit on my bed and request as I muddled my way through practice times). One of the people in our group usually had some sort of sermon, and we would plan some sort of fun things to do.

We spent a week on the Apache Indian Reservation; that was interesting too. We met with village children in the day, telling stories and singing with them. I remember asking why some rowdy teenagers threw rocks at the building we met in at night. It was explained to me that these boys were showing off their "toughness." I guess it was sort of a modern form of going through a "Manhood Ceremony."

We had a large choir at our church too – high school and college age - there were sixty-five of us in the choir and we traveled. We had dresses and shirts and ties all to match, and we traveled all up and down the state of California. We stayed in people's houses from the churches where we'd go. Singing has been a big part of my life - that's another way to tell a story.

I did a lot of bible school kinds of things at home too. In fact one summer, after my freshman year in college, the youth pastor came up and said, "I want you to head up the second and third grade summer bible school," and I said, "I can't do that." He said, "Yes you can, yes you can". So I had to set out to find people who could help me. My Aunt was a teacher and I sat down with her to find out ideas - things I could do during this bible school. I had sixty kids I guess. I look back on that and say, "Hum, I don't know, getting that kind of responsibility at such a young age," but we had a good program going. We had bible school going in the morning and then, it was out in the park and storytelling and swimming and reading stories in the afternoon – oh I used to love to read stories to them!

While Ruth tells these stories of her "teacher like" activities in high school and college, there were also other things going on inside the classrooms she was attending. These turned out to be pieces of literacy she would carry directly into her own classroom as a teacher.

Ruth - Well the interesting thing was that the English teacher in my last year of high school was really strict with us in terms of expecting us to learn how to diagram sentences. But it really helped me - the irony of it all was that it helped me because I couldn't depend on my spoken language to get my sentences correct. I felt by just being able to lay it out on paper and see if I had done it right, I could picture it. So then it got so I could do it in my head and I could see if it was correct or not.

And to some extent I still do it with the kids at school when we check our DOLs, our Daily Oral Language. If we are looking for subject and predicate I will just put a little line, a slash between them and say, 'This is a subject and this is a predicate.' It is especially helpful if you have a compound predicate. It's really easy for the kids to see why they don't put a comma, because they get used to hearing, "If there's an and, you put a comma" when you put things in a series. But the diagram helps them see that it's like two sentences combined. It's just one subject - that one person is doing two things.

Nancy – This is why you know so many of those little rules.

Ruth – Probably because I needed to learn them.

Nancy – They are wonderful little stories to help kids remember.

Ruth – I'm up for anything that makes it easier for kids so if I hear somebody, somewhere use a trick I tell the kids and the kids love tricks.

Nancy – Oh yea, because they remember them.

Over the years, Ruth has taken advantage of every opportunity she has had to perfect her use of the English language. Probably most influential was a college professor who required her to make changes in her spoken language.

Ruth – In college I took a class called Storytelling for Teachers, and one of our big assignments was to write a ballad. I don't remember now which one, but I used the Autoharp – you know it's a minstrel kind of instrument. I got an excellent grade on that, but my professor said I had to work on my English. Since my mother spoke mostly Swedish growing up, her English wasn't very good. When she did speak English her verb tenses didn't match and consequently neither did mine. And so nobody had stopped me, you know back when it was not 'good to

correct a child?' I guess that was the generation after the one where the folks had spoken another language. So my language got mixed between English and Swedish. This college professor who taught me storytelling just said, 'Look, you did an excellent job on that, but if you don't fix your grammatical errors I'm not going to let you pass this class.' He handed me a list of the mistakes I made and told me I had to fix them. So I made 3x5 cards, about 15 of them, repeating all the mistakes I made with the English language. I handed them out to my friends and said, 'If you hear me say this, stop me.' And after awhile I started correcting myself, and my English got better. He got me to correct my oral language, but it was interesting that when I turned in my papers they were grammatically correct because I had learned how to diagram sentences my senior year in high school, but my spoken language was still more relaxed and not correct. So he really worked on my speaking.

Nancy – Did you tell him why your English was that way? Did you tell him you grew up in a household that spoke Swedish?

Ruth – I don't know. I don't remember that. It didn't matter to him because he said he wasn't going to pass me if I didn't make those corrections. I didn't have any choice did I? I ended up working as a secretary assistant in his office interestingly enough.

Nancy – Oh that is interesting if he let you answer the phone for him.

Ruth - Yes, I answered the phone for him - interesting that I ended up doing that. I guess he made the changes he wanted, I made them or something…

Today Ruth teaches fourth graders. My special interest for writing this biography is in the ways she teaches writing – finding the sources of her teaching in the pieces of her life. As we were talking about her background and the things she did growing up, she began to connect her childhood with some of the ways she develops writing with her fourth graders. She is so perceptive and down to earth in the ways she views life and the activities she values, and she passes her sensitivity on to her students.

Ruth - I loved roller-skating. I cranked the skates on over top of my shoes with a key. I always wore my string with my skate key on it around my neck – I wore it to school, I remember that. And I tell the kids – write about whatever, when you are on the bicycle, tell what it feels like. Because I remember roller-skating when I was a kid, on a sidewalk that wasn't one long strip, but in little squares and I would go over these little ridges constantly – it was like dunt, dunt, dunt (rolling her tongue like static on the roof of her mouth). I would go block after block with that little sound and that feeling all over my body. And I have a rudimentary form of a roller blade too, made when they first came out. I brought them in and showed the kids. They called them roller blades, even back then. They had the round rubber wheels kind of like now, but a little thicker. There were just two wheels, not four. So it was kind of like ice skates on wheels. And they clamped on your shoes too like the old roller skates. The wheels were all in one line, two of them. I remember we would play hockey. My bothers and I would get the broom out and we would play on the driveway with a broom. We called it broom hockey.

And I just loved to ride bicycles when I was a kid. I loved to feel the wind blowing my hair back; it was just the sensation of my hair blowing in the wind that I loved. So every once in awhile I get kids to try writing about bike riding and how it feels to ride a bike. I had one little guy one year who was from a foster home. His one big joy was riding his bicycle, and I said, 'Oh just tell me about it. Tell me what you see, what it looks like when things go by you, what it feels like.' And so he started writing about bicycling, riding his bicycle and it was some good stuff. That was a good little kid. I think I would have taken him and adopted him, such a little sweetie. Then they moved to another shelter home because his shelter home closed down. Sweet kid though. I hope he does well.

See the funny thing is I remember these things the kids write because they are so much a part of them. When I think of them, I think of what they have written. And then there was that one about the little kid who had some kind of dog that had really big, loose skin and it looked like he was, oh I forget how he

said it, like he was stretching into his skin or something. That's the thing that is so exciting to watch – when the writing comes from inside of them.

Nancy – And your gift is that you make them look and find those things that are inside of them.

Final Thoughts on Ruth's Youth

"Teachers' words for the kind of impact on their teaching and for the processes by which this impact is felt to have been achieved, point to the strength, depth and persistence of personal pre-professional history in shaping their development as teachers" (Raymond, Butt & Townsend, 1992, p. 151). This childhood, this youth, developed a basis for the teaching profession Ruth eventually chose to pursue. The intriguing part of studying a teacher is in listening to the stories she chooses to tell. Almost without exception these stories Ruth has chosen to tell about her youth can be related to lessons and activities she creates in her classroom today. In chapter 4, Ruth's version of Writers' Workshop will unfold. Described will be Ruth's passion for children that we saw as she told of the little Mexican girl who was all alone, taking care of her younger sister, while her family worked in the fields. Ruth's love of story and song and the creative ways she used them to turn chores into enjoyable experiences, will be seen as her Writers' Workshop explodes into a busy, jovial classroom of students, enjoying the creation of their written pieces. The value Ruth places on her struggles of learning to fine-tune the English language through her Swedish background will be evident as Ruth requires her students to edit their written pieces into proper English.

What occurs previously in a teacher's life is taken into the teaching experience and used in many different ways by a teacher. Rather than narrowing developmental possibilities, these experiences seem to open broad areas for teachers to explore and consider for classroom use. "This should not be understood as implying that teachers' orientations are so deeply set…that no significant further professional development is possible. Rather, [these experiences] that occur before pre-service education seem to delineate broad areas for future development (Raymond, Butt & Townsend, 1992, p. 151).

These pieces of literacy, which appeared in Ruth's youth, are the foundations of her teaching development. Intertwined in these stories, is a future teacher, experimenting with life and experiencing various parts of life that prepared her for teaching.

Chapter 3 details the career experiences and professional development Ruth has experienced in her adult life. It is the stories she has chosen to tell that reveal her teaching life and the many roads she has traveled as a professional teacher.

Chapter 3

CAREER EXPERIENCES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This chapter continues the stories of Ruth's life initiated in Chapter 3. Continuing in chronological order, Chapter 4 begins with Ruth's first experiences after college as a "Teacher Trainer" in the Peace Corps continues to other professional job experiences, and to various professional development opportunities Ruth experienced. Specifically, this chapter progresses as follows: Ruth's Two Years as a "Teacher-Trainer" in the Peace Corps; Teaching Experiences; The Writing Project; A Professional Discussion about Conferencing; Living Like a Writer which includes: A Professional Discussion – Do Writing Teachers Have to be Writers?; A College Student Remembers Fourth Grade Writing Class; Life Experiences Add to Professional Development, Too; Professional Discussion: A Reading Conference and Testing; A Life-Long Learner; and Thoughts on Ruth's Biography.

Here we begin as Ruth completes her college years:

The little girl, who loved story and song, grew up to be exactly what her 6th grade teacher had predicted she would be – a teacher. While living at home, she attended Long Beach State University in Southern California. During her senior year there, she student taught and was then married.

Ruth - My first job, right out of college, was teaching the fourth grade. My husband and I moved to another little town in southern California and lived there for a year and I taught fourth grade. Then we went to Central America to serve in the Peace Corp for a couple of years. That was neat.

Ruth's Two Years as a 'Teacher Trainer' in the Peace Corps

Ruth - Our Peace Corps program trained in the inter-city schools of Philadelphia. I was very fortunate to train there under the Reading Supervisor for the state of New York. She would watch children's reaction to our teaching and then sit down with us to discuss techniques. She really did a much better job of presenting the whole picture of reading skills through the elementary grades to me than my college professors had done. I remember her talking to one of our Peace Corps trainees after one of her lessons where the trainee had gotten

visibly upset and had changed the subject when one child talked excitedly about the maggots in the trashcan. Boy did our supervisor chew her out. She told her that she should have capitalized on his eagerness and interest and used it to create a writing and reading situation for him. Listening to kids, and watching what they are interested in was really something that I agreed with her on.

Nancy – Did the kids in Central America write?

Ruth – Oh yes. It's interesting because I was a 'teacher trainer' there. I worked in the elementary schools. My job was to try and bring new ideas into the schools. All of the elementary schools were parochial schools - the Anglican, the Catholic, the Nazarene. The Nazarene teacher wouldn't even look in the direction of the Catholic school. I mean she wouldn't even look in that direction because it would have been sinful.

Many of the teachers were trained by their elementary teachers. A student could graduate from the 8th grade, spend two years student teaching under her teacher, and then become a full-time teacher. Needless to say, this developed in-bred problems. The Catholic teachers, however, were educated in Irish colleges. So I really wanted the teachers to be able to share ideas with each other and learn from each other. This became a large ecumenical project because many of the churches were so strict about their religion that they wouldn't even look in the direction of the Catholic Church.

Then I started getting a Saturday workshop going and I tried to encourage the teachers to come and present what they were doing in their classrooms so they could learn from each other. To get teachers to come there, I would observe in classrooms and find something neat that they were doing and ask them if they would share that idea with the other teachers on Saturday. And in the end, after my two years, the little Nazarene girl, and I felt like 'Yes, I won,' the little Nazarene girl said to me, 'Do you know, Sister Mary Joseph is a good teacher!' And I thought, 'Yes,' because I had facilitated the breaking down of barriers between them. I had thought if I could just get them talking to each other I could keep their teaching alive and I did.

The teachers there taught under impossible situations: no textbooks, large classes (60 per class in some schools), and few supplies. Mostly the teachers filled the chalkboard in the morning and the children copied it into their little paper booklets, like the college essay booklets we used to use. Then the kids would stand and recite from their writing.

We opened a teacher center, and I do remember one really neat thing we had in there was a large print, primary typewriter. Somebody had donated it from the states, probably because it wasn't used much there. So, some of the teachers could come in and together we would type up the children's stories and put them into booklets for other children to read. We had the center open in the afternoons for the teachers to come by to make teaching aides, type stories, and check out some readers that I talked some elementary schools in the states into sending down to us.

I went back, oh about 20 years later, into the town to visit, to show my son where he was born and visit old friends, and my teacher center, that I had opened, wasn't there. I was kind of sad, but then we were walking down by the bay and there was this huge teacher center. I felt like, 'yes!' It kept working.

Ruth's responsibilities in the Peace Corp exhibited teacher maturity far beyond her years. After only a year of teaching, she was in another country, facilitating growth and reflection among teachers from different religious, elementary schools. She not only facilitated communication between these teachers, but she created situations for them to learn from each other as well. And the teacher center, which began as her Saturday workshops for them, continues on even today, as a large, modern facility.

Teaching Experiences

Ruth – When I came back from the Peace Corps, I taught three years of first grade. I came back to the same Southern California school district, the same school in fact. I did a lot of writing with the kids there. That was interesting because I bought these little notebooks – I don't know if you can even get them now, but you could open them up and slip pages in and click them down. When the kids wrote something I could slip it in there and click it in. I had a little round

table in my classroom for all of their books so they could read each other's books during school time. All of their writing went into their little books. That was my first attempt at getting kids to write and they wrote a lot.

Nancy – Why? Why did you ask them to write and feel the need to get special notebooks for writing?

Ruth – Well, it fit in, and it was a natural. They were doing Open Court, I don't know if you are familiar with Open Court reading, but they do a lot of writing with it. When they learn a letter, they learn to write the letter, they learn to write a word using that letter, and then they develop simple sentences. The kids began to write simple stories and then pretty soon they were writing quite a bit.

Nancy – Do you remember if you followed what Open Court said to do or did you let them write what they wanted?

Ruth - Oh, I let them write what they wanted in those books, that was their creative writing thing. They had writing in their Open Court workbooks. That was learning to write words, but the little clip-in books, that was their book to write stories in. They would use the words they had learned from the Open Court lessons, plus they'd ask you how to spell another word or how to write another word and you could tell them and they'd start writing more.

Nancy – Did you write with then, do you remember writing?

Ruth – Well, I always had to write reports and things. No, I didn't keep a journal. That's what I'm saying; I'm not your typical writing teacher. You know if you look back and you ask me, "When did you start writing?" – I'm really not a writer. I think more than anything, I just enjoy watching kids write.

The next years for Ruth, were a time when Ruth raised children and her husband earned his Ph.D.

Ruth - After teaching first grade, I took some time off to have my second baby and help my first child get through a difficult medical problem. During that time I remember spending a lot of time reading stories to my own kids and singing with them. I would help them act things out and dress up like the characters in their stories. I loved watching them create.

My husband earned his Ph.D., and we moved to Wisconsin for a two-year post-doctorate stay. During that time I substituted in preschools that would let me bring my daughter along. It worked out pretty well for all of us. That period of my life was certainly filled with stories and songs. I also took care of some friends' small children in my home during that time. We spent many happy hours drawing pictures, and having them tell me their stories, which I wrote down for them in books that they could keep.

When Ruth moved to Virginia in 1982, she started teaching in the same school system where she is now, but for the first three years she was moved to three different schools. Finally in 1985 she was assigned to the school where she teaches today. One of the mandates in this school was that everyone teach writing on Friday. Ruth gathered writing prompts from colleagues and from literature and tried to teach writing. Here she talks about her frustrations as students tried to write from an assigned topic.

Ruth – Then we moved to Virginia where I have taught in the first and fourth grades over the years. I remember not being very happy with the curriculum when it was designed to follow the English book page after page. On Fridays we were supposed to have a 'writing time,' but the writing prompts became chores for the students. I really didn't like hearing them say, 'What do we have to write about and how long does it have to be?' They were really not owning their own stories. Our teachers would give students "the topic" and then when they got stuck, everyone would brainstorm ideas on the chalkboard. So, every child would turn out copies of the stuff from the board. This was hardly individual, creative writing.

While Ruth was struggling in the mid-1980's to meet the curriculum demands imposed on her teaching, Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, and Susan Sowers were completing their influential study of writing with the students at Atkinson Academy in New Hampshire. The influence of their study had not yet reached those interested in the teaching of writing. (See Appendix D for a history of the teaching of writing.) It was during the years between 1985, when Ruth

began teaching fourth grade, and 1991, when Ruth took the Writing Project that Her frustrations thickened and her interest in teaching writing in a new way heightened.

Ruth – I was much happier after the summer I spent with the Writing Project. I felt freed up to let the students write from their own experiences. I found the students feeling so much more personally fulfilled as writers. Their stories and their grammar skills flowered because of the desire to make it good for other students to read. One thing followed another, and I began helping the students make books with their stories and poems so that they could publish them in our school library and at home. Helping students to feel that they are 'writers' is very important I feel. I remember one morning having a little girl bounce into class and she looked at me with a great big proud smile and told me, 'You know what? I'm a writer!' These are the things that make me feel really good.

The National Writing Project

> The National Writing Project (NWP) is one of the nation's success stories in education. The project improves the teaching of writing, the neglected third "R," through a teachers-teaching-teachers model of professional development. The NWP was created out of a belief that every student needs to know how to write to succeed in school and in life. Writing is a focal point of nearly every state and school district's education standards, yet the National Writing Project is the only national program that addresses the writing deficiencies in our nation's schools by training teachers to teach writing. (The National Writing Project, 2003)

For Ruth, the Southwest Virginia Writing Project was what Goodson (1991) refers to as a critical incident. This experience gave her the tools and the confidence she needed to return to her classroom and teach writing the way she knew it needed to be taught.

Ruth – In 1991, I participated in a summer writing project. It was part of the National Writing Project offered by our local University. For four weeks during the summer, twenty teachers met and wrote and read and talked about writing. I

remember on the first day of the project we all sat in a circle. The teachers, from grades one through twelve, were all asked to tell about what they taught in their language classes. Every teacher in that circle spoke about teaching the same pieces of grammar – the same kinds of lessons were taught in every grade. When we got to the 11th grade teacher, she stood up, put her hands on her hips and said, 'If all of you have taught these same pieces of grammar every year, then why do students come to the 11th grade and still not know grammar?' The fact was that we were all teaching the same bits of grammar, and it just didn't seem to be sinking in. I thought, 'This is really kind of senseless that we're not really teaching. Students aren't learning, so what are we doing wrong?' That conversation is one that has really stuck with me.

This experience caused Ruth to change how she teaches grammar to 4th graders.

Ruth - I slip grammar in at DOL time. To me that's a lot more meaningful because kids can see it and then when we are writing I can say, 'Remember when we were talking about this? Did your sentence have a subject? Did it tell who you were talking about?' I could do that and make it secondary to the writing or just weave it into their writing, where before it was page 42 in the English book and you sat there and copied a sentence and did a worksheet. Your top kids would pass the test at the end and the bottom kids never did because it didn't have much meaning to them. So hopefully, by using writing to teach grammar it makes it more important to them to try and say it right and write it correctly.

The other thing we talked about in the writing project was the use of small groups in writing class. When we met with each other to share our writing, I felt so insecure bringing my pieces in for everyone to hear. But, it was a very supportive thing because we were encouraged to be very positive with each other. I would say 'this isn't very good' or I could always hear myself apologizing for whatever I wrote. We talked about the fact that in high school you get your papers ripped apart with red ink and you are always insecure because you didn't know what the teacher wanted. You had to figure out what the teacher wanted you to say and how you were supposed to say it. You were writing for a teacher.

Nancy – I keep going on this tangent with writing, suggesting that it's such a personal thing and such an emotional thing. When you put your words down on paper, there is just something about them - you don't want anybody to talk badly about them. You can help me with my writing, but don't smash it.

Ruth – Exactly, you really are baring yourself when you write.

Nancy – You are opening up who you are and what you stand for.

Ruth – Do I dare show this?

Nancy – And imagine the kids, how they must feel. Think of how confused they feel when they really don't know what to write about. Maybe they have ideas they want to write, but they are not sure if it is what the teacher wants.

What was it about the Writing Project that changed you?

Ruth – Well, one thing was that big enlightening conversation about teaching grammar. The other thing was the positive feedback - being very positive about peer interaction, helping each other in a supportive way.

Nancy – Did you finally feel comfortable with your peers talking about your writing? Did you ever get to that point?

Ruth – I think I felt comfortable, I just never felt like I was as good as some of the others in the group. I never lost my insecurity because there were some really good writers in that group. I guess I knew what it was like to have my paper red inked, but I'd never felt what it was like to have positive feedback and feel the comfort level. The Writing Project showed me what that comfort level could feel like, and I make sure that comfort level is present in my classroom.

Nancy – Is there anything else the Writing Project did for you?

Ruth - I also read a lot for the Writing Project. Writers' workshop was a whole new concept for me and I had to learn it, and I wanted to learn it, so I really got wrapped up in it. I had read Lucy Calkins' book, *The Art of Teaching Writing.* It's long, but it reads nicely. You can read her easily. I'd go from one thing to the next, reading everything I could. We were assigned a paper to write and I decided to title my paper, 'What Do I Have to Write and How Long Does it Have to Be?' Those were the two things that were really driving me crazy. Those were the two things the kids would always say, that told me it wasn't their work. My

paper was about how to get kids to write on their own without asking those questions - how to get kids to find their own topics.

Nancy - How did you get to the writing project? How did all that happen?

Ruth – I think a flyer was sent out to school or something.

Nancy – You just decided to go. Did anybody else go?

Ruth – I don't think anybody else in my building has ever been except for me. I talk about it and everything. You have to kind of want to do something different I think. If you are perfectly happy just doing page 42 and 43, then you just sort of stay in that comfort zone. It's just like when I came back, my teaching partner dug her heels in and did not really want to change. Back then we had our desks sitting next to each other and I had my group right next to hers. I guess that year when her kids were off to P.E. or something, I had my group writing, and she was sitting there at her desk. I didn't pay much attention to what she was doing, but she sat there and was listening and later she said, 'I think I might try some of that.'

Nancy – It is a slow process. When I think back to where we were talking about people who were in your writing project and we talked about all the different levels of educational maturity, teacher maturity. I remember some of the gals that were in my project. We were supposed to come in and write for 15 minutes every morning and some of them just didn't do it. It just wasn't in them. It wasn't part of who they were.

Nancie Atwell recommends, "Begin (teaching Writers' Workshop) by starting small – begin with something you feel comfortable with" (Atwell, Workshop, 2003).

Ruth – I have to tell you something funny. Before school ended that year, before I attended the writing project, my teaching partner said to me, 'I know you are going to take this class on writing, but don't come back different.' She said, 'Don't come back different' and then of course I did; I came back different and wanted to try all these new things with the kids. And she was just wringing her hands and she said, 'Well, ok you do it. I'm still going to do it this way.' So she would do the language books everyday, you know page 27, 28, 29, and I started

trying to do Writer's Workshop. It took three years of my doing it to really get it going. I had just a skeletal thing when I started, but that was something they kept reinforcing in the project, 'Don't worry about trying to do it all in the beginning. Just do something. Just get started. Try it, a little thing.' And they were right. Every year you add something to it. And then that year and each year I'd add to it. I'd do something more and more, read more books…at that point I just became a voracious reader on writing.

A Professional Discussion about Conferencing

> We need to think hard about how we talk about writing – to our colleagues, to our students, to ourselves. Language, as the linguists tell us, is also the language of thought. In the end, the words we use to explain such concepts to our students will be the words they use to explain them to themselves. (Fletcher, 1993, p. 6)

Ruth – Conferencing – that was one of the big questions in this Writing Project. The teachers kept saying, 'What do you mean conference with kids? How do you conference?'

The school system where Ruth teaches has early release for students once every six weeks. During this time and during periodic workdays, professional development sessions are offered as choices for teachers. As Ruth's knowledge and experience accumulated over the years, she began sharing specific parts of Writers' Workshop with her colleagues during Professional Development sessions. She has spoken to teachers about conferencing with students about their writing.

Ruth - I'm not sure when I talk to teachers about conferencing that I get through to them. I think you almost have to feel a response to your own writing, like I did in the Writing Project, in order to know what it is like. It's too easy as a teacher, to sit and let your mind wander on all the things you've got to get done and say, 'Uh huh, that's nice.' You really have to focus. You are role modeling how kids should be listening to each other, too. When I have them peer conference I tell them, 'The first most important thing is to listen, not to think, not to daydream, not to look at anybody else, but to listen to what is being read and

respond to something that catches your attention' – that's the second thing they have to do. 'Then if they said something you are confused about or if there is something you want to know more about, then ask that question, but no where in this process should you say, "I think you should do such and such.' It's listen carefully, respond to something that caught your attention, ask any questions about things you are confused about or things you want them to tell you some more about, because that helps them too. As they tell you some more about the story, they'll think about something else they might want to write, but hadn't thought about before.' And it is hard for teachers not to pick up a pencil.

Nancy – …and write that extra letter in where one was left out.

Ruth – Sometimes I pick up a pencil and then I have to make sure I pick up a piece of scratch paper from somewhere. I use them to show kids how words might go together or how to rearrange words so they flow better. When you are conferencing with them, it is a good opportunity to teach a skill lesson or to review one that you talked about in DOLs, but you're still not changing what they're doing here, you are just talking things over. You are not making any changes on their paper.

Nancy – …because as you say, 'Don't write on that child's paper.'

Ruth – 'Don't write on that paper.' (Ruth repeats in a squeaky voice) And it's hard for a teacher not to want to do that.

Nancy – All of this goes back to the way you believe, or I believe, or any teacher believes, the human being learns.

Ruth – Yes, exactly.

Nancy – You can't take this piece of information and attach it to this student if there isn't something to attach it to.

Ruth – …if there is not a reason for them to be learning it or wanting to learn it. It is just like that thing when we sat in the circle and we talked about how we teach the kids the same thing year after year. Why is it not attaching, to use your term, why is it not registering? – because somewhere in there it's not meaningful to the kids. There are no hooks to hang your new learning on. No old information to register with the new.

Nancy – Can you imagine when they get to the 7th or 8th grade and the teacher says nouns and verbs again?

Ruth – I know, I can remember my 10th grade teacher being livid, just screaming at us, her face was bright red and she was screaming at us: 'Why don't you know this?' (chuckle) Every once in awhile I say well we did learn, I can't say we didn't learn when we were kids, but could we have learned more or could we have done better?

Living like a Writer

Something in Ruth's past caused her to be fearful of writing. Maybe it was several things – certain people, certain experiences, or maybe it started because of the mixture of English and Swedish she had in her head for such a long time. Here Ruth thinks aloud and expresses her feelings about living like a writer.

Ruth - I was always afraid to write, so somewhere in there, something developed in me a fear of writing – a feeling that I couldn't do it. I could sing, I could make up stories in my head, I could do all that stuff, but I still don't do a lot of writing. I do a lot of thinking like a writer and I told the kids, "This teaching you guys and listening to you read your comp books has really opened up my life because I can't pass up a leaf and I can't pass up a sound or an experience without thinking how I would describe it to you." I said, "You know, thinking like a writer even when you are walking around makes you more interesting." I tell them, 'It makes you more interesting to other people too, because if you look more closely at life you are going to be a more interesting person. If you and a friend are walking along and they find this or that interesting and they are chatting to you about interesting things they see, that is different from when you have someone who just walks along and you say, 'Did you see such and such? And they say, no…' I said, 'That's not a very interesting person to be with and they probably are not very interesting to themselves.'

We will see later, as Writers' Workshop comes alive in Ruth's classroom, that her deep belief in the power of writing and in the importance of writing in a child's life, are the result of this string of learning and life events. As Ruth and I sat and talked, she shared some very powerful ideas she has about how writing

functions within a life. They reminded me of Ralph Fletcher (1996) as he talks about how writers differ from other people:

> Writers are pretty ordinary people…[they] are like other people, except for at least one important difference. Other people have daily thoughts and feelings, notice this sky or that smell, but they don't do much about it. All those thoughts, feeling, sensations, and opinions pass through them like the air they breathe.
>
> Not writers. Writers react. (p. 3)

Ruth - I think in a way a lot of times when you write, its not always that you are writing with pen and paper, you're thinking - you're thinking about things and using your memories to create in your head. I think you think like a writer when you are playing, when you are growing up; then you are creating in your head even if you're not putting it on paper. I want my kids to remember that because they are not always going to have a pencil and paper handy. If they can watch closely and think like a writer then, when they need to, they can pull on things they have seen, things they have done, stuff they have heard – they can compare and describe and stretch their ideas into good written pieces. Kids can talk in metaphors and similes, but I'm not sure they know they can write it all down. They have to write it to be able to do it. They think they can tell me lots of details about a movie, but writing down the details is a different skill.

A Professional Discussion – Do Writing Teachers Have to be Writers?

There are differences of opinion on this question, "Do writing teachers have to be writers?" Some of the controversy comes in the way the question is worded. It might say, "Do teachers have to write?" meaning do they have to write in class as their students write, or the questions might ask, "Do writing teachers have to be writers?" I have heard discussions about this last question vary from "writing teachers should be published writers" to "teachers should be able to write emails and letters," - a great difference to be sure. During a workshop presented by Nancie Atwell, she spoke to this question with two ideas: first, she does not write in class with her students because she does not have time to be the teacher and write too. And second, teachers of writing do not have to be great

writers. They just have to be able to write a little bit better than their students! (Atwell, 2003)

The National Writing Project's Position Paper lists eleven "Basic Assumptions". Number seven reads like this:

"Basic Assumptions of the National Writing Project

7. *As the process of writing can best be understood by engaging in this process, teachers of writing should write." (National Writing Project, Basic Assumptions, 2003)*

And the NCTE (National Council for the Teachers' of English) Position Statement states:

> *Writing teachers should themselves be writers. Through experiencing the struggles and joys of writing, teachers learn that their students will need guidance and support throughout the writing process, not merely comments on the written product. (2003)*

Ruth does not think of herself as a writer. We discussed her views on this topic.

Nancy – There is a lot of research out there from people in professional journals that say if you are going to teach writing you need to be a writer. In fact the National Writing Project believes that writing teachers should be writers themselves.

Ruth – I know that and I feel guilty about that too.

Nancy – Well, maybe it's not true. Lucy Calkins says, "I have seen teachers who do not regard themselves as writers and yet teach writing in wondrous ways" (1994, p. 13). I think you might be who she is talking about.

Ruth – But I also read some stuff along the way, I'd have to go back and look, but somebody said the most important thing is to encourage writing in your kids. Somewhere in there somebody said that you really don't have to sit and write when your kids are writing, because if you do, there is no time to involve yourself in their writing, if you are writing yourself.

Nancy – It's unrealistic to think *you* could write during writers' workshop because once your classroom gets going not everybody is sitting and writing. Everybody's doing whatever he or she needs to do.

Ruth – Everybody is doing their own thing.

Nancy – You can't write. There is no way you can sit there and write because you have too many things to do. You are at the computer, or conferencing or giving directions…

Ruth – And I guess the more I think about it, I do write. My teaching experiences have influenced my writing in the respect that when I do write to somebody or write about something, I know I'm not just going to write, 'It was a nice party. Thank you, we had a good time.' I'm going to tell them something about it. I'm going to add some details. So it has affected my correspondence, but I keep thinking I should write more. Every once in awhile I start some little piece about my childhood or something and then I get side tracked. I have pieces I've started here and there that sit in the drawer somewhere.

A College Student Remembers Fourth Grade Writing Class

Ruth's students are greatly affected by their experiences with writing in the fourth grade. Here Ruth tells the story of a young man who wrote about her teaching in his college entrance essay.

Ruth - Remember I showed you the letter written by one of my students? In his college entrance essay he talked about learning to write in the fourth grade. He wrote about how he felt about himself, which I thought was kind of neat -he thought about himself as a writer. I think I taught him in one of my first, early years, when I started writers' workshop. He was a kid who would mess around in the classroom. I did indeed put my watch in his hand and I said, 'Here go sit out there for five minutes.' I said, 'When it rings just come on in.' I put my watch on his hand and sent him outside by himself and you know I could have been hung for not supervising that child.

Nancy – You could have made the front page of the paper!

Ruth – I could have, but it made so much difference, it meant so much to him, just to go sit out there on the lawn. There wasn't anybody out back. I said,

‘Listen to everything, and don’t write anything.’ I didn’t send him out with paper and pencil, I said, ‘Just go out there and look and listen.’

Nancy – Did you peek at him?

Ruth – Well, he was down there…

Nancy – Down by the creek?

Ruth – Yes, that’s before they fenced off the creek. He was sitting there poking sticks in the creek. But he came back before the watch rang and he said, ‘I know what I want to write about.’ And he went right to his seat and picked up a pencil and started writing. And then he came up and he said, ‘Can I read this to you?’ He read it and I said, ‘That is so neat. I feel like I’m down there with you.’ And you know, he was excited then, he was rolling. I said, ‘And tonight take your composition book with you and go out and go looking and listening again.’ So he did and it turned out he had a yard, a big yard that had trees, almost like a little bit of a mini woods kind of thing. He went out there and came up with the neatest stuff. When he came back and read it, and I was thinking, ‘Oh my gosh.’ This was a kid who was sitting there messing around.

Nancy – I didn’t realize he was that kind of kid.

Ruth –One day he came in and he had this stick in his hand that he’d found out there on the playground and he said – why he thought he had to ask me for permission to take it home I don’t know, but he said, ‘Can I take this home?’ And I said, ‘No’ and I snatched it from his hand and he looked at me like ‘Huh?’ I said, ‘The only way you can take this stick home is if you write about it!’ And he laughed with me because then I started laughing too. It wasn’t a mean thing – he knew I was being silly with him. But he came back to school the next day, and he threw a piece of paper on my desk and he said ‘HERE!’ with the same sort of response I had given him. I laughed and said, ‘Did you really write about the stick?’ He said, ‘I DID!’ He knew I was teasing about it, but anyway he did it and it was really cute. It was a stick that had a vine that had grown around it so it was gnarled, twisty gnarled, and he wrote about it and called it the witch’s hiking stick, or something like that. But it was cute…’nothing but a vine could make this stick mine’ (Ruth quotes her student).

Nancy – You were talking about sending him outside to look, where did that come from, where did the looking come from? Did you decide that or did you just put it together somehow?

Ruth – It just seemed like the thing to do.

Nancy – That's what you took from the writing project. You came back to your room and you started having kids look.

Ruth – I started having them write ideas in their composition books. I didn't to give them topics to write about; they had to find topics and in order to find topics you have to look for them. You have to think.

Nancy – So it was just logical

Ruth – Yes, it was just logic.

Life Experiences Add to Professional Development, too.

Who knows how we put things together – how we read something or experience something and then change it into our own liking and for our own use? Ideas in Ruth's classroom come from everywhere in her life. She reads, she interacts with students and colleagues, she attends professional conferences and all of these experiences become mingled together to create Ruth, the teacher.

Ruth takes advantage of opportunities at any time during her life. Here she quizzed a writer she met on a recent trip to California.

Ruth - I sat next to a writer on the airplane flying out to California this summer when we took Mom out to visit her brother and sister. I kept pumping him for things to tell my fourth graders. I said, 'I teach writing to fourth graders. I'd love to tell them I sat next to a writer. Tell me what I could pass on to them.' He said, 'Tell them get on the email and write.' Because he said, 'The email is so comfortable. You can just write, spur of the moment whatever thoughts come to your head. Write to a friend. Get on the email,' he said. 'Tell them to email.' He kept saying that over and over again.

Nancy – What age man was he?

Ruth – He was a young fellow. And I thought well, yea, he had a point because when you write an email you are writing meaningful things and they are

coming from you. It's original. He wrote articles for the airline magazines and he wrote book critiques. It was an interesting little sideline. I think it would be fun to talk to some writers. And I keep thinking it would be fun to write kids books someday.

Professional Development – Attending NCTE in Knoxville, Tennessee

What Ruth does in her classroom today comes from many different places. This piece came from Knoxville, Tennessee, where she arrived extra early to a presentation in order to hear Donald Graves and Ralph Fletcher talk about developing characters. Ruth knew it was important to hear what these nationally known writers had to say about the teaching of writing. She wiggled her way into a front row seat and learned new ideas that she would take back to her students – ideas that would perhaps change the way they would view writing during their life.

Ruth - At the National Council for the Teachers of English Conference in Knoxville, Tennessee, I listened to Donald Graves and Ralph Fletcher. The two of them were presenting on character. That room was full - it was a big room full of people. My teaching partner went with me, by then she had started doing Writers' Workshop. I said, 'I have to get there early, I want to sit in a front row seat. I don't want to miss anything.' And I had notepaper and I sat there on the front row, and I was good to go. The crux of what they were trying to say was 'get to know your main character really well – he will lead you. Get to know your main character and your character will tell you what he needs to do.' In other words, like I tell the kids, you can sort of plan an idea, where the story will go, and what kind of tension points are needed to keep the story moving, but the actual writing, as you begin to write that chapter, the actual writing will develop if you get to know that character. At first I tell the kids to start living with their character a little bit. Take him to the dinner table. What would he think? What would he do? And that is hard - some of them can do it, but some of them can't do it. But the message from Graves and Fletcher was that if you really get to know the character in your story well, live with him and take him everywhere you go, then as you are writing, this character will develop and lead you through your story.

A Professional Conversation: A Reading Conference and Testing

Ruth - And I remember in 1990, at a reading conference in Norfolk, Virginia, Donald Graves was the keynote speaker. That was just before we had a big storm heading our way. Remember that year when we had a huge snowstorm? My husband said, 'Get home! Get home!' and I said, 'But I want to hear Donald Graves talk!' (shrieking her voice and chuckling)...but Graves talked about developing writers, and his work in the prisons. I don't know how it all came about at the time, but he was invited to the prison to work with prisoners on their writing. During his presentation he told about this one young man who was so rebellious about writing. After several meetings the convict whipped out all of this stuff he had been writing, and Graves said it was good stuff.

But he was talking about that and then got to ranting and raving about the Literacy Passport Test, where we gave a topic and students had to write on it. It was a test we use to give in the sixth grade – reading, writing and math. What I tell the kids about taking tests is you are going to have to do this test. You're not going to get to conference with anybody so it's none of the real life stuff like we have learned about in class. But you have to think, 'Now if I were conferencing with somebody what would that person think about what I wrote?' I said, 'That's another step up,' but if they haven't had that first experience of conferencing with their classmates, they don't have that to draw on. In other words I tell them to conference with their own writing. 'What could I do different? How could I fix this up?' And then when it changed from the Literacy Passport to the SOLs, I sat down, and I really looked at the requirements for both of them, and found that they are very, very, very similar. And the point scale is very similar. There isn't a whole lot of difference. Two-thirds of the test is on presentation, voice and all that stuff. Grammar is just a third of it.

Nancy – The mechanics are a very small part of it.

Ruth – So teaching writing the way we used to, where you teach the mechanics as the core of a language class, really wasn't addressing what was needed for this test.

Nancy – You can't teach mechanics over here and writing over here because we get to the eleventh grade and students still don't know about mechanics.

Ruth – So if mechanics can just sort of come in, if they can weave themselves in as they write, then students can apply what they learn as they create their written pieces. You see them writing and you see one of those DOLs being misused again and you keep thinking, 'Oh gosh, you'd think they would remember that,' but eventually over the year they start to make those corrections and even if they don't make all of them, some of it's got to be here. You know I learn things and I sort of forget them, but then I hear them again and it's 'Oh yea. I remember that.' You have something you are pinning new learning on.

Nancy – Something you are relating to. An experience you remember. It's the light bulb story.

A Life-Long Learner

Ruth - I like taking courses because I want to take them. I have taken some other courses during the summer, but I especially liked an ecology economics class I took during this past summer. It was really neat. We went out in the field and looked at different things, and we had speakers from all over the place that came in and I love that. It was so cool. We looked at a reclaimed, coal-mining site and some forms of water cleanup, and all kinds of ecology related projects. It was really an informative class. I enjoyed it.

Nancy - So you are just a life-long learner.

Ruth – I think you should be. I think you have to be to make life interesting. I always tell the kids, 'Everyday you should learn something new. Everyday of your life you should learn something new.' (chuckle)

Thoughts on Ruth's Biography

Ruth's professional experiences and professional development span a wide variety of learning – an accumulation of life which has caused her thinking and beliefs to center on teaching students to write. This biography of Ruth gives shape to her life, understanding to her development as a teacher, and the influence of her biography on her teaching:

> Biographies that evoke full lives – inner and outer persons – provide us with knowledge about how other persons have shaped their existence. We see the process by which that shape comes into being. We may like that shape, be disgusted by it, or stand in total awe of it, but, in an immediate sense, our reaction to the shape of the life is of less importance than the fact that we *see* the shape and the process that led to it. (Veninga, 1983, p. 61)

Ruth's teaching stands embedded within her life. This woman, this professional educator, brings into her daily teaching a mingling of overlapping pieces of experience and knowledge. With each conference she attended and each class she embarked on, the layers of understanding thickened as she considered new ways to teach her classroom of students. This understanding of a teacher's life brings new vision to the complex nature of what it takes to teach our nation's children. Hargreaves concurs:

> A teacher's professional (and indeed personal) *biography,* her past and projected *career*, and her educational *perspective* form closely interwoven aspects of her professional development and have significant effects on her approach to classroom teaching…the strategies [a teacher] adopts in the classroom and her attitudes to change are very much bound up with the kind of person she has become, the professional experiences she has had, the perspectives on teaching and learning to which she has become committed and the particular groups or cultures of teachers with which she has identified and from which she gains support. (1986, p. 138)

Ruth's experiences detail her knowledge about teaching and life in classrooms. The following chapter visualizes the use of her knowledge and her life. In Chapter 4, Ruth's classroom comes alive as her teaching of Writers' Workshop conceptualizes the details of her professional development through the specific lessons, literature, and atmosphere she has chosen to create the learning environment in her classroom.

Chapter 4
RUTH'S WRITING CLASSROOM – A SPECIFIC LOOK AT WRITERS' WORKSHOP

This chapter draws together, in an integrated mosaic, Ruth's playful childhood, her mother's Swedish background, her own school experiences, her insightful teaching in the Peace Corps, her active role in numerous conferences and professional conversations, and other influences on Ruth's teaching from throughout her life. The portrait of Ruth's teaching in this chapter is the synthesis of these life experiences that formed Ruth's philosophy of the teaching of writing and its practical application in the classroom.

The Structure of this Chapter

Writers' Workshop in Ruth's classroom began during the second hour of the first day of school and continued each morning during my sixty-nine days of participant observation. This chapter analyzes Ruth's teaching of Writers' Workshop. As I analyzed data, three main sections and several sub-sections emerged that assembled and layered the progression of methods Ruth used to teach writing to her fourth grade students:

1. "Beginning the "Writerly" Life," examines data from days one through eight and is sub-divided into three sections: "The First Looking and Responding" examines data from day one, "Becoming Authors" examines data from day two, and "Writing Skills Thicken" examines data from days three through eight. The third section, "Writing Skills Thicken" is divided into two sections that explicate the purposes of instruction during these days: "Creating Writing Habits" and "Teaching Writing Skills."
2. "Students Developing as Writers" describes data from days nine through sixty-nine and is divided into two sections: "Share Time" and "Workshop." Within "Share Time" are three sub-sections: "Responding to Student Writing," "Teaching Elements of Writing," and "The Tacit Element." Within "Workshop" are five sub-sections: "Structure and Purpose of Workshop," "Bringing a Piece to

Publication," "Teaching Conferencing and Response to Writing," "Conferencing with Students," and "Conferencing into the Zone of Proximal Development."

3. "Meandering Through Writers' Workshop" is a series of portraits of teaching and learning events from throughout this research period. Here I describe vignettes of learning within this Writers' Workshop that exemplify the challenges of teaching writing. Portrayed are the journeys of six students who purposefully meandered through this Writers' Workshop.

Each section analyzes Ruth's teaching of writing and students' response to that teaching with the specific, appropriate literature described in Chapter 2 in the section "Embedding Analysis from the Literature." Each section and sub-section progressively adds layers of teaching and response that build and thicken to portray students' growing knowledge of writing. The analysis accumulates to portray a broad sense of the activities Ruth utilized to teach and facilitate writing, and the reactions from students as they developed the skills of writing and the processes necessary to polish and publish their written pieces. While this chapter begins as a step-by-step account of what Ruth and her students accomplished during writing classes, it is not meant to be used as a prescription for teaching writing. It is instead meant to be an array of possibilities from which to draw ideas about the teaching of writing.

Data analyzed in the first section, "Beginning the 'Writerly' Life," encompass the first nine days of school. The writing of the first day, "The First Looking and Responding," and the second day, "Becoming Authors," analyzes the way Ruth initially began to create this community of writers. During these first two days, students began to know each other in personal ways and see themselves as writers. The analysis of these first two days is designed to place the reader in the center of Ruth's writing classroom and proceed through the specific lessons and activities with Ruth and her students.

Data obtained from the next six days, "Writing Skills Thicken," are divided into two sections: "Creating Writing Habits" and "Building Writing Skills." Data

were analyzed in detail to provide the reader with a specific understanding of how this writing class continued to progress. Ruth realized that these fourth grade students had not experienced writing from her conceptual stance nor had they been guided to discover their own topics by closely observing their world. Her initial task had been to encourage students to discover their own writing topics by creating the habit of searching inside their own world for ideas and to begin creating writers, by teaching her students skills that writers' use. This section analyzes the teaching methods Ruth used to begin creating writing habits and teaching writing skills to her students.

The analysis of these first nine days is written in descriptive detail. It is important to experience these first days in detail in order to understand the basis from which this writing classroom operated. The structure of these first eight days differed from the remainder of the year. The lessons and activities Ruth taught during these days were designed to excite students about writing possibilities and motivate them to explore their world and to write about their discoveries.

The second large division, "Writers' Workshop – Developing Student Writers," analyzes Ruth's teaching for the remaining sixty days of my participant observation. The analysis of days nine through sixty-nine is divided into two sections: "Share time" and "Workshop." At the beginning of this time period, on the ninth day of school, the structure of class time changed; Ruth began to facilitate a short, whole-group, ten-minute, share time with a one-hour workshop. This was the format used for the remainder of the school year. Share time supported two purposes: first, for Ruth to listen to students read journal writings and for her to respond, orally in a positive way, to the writing; and second, to teach a characteristic of writing through the reading and discussion of a story, poem, or a selection of professional literature. My analysis of "Share Time" data includes three areas Ruth used in her teaching during this time: "Responding to Student Writing," a section which analyzes various ways Ruth responded as students read from their journals each morning; "Teaching Elements of Writing," which analyzes various pieces of children's literature and professional writings Ruth used to teach the elements of writing (a complete, descriptive list is found in

Appendix C); and “The Tacit Element,” a discussion of the importance and use of recognizing individual “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi, 1974) students bring to this writing classroom. Within each of these sub-sections are analyses of the literature Ruth read, vignettes of student journal writing and sharing, and an analysis of the teaching Ruth chose to include in this writing classroom during share time.

Workshop, from day nine on, lasted for about an hour and was the time for individual students to proceed doing whatever was needed in order to move through their own processes of writing. My analysis of “Workshop” data includes five sections Ruth used in her teaching during workshop: “Structure and Purpose of Workshop” is an description of workshop as a classroom situation housing an underlying structure and purpose situated specifically to create writers; “Bringing a Piece to Publication,” is an analytical discussion of the procedures Ruth required of students in order to move through the processes of writing and bringing a piece to the publication stage; “Teaching Conferencing and Response to Writing,” describes a writer’s need for response and the manner in which Ruth taught conferencing to her students; “Conferencing with Students,” analyzes the purposes of conferencing and exemplifies conferencing through vignettes of specific student conferences; “Conferencing into the Zone of Proximal Development,” analyzes the rationale for conferencing through the Vygotskian lens of constructionism. Within the analysis of these sub-sections is a broad picture of the inner workings of workshop, vivid pictures of students becoming writers, and the theoretical basis for teaching writing in a Writers’ Workshop.

Beginning the “Writerly” Life

“Writing does not begin with deskwork, but with lifework” (Calkins, 1994, p.3)

On the first day of school, at 9:00 a.m., as Ruth’s students entered her classroom, she smiled, extended her hand to them, and offered a verbal welcome. Some students gave her a high five and others smacked her hand as they passed her. Ruth’s first efforts to build a learning community with this class began a few days before. Ruth met most of these children and their parents at their back to school, welcoming meeting (Journal, Third Workday, Fall, 2001).

This morning's greetings reflected the excitement of the first day of school and Ruth's commitment to making everyone feel welcomed into her classroom "learning community" (Calkins, 1994, p. 31).

Ruth facilitated the mundane, administrative duties teachers must endure on the first day of school. By 10:00 a. m. we had attended a school meeting, a fourth grade meeting, and returned to Ruth's classroom. Ruth was ready to begin her writing class.

The First Looking and Responding – Day One

Inside the classroom, Ruth talked to her students about what was to come. "We are going to go outside and see what things look like. Put your hands together like this," she said, making a small circle in the air with her thumb and index finger. "You are going to explore this much space in the grass – just this small part of the world." Students asked, "Should we bring paper with us to write on?" As Ruth put her hands on each side of her head, at her eyes and squeezed as if preparing her brain to think, she replied, "No, we are going to remember what we look at" (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001).

This conversation prepared students for the outside activity to come – an activity that would initiate a fresh way for students to begin developing ideas about experiences in their lives. Ruth valued the importance of learning about the lives and interests of her students. She knew she must somehow immerse them in situations that would cause them to think and respond with details from their lives (Atwell, 1998). Ruth "cannot make [her students] have ideas or not have them" (Dewey, 1933, p. 41), but she could place them in situations where they were likely to have sensations and ideas in worthwhile ways. "[She] began by looking at [her] students as teachers who would instruct [her] about their lives" (Atwell, 1998, p. 55). Ruth was ready to immerse her students into a new situation and direct them to look in a new way – a way that began to change how they viewed and thought about their world.

> We went outside through the back door. It was 10:25 a.m. in the morning. The sun was shining. Dew was on the grass. Students formed the small circle with

> their hands and moved away from the sidewalk to find their space in the grass. They looked like frogs as they knelt down to search this small part of the earth. “You have one minute to look,” Ruth told them. Some students kept their hands in the shape of the circle and looked. Others broke the circle and used their fingers to move grass and leaves so they could see farther down toward the dirt. When the minute was up, Ruth called students to her in a huddle. She pointed from one student to the next, “What did you see?” The answers were varied and insightful. Students replied, “Weeds that looked like little cucumbers.” “I peeled away grass and saw a little tiny hole.” “Clover and three bugs.” “I counted 51 pieces of grass, some weeds and 2 clovers.” Ruth wanted to extend their thinking. She wanted them to describe what they saw and relate it to something else – something else familiar to them. Ruth probed them with questions, “What did it look like? “How would you describe what you saw? Relate it to something else you know about. Think about it.” Students began to describe what they saw with additional details, “Weeds that looked like roof pieces.” “An ant that didn’t look too happy with me looking around.” “Clover and bugs that looked like a village” (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001).

Ruth was causing her students to think and integrate what Calkins calls “following our ideas” into their responses. Calkins explains that “[i]n order to make meaning, we need…to follow *our ideas*. We can’t look at a subject and expect that an idea will jump and hit us on the head. We have to *make* ideas” (1994, p. 473). Ruth was helping students to begin to develop their own ideas by observing and connecting the observations to something they already knew.

Next Ruth gave another instruction. “Now make a bigger space with your arms. Make a circle with your arms like this,” she said, demonstrating a circle with her arms, so big, that only her fingertips touched. “I’ll give you more time to look in this bigger space. Find a spot” (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001). Everyone moved out across the grass, in different directions this time, sensing the need for a larger space. Ruth timed five minutes for students to observe. At the end of this observation period students gathered around Ruth on the sidewalk, hopping up

and down, eager to share. Looking took practice and focus to observe and respond. This second session brought not only more detailed descriptions, but now students began to extend their responses to include details from past experiences – they were beginning to paint pictures with their words. Ruth called on students and they shared these responses: “It looked like a nursing home thing – the clover with shriveled leaves.” “I saw dead grass that looked like a bird’s nest.” “The grass looked like trees with giant pine cones.” Ruth beamed. “That’s good,” she told them, “your words draw a picture in my mind,” (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001) Ruth wanted her students to be able to create strong images and develop the habit of observing the world so they could create their own pictures using words (Fletcher, 1996).

Ruth provided students with a few more minutes to make discoveries at yet another large area. This time they chose a spot in a different area of the schoolyard and studied it, getting down on their hands and knees, sifting carefully through the grass, looking and thinking about what their eyes saw. This time, when Ruth gathered students back in a huddle, the descriptions were even more vivid. Students responded with these comparisons: “The grass looks like New York City with tall buildings.” “I found a spider’s web that looked like a swimming pool.” “I saw a seed in a spot that made it look like a rose.” “I saw a root above ground that looked like a bridge.” “That’s great,” Ruth said, “you are looking at your world with different eyes. You are seeing things in different ways. This kind of looking and comparing is exactly what I want you to do.” (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001). Ruth’s students were looking with different eyes – they were seeing things they had looked at before, but now these images were changing and extending in their minds. This “rigorous pursuit of their ideas” became the “primary content” of this course work – a “student-centered” classroom where writing ideas came from within students’ lives (Atwell, 1998, p. 71).

Next students would learn about a “container” (Calkins, 1994, p. 24) they would use to record their images – a “container” that if used properly, would house each students’ way of looking at and responding to their world. These containers, whether called a “notebook,” a “day book,” or a “journal” are “places

for *rehearsal.* They are seed beds out of which rough drafts grow" (Calkins, 1994, p. 24). From outside on the sidewalk, Ruth instructed students about the next procedures: "Now we are going inside. You get your pencil and writing journal out and just start writing. Write about the things you saw and what they looked like. In the end you are going to pick a favorite" (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001).

Inside students wrote in their writing journals. Ruth roamed the room, looking over shoulders, whispering in ears, encouraging the writing. "I can see you drawing a picture with your words," she said (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001). In the second hour of the first day of school, while other teachers were still putting papers in folders and gathering the year's tissue boxes, Ruth had begun a writing experience with her students that would continue each day, throughout the school year. Her students had begun thinking and writing in ways that would grow in layers and thicken as the school year progressed. This was the first layer, the beginning of a writing experience unlike any of these students had encountered before.

After a few moments, Ruth interrupted students as they were still writing. "Over there on the left side of the page, in the margin, write a few words to remind you of the things you still need to write about." (This was an instruction Ruth used frequently – Having students jot notes in the margin saved precious class time, suggested future writing topics, and kept students from sitting and waiting on others to complete their writing.) "Now come up front and gather on the rug at the board," Ruth instructed students (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001). Students continued to jot down notes in their journals as they moved toward the rug area, in front of the board. Ruth began her inquiry and discussion as soon as students were seated. She called on students to share their favorite observations as she recorded them on the dry erase board. The board gradually filled with each student's favorite memory of their discovery from outside. Ruth explained that these ideas would make a class book by noon the next day. "When you arrive in the morning, you will each receive your favorite idea typed on a half sheet of paper. It will be your job to illustrate your idea, so be thinking about how

you picture the idea you remember from outside in the grass" (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001).

Becoming Authors – Day Two

"Publication -The beginning of the Writerly Life." (Calkins, 1994, p. 261)

On the second day of school, students experienced exhilaration when the ideas from the previous days looking and responding were put into print. This day began to accumulate writing knowledge and experiences that thicken the "writerly life" (Calkins, 1994, p. 261) for Ruth's students.

Students arrived in the classroom to find a half-sheet of paper lying on their desks. I was seated in the back of the classroom because I wanted to watch students as they read from the papers. Anticipation permeated the classroom. One by one students reacted with smiles, excitement, and eyes that widened, as they read their words (Journal, Day Two, Fall, 2001). Ruth had typed each student's words in short lines that made them look like a poem. She began each poem with the students' name as illustrated by these examples:

Justin saw some grass
that was totally level
so that it looked like
a flat bridge
that could be walked over.

Elena saw an ant
finding its way
through a
jungle of grass.

Brandon found a spider web
with dew on it
that looked like
a swimming pool.

"Notice how I typed your ideas," Ruth said to students. "I divided your words into different lines. Now they look more like a poem. Read it to yourself and see what you think." Ruth gave students a moment to read their poems. Tyler reacted with the news that he was now an author. "Cool," he said, "I'm a poet!" Students were instructed to illustrate what they had written. Ruth told them to illustrate the whole page around their writing. They worked on the illustrations at various times during the morning. Ruth told them she did not want a rushed job, but instead a really good job (Journal, Day Two, Fall, 2001).

By the end of the day all pages had been illustrated. Ruth bound the pages together with a spiral binding. This title appeared on the cover:

Taking Time to Look Closely at Life

Mrs. Lacy's Fourth Grade Class

August 22, 2001

Inside this book were the first writings from these students in their fourth grade year of school. On the second day of school, this class had already published their first book. Each of Ruth's students was an author.

Ruth believed that the teaching of writing was about how individuals view and react to their own world (Journal, Day Two, Fall, 2001). Calkins (1994) explains that "[w]e cannot teach writing well unless we trust that there are real, human reasons to write" (p. 12). Ruth's students did have real reasons to write. She knew it was her responsibility to facilitate students' views of their world and prove to them that their stories were worthy of the written word. Beginning the school year in this manner was a conception that took years of research, consideration, and tweaking to create. It was a method of initiating Writers' Workshop that accomplished specific goals for Ruth's students. Ruth knew, from her years of developing as a writing teacher, that "[g]etting students started writing isn't getting students writing. It is getting them thinking…" (Rief, 1992, p. 38). During the first two days of school, Ruth started students thinking and motivated them to experience the exhilarations of being an author.

For the next six days, Ruth would build her teaching of writing on this foundation. Knowledge of writing and literature would thicken each day, as Ruth

involved her students in writing activities and immersed them in the language and literature of writing.

Writing Skills Thicken – Days Three through Eight

During my analysis of data from this next time period, days three through eight, two broad topics of teaching surfaced: Creating Writing Habits and Teaching Writing Skills. During Writer's Workshop, on days three through eight, Ruth continued to lay a foundation for the year's writing class. She added to the looking and responding done during the first two days. She used the entire hour and ten minute class period to create writing habits and teach writing skills that would move her students toward becoming better writers.

Creating Writing Habits

Ruth believed that her students needed to form writing habits in order to develop their skills as writers. Specifically she wanted students to be in the habit of doing the following:

1. Keep their journals with them at all times.
2. Look at their world with eyes wide open and compare what they saw to something they already knew about.
3. Write anytime, everyday in their writer's journal about anything that caught their attention.
4. Share their written words orally, everyday, during share time. (Journal, Fall, 2001)

These habits were the initial basis from which Ruth worked to create writers among the students in her classroom. Habits one, two, and three involved the use of students' writing journals. Ruth frequently reminded students to keep their journal with them wherever they went and to write in it whenever something caught their attention. As day three of the school year began, Ruth stood before the class, holding up a writing journal, ready to remind students of its use. "What did we say this was?" Ruth asked. "Like your right arm." "Like a diary," students responded. "It's more than a diary," Ruth said. "It's to write down your ideas and anything you see or hear that is of interest to you" (Journal, Day Three, Fall, 2001). Ruth required students to take their writing journals with them wherever

they went. Ruth wanted students to "live like a writer, not just in school during writing time, but wherever [they went], at anytime of day" (Fletcher, 1996, p.3). They were to write about anything in life that caught their interest. The idea of students keeping this journal with them all the time was new to Ruth's students. For some it was an easy habit to create, but for others the habit took time (Journal, Fall, 2001). Ruth wanted students to understand that "[s]o much of writing is about sitting down and doing it every day, and so much of it is about getting into the custom of taking in everything that comes along…" (Lamont, 1994, p. 151). Ruth built these days into her curriculum at the beginning of the year because she knew that the habit of writing everyday would take time to create (Journal, Day One, Fall, 2001).

Ruth's introductory writing lesson, from the first day of school, was the first layer of teaching and learning that initiated a yearlong assignment to look at the world and respond. Ruth immediately combined this assignment with the requirement to write everyday in a journal. Combining these two assignments was important to the changes Ruth wanted to create in her students' lives because "[k]eeping a writer's notebook can help you be more alive to the world. It can help you develop the habit of paying attention to the little pictures and images of the world you might otherwise ignore" (Fletcher, 1996, p. 45).

Ruth required students to record and respond to their lives because she wanted them to realize that writing begins not by sitting down to write something big, but by gathering small "seeds" (Fletcher, 1996, p. 30) from life, which later grow into bigger pieces of writing. Calkins (1994) concurs: "I…believe that authorship does not begin in the struggle to put something big into print; rather, it begins in living with a sense of awareness" (p. 3). Ruth's teaching reflected Calkins' ideas. Students' awareness of life around them grew daily as was evidenced by these comparisons shared by students during the first days of this class. They reflected the "looking and responding" progress made during days three through eight:

- The butter on my Eggo looked like a dog and a fire hydrant.

- I looked in my sister's room. The bed was not made up. The piles of covers looked like clouds.
- The noise on the bus sounded like a lawn mower – the kind you crank.
- The towels looked like flying carpets on the clothesline.
- The bubbles on the soap bar looked like see through tents.
- The flowers on our deck looked like a church choir.
- Our barn looks like a gray box.
- The bat hanging from the tree looks like a leaf.
- My cat's purr sounds like an engine idling.
- Dad made pancakes with rings that looked like tree stumps.
- At Bristol Speedway the burning rubber smells like 14 skunks spraying all at once. (Journal, Day Two, Fall, 2001)

I noted in my journal that while students' observations and resulting comparisons were numerous and impressive, it was really only five or six students who were contributing at this point. The biggest part of this class had not yet caught on to this idea of looking at their world and writing about it (Journal, Day Two, Fall, 2001).

The fourth habit of orally sharing their writing encompassed the first three habits. For students to participate in share time, they must have looked at and responded to the world and written about it in their journal. During days three through eight, Ruth sought to create this fourth habit by gathering students together on the rug at the front of the room and spending large amounts of time listening and responding to what they had written in their journals. This was called share time. Creating writing habits meant working on them, everyday. Students grew to know that every morning they would have an opportunity to share what they had written – they knew that each day they could share a response they had written about some part of their own world (Journal, Fall, 2001).

Days passed as more and more students wrote in their journals and came to share time ready to contribute. I watched students as they sat on the floor

during share time. Each student was watching and listening. Those who had not written during the first days seemingly felt left out of the sharing process and were making bigger efforts to become recipients of Ruth's positive responses and full-fledged members of the writing community (Journal, Fall, 2001). Ruth explained to me what she felt teachers needed to understand about this part of the teaching of writing: "It is very important to take the time to share what they have written in their journals. This is how some students can learn from their peers about refining the process of looking closely at things and telling what they look like" (Journal, Fall, 2001).

Ruth handled those who were not participating with encouragement and patience. For some students this new assignment was difficult. At first Eli could not remember to take his journal home with him. When he finally did take it home, he could not find anything to write about. One day he shared this excuse for not writing: "I just sat in the car, at the grocery store, while my mom talked on the phone for two hours. I didn't have time to write." Ruth replied, "That was a perfect opportunity to look around and write about what was going on in the parking lot. You can write about anything you see, no matter where you might be" (Journal, Day Thirteen, Fall, 2001). For Eli and others, these new writing habits took time to create. Ruth was patient as she responded with encouragement and offered suggestions for writing. Her goal was to encourage everyone to write and share. From past experiences, Ruth knew that each student would begin to write in his or her own way and in his or her own time. The levels of writing experience students brought with them to this class varied, therefore; their starting points were different and their progress was individual. Ruth's manner of teaching writing facilitated these differences and her demeanor created a safe atmosphere for students to grow as writers. The creation of these four habits took time, teaching skill, and a special kind of patience Ruth acquired through years of experience (Journal, Fall, 2001).

Building Writing Skills

In addition to creating writing habits during the first eight days, Ruth sought to build writing skills in her students. Two means of skill building emerged

from my analysis of this data. First, Ruth read and used pictures books to spark memories for students to write about and to study specific writing techniques used by professional authors (Ray, 1999). Second, as Ruth listened to students share their writing, she responded with ideas that stretched their writing, and she suggested various perspectives to facilitate variety in their writing.

During these first days of the school year, Ruth began to build students' awareness and knowledge of writing skills and characteristics. She knew that students must begin "living a writing kind of life" (Fletcher, 1996, p. 2) and she must deliberately direct them to do so. Ruth began by reading good literature in the form of picture books, to her students. She read them because she loved to and because she knew that "[r]eading matters in a writing workshop because when we let the work of other authors matter to us in significant ways, we can expect our texts to matter as well" (Calkins, 1994, p. 256-257).

The first book Ruth read during class was Jane Yolen's, *Owl Moon.* It is one of my favorites and I offered to bring in a tape of the book for students to listen to, but Ruth enjoyed reading this book aloud to students. "I like to read this book to them myself," she said, "so I can speak all the parts and act things out for them" (Journal, Day Two, Fall, 2001). Atwell concurs: "Literature…read with genuine pleasure is the only literature students will be able to listen to with genuine pleasure" (1998, p. 145). Ruth read *Owl Moon* aloud with a rich enthusiasm that took students into the woods to find an owl in the silence of a snowy night (Journal, Day Three, Fall, 2001).

Ruth used Yolen's writing to teach students to listen for specific writing characteristics. She wanted students to hear the similes and metaphors Yolen used to describe the nighttime adventure of owling. Ruth read *Owl Moon* aloud for students because she recognized that "[w]hen youngsters learn to listen through an author's words to a story, they learn a way of listening that is essential to writing" (Calkins, 1994, p. 256). Ruth wanted students to hear the similes and metaphors that encouraged them to linger a little longer in the story and then come to learn to use them in their own writing.

Ruth's lesson with *Owl Moon* integrated two focal points. First, before the initial reading of *Owl Moon,* Ruth asked students to get their pencils ready to write. She told them that as she was reading she wanted them to jot down a word or two when they were reminded of something in their own lives. They were to skip a few lines in between each memory so they could come back later and add details. After the first reading, students shared their memories. Denny remembered a night of sleigh riding when his best friend broke his leg. Samantha recalled a walk in the woods with her dad, and Justin was reminded of how cold he gets when he plays in the snow. *Owl Moon* sparked discussions about flashlights, birds, giant trees and train whistles (Journal, Day Three, Fall, 2001). These memories would become "seeds" (Fletcher, 1996, p. 30) for growing future pieces of writing.

Second, before Ruth read the book again, she instructed students to be ready to count every time they heard a "like phrase," something being compared to something else in the story. They could count with their fingers or make tally marks on paper as they heard comparisons. Ruth's students had begun using comparisons and "like phrases" on the first day of school. This reading extended that first lesson through the writing of a professional author. Ruth talked with students about the importance of using comparisons that were real in their own lives. Ruth explained that if they made up something that they had not experienced, their similes would sound fake and confuse the reader rather than developing empathy (Journal, Day Three, Fall, 2001).

After the second reading, students remembered the following comparisons from *Owl Moon:*

- "The snow was whiter than the milk in a cereal bowl."
- "I looked so hard my ears hurt."
- "The owl threaded his way through the trees."
- "The owl lifted off the branch like a shadow.''
- "I was a shadow as I walked home."
- "The train whistle blew like a sad, sad, song."
- "I could feel the cold as if an icy hand was on my back."

- "I felt cold and hot at the same time." (Journal, Day Three, Fall, 2001)

Students had learned to recognize comparisons and heard a variety of uses for them in a story. Teaching similes and metaphors using *Owl Moon* brought Yolen's style and technique to students' attention and provided them with skills to use as their knowledge of writing thickened.

As Ruth brought this lesson to a close, she instructed students to extend their awareness of comparisons into their own lives. "As you look around this afternoon and tonight, I want you to think about how you can compare things. I want you to write about what things sound like, look like, smell like, feel like – compare things – use your imagination" (Journal, Day Three, Fall, 2001).

Ruth also used story to elicit a different kind of memory and to study a particular story characteristic. Ruth used Russell Hoban's, *Bedtime for Francis,* to elicit memories about going to bed at night. She wanted students to dig into their memories to remember a time when going to bed created some sort of fiasco for them or a bedtime ritual their parents used to get them to sleep when they were younger. Additionally, Ruth used this book to study story endings. Hoban uses the structure of this story to bring ideas together for an ending. This writing lesson brought one form of story ending to students' attention.

As Ruth prepared to read this book on day seven, she readied students: "Get your writing journals open and pencil ready. Write bedtime memory shots as I read" (Journal, Day Seven, Fall, 2001). Students listened with "genuine pleasure" (Atwell, 1998, p. 145) as Ruth read this story. She had a special voice for father and a special voice for mother and a high girlie voice for Francis. She made Francis sing, and the inflections in Ruth's voice made Francis sound so innocent as she made up more and more excuses for not going to bed (Journal, Day Seven, Fall, 2001). Ruth knew the importance of presenting literature to students in realistic, entertaining ways "changing [her] inflection for different characters and moods of [the] text" (Atwell, 1998, p. 145). She made faces to reveal Francis' different moods, and she paused to stress certain parts, "to let them sink in" (Atwell, 1998, p. 145). She performed for her students in much the

same way she put on puppet shows for her neighbors when she was young (Personal Interview, August 8, 2002).

Ruth also used *Bedtime for Francis* to discuss ways to end a story. Ruth asked this question: “What did the author do at the end of this story to wrap things up?” A discussion revealed that the author had Francis solve her problem of not being able to sleep, and the author reminded the reader of all the things Francis had tried in order to avoid going to sleep. Students now knew that writers do not just cease their writing, but they must let the reader be aware of an ending to story and ideas. From Ruth’s teaching of *Bedtime for Francis,* students were now equipped with knowledge of one specific way to end a story (Journal, Day Seven, Fall, 2001).

In addition to reading literature during these first few days, Ruth encouraged students to gather writing “seeds” (Fletcher, 1996, p. 30) in a variety of ways. At different times during these first days, Ruth brought these writing suggestions to students’ attention:

- “I need to warn you now that one day this year somebody is going to get sick. When you are sick, write about what it feels like to be sick. How does the world look to you when you are sick? Then when you write your story and your character gets sick you can describe it.” (Journal, Day Five, Fall, 2001)
- Ruth instructed students: “If somebody didn’t know what a smile looked like, how would you describe it?” Ruth smiled so students could notice details and compare a face with a smile with one that was not smiling. Students noticed differences on Ruth’s face as she smiled: “Your cheeks are puffy.” “They are so puffy that your eyes are squinting.” “And your mouth turned up on the sides.” (Journal, Day Five, Fall, 2001)
- Ruth encouraged students to look more closely at people: “I want you to start being a people watcher. Start looking closely at people. What do they do? How do they act? Watch all kinds of people.” (Journal, Day Eight, Fall, 2001)

- Ruth encouraged students to expand their writing capabilities: “I want you to start pushing the edges a little bit. Spread your writing out. Add more words. Add more details. You can lead your readers into feeling things by using these “like phrases” in your writing. You can put thoughts into a characters head. Your characters can take us anywhere with facial expressions and thought shots.” (Journal, Day Six, Fall, 2001)
- Every so often Ruth had students note a writing idea on the inside front cover of their writing journals. This instruction directed them to write from a different perspective: “Write this in the front of your journal, lie on your back and write” (Journal, Day Six, Fall, 2001).
- Ruth kept variety in student’s writing by suggesting that they write while exploring a different environment. One day she suggested that students climb a tree: “If your mom allows, take your writing journal and a pencil with you in a backpack. Climb up in a tree, look around, and write from up in the tree” (Journal, Day Two, Fall, 2001).

This last suggestion, to climb a tree and write from a limb, brought a “seed” (Fletcher, 1996, p. 30) of writing to share time that eventually became Elena’s first poem. She shared this journal entry one morning during share time: “When I climb a tree and it feels like I’m in a jungle waiting for something to leave.” Ruth spontaneously used this opportunity to talk to the class about “exploding a moment” (Lane, 1993, p. 65). Ruth questioned Elena in an effort to draw more details about what she had seen and how she reacted to being up in the tree. “What did it feel like? What did it smell like? What did things look like as you looked around from up in that tree?” Ruth asked. Ruth knew these questions would help Elena “explode her moment “ into a detailed view of what the world looks like from high up on a tree limb. (Journal, Day Fifteen, Fall, 2001)

Eventually Elena exploded her moment in that tree into this entry in her writing journal:

> When I climb a tree and it feels like I’m in a jungle waiting for something to leave. The jungle has a light shower of mist. When I’m under the tree it

> feels like I'm in a hut. When I am in it, it feels like a large shadow hovering over me. When the pine needles tap me it feels like moths landing on me and then flying off again. I think a tree is a wonderful place to be and I hope you think the same thing too. (Journal, Day Fifteen, Fall, 2001)

Ruth and Elena worked on this piece together and transformed it into a poem. Ruth used the ideas in Georgia Heard's (1989) chapter "Sound and Silence: Line Breaks and White Space (p. 55-64) to teach students about transforming writing journal entries into poetry. Ruth explained that poems look different from paragraphs in stories. "…poetry has different shapes…It looks different from a story. Poems are like buildings; some are long and skinny, sometimes with only one word on a line. Some are fatter, with much longer lines" (Heard, 1989, p. 56). Ruth used Heard's ideas to help Elena transform her paragraph into a poem.

Ruth decided to use Elena's writing as a lesson for the whole class. Ruth made a transparency of Elena's journal entry; and when she projected it from the overhead, one student immediately said, "I see what is wrong." Ruth responded by saying, "No, there is nothing wrong with this. It is a journal entry that we used to transform into a poem." Ruth focused students' attention on specific lines of the journal entry as she proceeded with her explanation. " I want to show you how we polished it. First, we took away 'I hope you think the same thing too' because this is an uncomfortable voice to write in. We are going to stick with the first person voice. And look how many times she has used 'when'. We pulled some out and looked to see what we could do to fix her writing without using 'when' so many times. You are the authors. Play with your words. Do you have to use all of the suggestions made for your writing? No. This is your piece. Now where do you break this piece to make it into a poem?" (Journal, Day Fifteen, Fall, 2001) Ruth took suggestions from students and inserted line breaks at various places in Elena's writing so students could begin to experience the transformation of this journal entry into a poem. Then Ruth put a transparency of this finished poem, as she and Elena had transformed it, on the overhead:

A Wonderful Place To Be

I climb a tree,

and it feels like

I'm in a jungle,

waiting for something to leave.

The jungle has a light shower of

mist.

When I'm under the tree,

it feels like I'm in a hut

with a large shadow

hovering over me.

The pine needles

tap me,

and it feels like moths

landing on me and

flying off again.

I think a tree is a

wonderful place to be.

When Ruth put the transparency of the poem on the overhead the class responded. "Cool," someone said, "that is way different." Ruth reminded students, "Remember you are not making rhyming poetry are you? You are using a few words to make effective writing." Cody said, "I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to take my name out of the "adult conference" box because now I know that I'm not ready for an adult conference. I'm going to write another draft and

mark where I'm going to break my lines. Then I'll be ready for a conference" (Journal, Day Fifteen, Fall, 2001).

Writing skills, during these first eight days, began with looking and responding and progressed to poetry written from up on a tree limb. Ruth's students were listening, responding, reacting, writing, and revising. The layers of writing skills thickened and multiplied as experiences in this writing class caused changes in how students looked at life and extended that looking into their writing.

Writers' Workshop – Days Nine through Sixty-Nine

On day nine of Ruth's writing class, the structure of classroom time changed. For the first eight days the entire hour and ten minutes consisted of information and activities designed to encourage students to think about writing, look at their own world to find topics about which to write, to respond to those topics, and to create the habit of writing everyday. On day nine, Writers' Workshop began and time was divided into two parts: share time, which lasted ten minutes, and workshop, which consumed the remaining hour. Share time was a shortened version of what students had been used to during days three through eight. During these next sixty days, Ruth always responded quickly to student journal entries and frequently taught a specific element of writing. Workshop was a time when students went about doing whatever they needed to do in order to facilitate the progression of their writing. This large chunk of writing time was not needed until now. Students had to build a large selection of writing possibilities in their writing journals in order to have enough material to begin writing poetry and picture books.

Share Time

Share time in Ruth's classroom served two purposes: to respond orally to student journal writing and to teach elements of writing. Analysis of share time data gleaned three areas of teaching to be considered here: "Responding to Student Writing," "Teaching Elements of Writing," and "The Tacit Element." The first two sections describe Ruth's methods as she used these strategies to build writing skills in her students. The third section, "The Tacit Element," is a

discussion of this concept and the importance of understanding this foundational reason for teaching writing using Writers' Workshop methods.

Responding to Student Writing

For the next sixty days, share time in Ruth's classroom, occurred everyday. This time was used to continue building and nurturing this community of writers. Some of the content of share time varied from day to day, but there was one aspect that stayed constant and always occurred. Everyday students shared what they had written in their journals and everyday Ruth responded to their writing in some excited, positive way. This aspect of share time was Ruth's way of conducting a quick one-on-one conference with each student. It was her method of following students' writing progress without having to read writing journals herself. During this time students read their writing, listened to their classmates read their writing, and heard Ruth find some piece of their writing ideas to enhance or expand. Many times she offered suggestions for future use of journal entries (Journal, Fall, 2001). Ruth had developed her responding skills over years of teaching writing. She knew "…how to give information when curiosity…created an appetite that [sought] to be fed, and how to abstain from giving information when…it would be a burden and would dull the sharp edge of the inquiring spirit" (Dewey, 1933, p. 40).

As Ruth interacted with each student, listening to them read journal entries, she responded to various elements of writing progress. She did this with quick, pointed comments since "[t]he practical problem [for her was] to preserve a balance between so little showing and telling as to fail to stimulate reflection, and so much as to choke thought" (Dewey, 1933, p. 270). One day, during share time, Eli initiated a conversation about injuries as he read from his journal. As other students entered the conversation and began to extend it in other directions, instead of "choking thought[s]," (Dewey, 1933, p. 270) Ruth tactfully extended thoughts towards students' writing journals:

Eli: "I fell off my bike and onto the driveway."

Ruth: "It happens so fast – one minute you are so happy and then wham!"

Denny: "You don't think when you fall."

Amber: “I slid down the banister and twisted my ankle. I couldn’t walk on it.”

Ruth: “Ok. You have one minute to write a seed. You can fill it in later – we can explode these later.” (Journal, Day Fifty-Eight, Fall, 2001)

Ruth knew that a conversation about injuries could go on and on if she let students share all of their stories. She gave students one minute to write a “seed” of their story, so they could come back later and finish it.

Share time moved quickly each day, as one student after another shared their writing, because Ruth did two things. First, as students raised their hands, ready to share, she pointed and said, “Go”. Students came to know that they must be ready to share and share quickly. Second, Ruth did not allow students to tell stories during this time. If they tried, Ruth stopped them by saying, “Write that down in your journal.” (Journal, Fall, 2001). Students knew that share time was for sharing writing, not for telling stories.

Ruth believed in the importance of responding to student writing in a genuine, positive way. A teacher’s positive excitement leaves students feeling good about themselves, wanting to continue on with the success they have experienced. In Ruth’s words, she explained teacher response to writing this way:

> Your enthusiasm over what they have written is very important. Specific comments about what they wrote (not just “that’s nice”) help the students begin to develop critical listening skills and techniques for positive feedback of other students’ work during future writing conferences with peers. Responses such as: “You’re right, cobwebs with dew on them do look like little trampolines,” or “I’ve seen an ant carry things as big as themselves. They really do look like construction workers building things.” You need to listen carefully to them when they are reading their entry and focus on what you will be able to say to them in response. Your excitement over their finds and thoughts is contagious.” (Journal, Fall, 2001)

Daily, Ruth listened to students read from their writing journals and responded specifically to each piece of writing. She commended students' choice of words and encouraged their writing, extending it purposefully beyond the writing journal. Her conversations with students were positive and offered specific help and useful suggestions as shown in these examples:

- Denny read: "When I hurt my knee it felt like hot lava pouring down my leg." Ruth responded: "That's a great "feels like" comparison. You can use that when a character gets hurt." (Journal, Day Six, Fall, 2001)
- Tyler read into facial expressions as one Atlanta Braves baseball player came to bat. "His cheeks were puffy. He was thinking, 'I have to get a hit.' He was breathing through his teeth as he came up to bat, anxious to get a hit." Ruth responded: "Oh, I can see the expression on his face and 'breathing through his teeth' lets the reader know how intense he was." (Journal, Day Six, Fall, 2001)

These examples of student writing and Ruth's responses were exemplary of the conversations that occurred everyday during share time. Ruth's excitement, good listening, and quick response were necessary for building confidence in students as they learned about writing.

Ruth was not the only one listening as share time progressed each day; students were listening to each other and learning as well. This interactive situation reflects the Vygotskian perspective of constructionism in this writing classroom. Ruth's students were "…build[ing] collective knowledge together; then as individuals, [they] use[d] whatever part of that collective knowledge that [was] meaningful in [their] lives" (Wink and Putney, 2002, p. 12) to add ideas to their writing. Here we can "see the context as an integral part of…learning" (Wink and Putney, 2002, p.12). Students heard their classmates read their own writing and they heard Ruth respond. The experiences helped students construct additional meaning in their lives. As they listened to Ruth and to each other, seated on the floor of their classroom, they listened and created more ideas in their minds. I watched students, as their pencils went to work, writing in their journals,

describing new images created from the ideas flowing among their classmates and their teacher (Journal, Fall, 2001).

Teaching Elements of Writing

In addition to sharing writing during share time, Ruth continued, as she had done in the first eight days, to stimulate additional writing topics by reading picture books and good literature to students (a complete list is found in Appendix C) and to teach writing elements in various ways. As the days of Writer's Workshop progressed, Ruth continued to expand students' knowledge of writing elements. One day Ruth was teaching Lane's (1993) ideas about "exploding a moment" (p. 65). As students sat in their share time circle, on the rug, Ruth told students, "I am going to ask you to watch me very closely – watch my hands, watch my face, watch my arm; watch what I do and watch how I do it." Ruth sat in her chair and slammed a book to the floor. Students responded: "I heard a loud noise;" "Your face looked mad." Next Ruth said, "I'm going to do this again. Watch me and see what else you notice." This time students responded with more details: "Your hands were tense;" "The book opened up as it hit the ground;" "The book was falling like a bird;" "I heard the sound of wind whipping against a tree." Ruth tried this again saying, "Now this time just look at my hand." Students responded: "Your hand shook;" "Your hand was flying with anger;" "Your hand was white like it had just been stuck in snow." Then Ruth slammed the book slowly to the floor so students could see details better. She asked students to "Look at my knuckles. How do they change when I grab the book?" This time students saw Ruth's "arm shaking" and her "hand squeezing the book hard." During Ruth's last demonstration she did not release the book; she rose up and froze with the book high in the air ready to release it. Students watch and responded with details of what they saw: "Your face is squinting;" "Your eyes are bulging;" "Your eyes are watering;" "Your whole face looks tense." Ruth said to students: "You could describe this event very simply; 'She raised the book up then dropped it on the floor." Tyler responded: "Boring." Ruth continued, "Or you can explode this moment with the look on my face, my hands, the sound of my

book. You don't have to write about lots and lots of things. You can write lots and lots about one moment" (Journal, Fall, Day Eighteen, 2001).

On most days during share time Ruth found something in a student's shared writing that could be used to teach more precise observation of something specific. One day Samantha had not written very much in her writing journal. I was sitting right behind her, looking over her shoulder, as she shared what she had written: "I knew what my Mom wanted by the way she stared at me." Samantha went on to tell about how her Mom wanted her to clean up her room, and she knew by the way she stared at her that the room was a mess and needed to be cleaned up right away. Ruth took advantage of Samantha's story to teach an impromptu mini-lesson about using a blank stare. Ruth asked students to look somewhere with a blank stare and notice how they were feeling. Students responded with these comments about how it made them feel:

- Eyelids heavy
- Body limp
- Eyes strained
- Only concentrating on what you look at
- Like being hypnotized (Journal, Day Fifty-Three, Fall 2001)

Ruth explained to students: "Writers put themselves in a mind set. They put themselves there in the situation they want to write about so they can feel what it is like" (Journal, Day Fifty-Three, Fall 2001). Ruth frequently asked students to experiment with different life situations so they could "feel" what it was like to be there. "I want you to write about things you know about. When you experience things and think about them, then you know more and it is easier to write about them," Ruth told her students (Journal, Day Fifty-Three, Fall 2001).

Many such lessons filled the moments of share time during these last sixty days of observation. Ruth used this time to build writing skills and broaden students' awareness of authors' techniques, while tapping into the personal tacit elements of each individual student. The following section discusses the importance of acknowledging the tacit element in a writing classroom.

The Tacit Element

Teaching writing using Writers' Workshop methods opened up any part of students' lives that they chose to share orally or in writing. The writing journal, combined with the freedom to write about anything that caught their interest and the safe, open context of this classroom, insured that students' "tacit knowing" (Polanyi, 1974, p. 264) would appear in their written pieces. The following discussion of "tacit knowledge" (Foster, 1992, p. 11) explains the nature of this element and the importance of acknowledging and accepting this concept, in a writing classroom.

There exists within each of us a uniqueness that is ours alone, what Polanyi calls our "tacit knowing" (Polanyi, 1974, p. 264). It is not made or created, but it is instead there, within us, when we are born. It is our own unique window to the world: our own way of seeing things, our own way of interpreting things, our own way of reacting. It is the base from which we begin and is nurtured and nudged throughout our lives. Before we know anything, before we do our first piece of learning, we possess a whole set of elements which guide our thinking, our seeing and our existence. "…we can voice our ultimate convictions only from within our convictions – from within the whole system of acceptances that are logically prior to any particular assertion of our own, prior to the holding of any particular piece of knowledge" (Polanyi, 1974, p. 267). Our tacit element is what makes each of us the unique being we are.

Ruth's teaching acknowledges that asking students to write, using their own topics, causes unending surprises as they explore their world through their own mind and eyes (Journal, Fall, 2001). Foster (1992) agrees: "To effectively nurture our students as writers, we must distinguish in our teaching between those elements of our students' writing which will remain personal and tacit, and those which must be subjected to external conventions" (p. 9). During share time, when written drafts were just beginning, Ruth opened her teaching to the surprises students shared from their lives, and she taught "external conventions" necessary to develop writing skills. Ruth believed that share time was important. "Isn't writing exciting and it is so powerful," Ruth told her students one day

(Journal, Day Thirty-three, Fall, 2001). Ruth learned what Elena saw from inside her tree because she allowed her students to reveal their tacit element and write from inside their own lives.

Workshop

My analysis of workshop data gleaned additional areas of teaching. During this time of participant observation, I interacted with students frequently, in an effort to view writing progress individually, from within its making. My goal was to understand how Ruth's teaching and students' learning intertwined to generate writing and writers. This section analyzes areas of workshop data and their various influences within this classroom.

Structure and Purpose

During days nine through sixty-nine, in addition to share time everyday, students could anticipate an hour of class time to make progress on their written pieces: a time that was called workshop. Share time provided "regular, frequent occasions for teaching and learning about writing" (Atwell, 1998, p. 93), while the purpose of workshop consistently filled the need for "regular, frequent chunks of [writing] time [students could] count on, anticipate and plan for" (Atwell, 1998, p. 91). The layers of habits Ruth initiated during the first eight days thickened with experience and were foundational to this workshop. Over time, workshop extended the use of these habits and facilitated the creation of additional writing habits. During workshop, students considered the writing strategies Ruth taught during share time and used what they needed to take control of their writing. Students' writing habits extended in many individual directions because Ruth's workshop facilitated "the messy and unpredictable act of creating" (Atwell, 1998, p. 98). As they absorbed ideas from Ruth's teaching, students "constructed" (Vygotsky, 1962) new techniques of their own, mingling them with their own writing topics and testing them in their writing, each in their own way and in their own time. Students gradually began to "live like writers" (Fletcher, 1996, p. 3) in and out of school. Because Ruth taught Writers' Workshop, students "develop[ed] the habits of mind of writers" (Atwell, 1998, p. 91). One morning, Cody came bounding into the classroom saying, "I've got it Mrs. Lacy, I know

how I'm going to end my football piece!" (Journal, Day Thirty-Three, Fall, 2001). Cody's ideas for an ending did not come at school during his writing class; they popped in his head at home during a conversation with his dad. His habits of looking and thinking like a writer extended outside of his classroom, into his life, and might surface, wherever he went.

An element of structure that surfaced during my analysis of this data, addressed the frequency of teaching Writers' Workshop during a week's time. Many factors might enter into a teacher's decision to teach Writers' Workshop, while additional factors would need to be considered to determine frequency. Professionals advocate a minimum of three, predictable periods of writing during a week's time, but agree that students' growth in writing is best nurtured when Writers' Workshop occurs every day (Graves, 1983, Calkins, 1994, Atwell, 1998). Ruth's decision to teach Writers' Workshop every day was probably conceived in many places throughout her life: her playful love of story and song as a child, the knowledgeable professor who trained her for the Peace Corp, the words of Donald Graves that she savored as a major snow storm approached, and her building Principal who afforded her the freedom to teach from her heart. These and many other factors entered into Ruth's decision and her ultimate choice to teach her language arts class as Writers' Workshop (Personal Interview, August 8, 2002).

One additional point of workshop structure emerged during analysis of these data: that of the structure and use of time. In order to understand workshop, it is essential to understand the configuration of workshop time in contrast to the division of time in a traditional, language arts classroom. Workshop time was not divided into specific, time-configured activities, as are many language arts classes. It was instead a large block of time students used to work on their individual needs as writers. During this time students were busy doing a wide variety of writerly tasks. To an untrained eye, Ruth's classroom looked like an unstructured menagerie of students in motion with a teacher who was not in control of them. An unknowing administrator, coming in to evaluate teaching, might whisper, "I'll come back when you're teaching" (Atwell, 1998, p.

95). At any given time, in Ruth's classroom, an observer could watch as students carried out a variety of writerly tasks. During workshop, students sat quietly at their desks, searching through their journals for writing topics, thinking and writing and then thinking, writing and searching some more. Students conferenced with one another or an adult on the rug or at peripheral table at the side of the classroom. Students typed their writing at a classroom computer or went down the hallway to the computer lab to type. And students did research in the classroom or in the library to gain information needed for their writing (Journal, Fall, 2001). Students were always working on some aspect of their writing. "When [students] can count on time always being there, they learn to use it" (Atwell, 1998, p. 93). Thinking, talking, and moving around might not be considered as part of writing to unknowing observers, but they are essential in Writers' Workshop.

The following section is an analysis of the procedures Ruth required students to follow in order to bring a piece of writing to the published stage. I include this section to explain the underlying structure of workshop time. While an unknowing observer might view a chaotic situation in this classroom, each student was, in reality, following a very specific set of procedural guidelines. It is important to understand that while each student was doing something different at any given time, and the class as a whole looked and acted disorganized, there was in fact a rigid structure in place, dictating the curriculum of each student. (Further details of workshop procedures are found in Appendix B)

Bringing a Piece of Writing to Publication

In order to move through the processes of writing and bring a piece to final publication, Ruth required students to work within an open, skeletal system of rigid, procedural guidelines that included drafting, conferencing and revising. During my period of participant observation, students had the option of publishing their final writing in one of two genres: a poem or a picture book. The writing process began with a student's writing journal and ended with the publication of a poem or picture book. All ideas for writing a poem or picture book came from a student's writing journal.

When a student felt he was ready, he sought out a peer or an adult and together they conducted a content conference. The purpose of this conference was to discuss the various topics the student had written about in the journal. This conference was designed to develop an array of topic possibilities, not necessarily to choose a topic. The student writer always made the ultimate decision of topic choice. He might leave the conference with a specific topic in mind or he might leave the conference with several possibilities of topic choice. Once a student writer came to a final decision about a topic, he began to test the topic by drafting it onto loose-leaf paper and moving it into his writing folder. To this paper the student stapled a routing slip, a small piece of blue paper, printed with a chart containing the name of each writing process above a blank box, used for naming a conferencing partner or checking off the completion of a draft (see Appendix B). At this point writing moved to the drafting stage, from the writing journal into a student's writing folder. On one or multiple pieces of loose-leaf paper (written only on one side, should the need for cutting it apart for organizational purposes arise), the student drafted and revised his writing. When the student felt that his first draft was complete, he sought out a conferencing partner to conduct a peer conference. The writer searched the room for an available student (or in some cases an adult) to partner with for this conference and then found a spot on the rug to hold their conference. During this conference the writer read his words, and then entered into conversation about his writing with this peer. This conference helped the writer, through conversation and questioning, know how his words were received by a listener and gave the student suggestions for revision. With new ideas from this conference, the writer checked off "Peer Conference" on his blue, routing slip, entered the name of his conferencing partner in the box, and returned to the drafting stage to rethink and revise the writing. On the blue routing slip, the procedure after "Peer Conference" was "Final Decisions (me)." The content conference and the peer conference were experiences designed to broaden a writer's thinking and cause him to consider other possibilities from a conferencing partner, but the writer was always responsible for every decision that was made.

The final stage in this process was editing. The blue routing slip contained three columns under the editing section: “Self,” “Peer,” and “Adult.” Students were first required to edit their own paper, then hold an editing conference with a peer, and hold a final editing conference with an adult. This final phase of the three editing conferences required an adult who helped the writer polish the writing into a publishable form. The student writer and his adult, editing partner together examined every aspect of this writing, checking spelling, word order, and language usage. Any errors that were seen as problematic by the adult partner were then listed on the student’s “Writing Skills Sheet,” housed in the writing folder, for future instruction.

From this final conference the writer moved to a computer where he typed this piece and saved it on the school’s server. Ruth, or an adult volunteer, retrieved the writing from the server, transferred it into Adobe Page Maker, and printed it out in book format. A second copy of the writing was made on the copying machine. Copies of individual poems were stored in the student’s portfolio (a loose-leaf binder) until ten poems had been accumulated. If the student had written a ten-page picture book, it was ready for final publishing. The student constructed two books by making cloth bound, hard covers and sewing the covers and the writing together with dental floss. Two copies of the book were constructed. The student kept one copy, while the second copy was put in the library for other students to checkout and read (Journal, Fall, 2001).

Ruth’s students completed many books during my observation time in her classroom. The books published early in the semester were picture books. It was not until mid-December that the first student had accumulated enough poetry to publish a poetry book (Journal, Day Fifty-Nine, Fall, 2001).

Teaching Conferencing and Response to Writing

The personal nature of writing and response to writing was, for Ruth, an element of major consideration in her teaching. From past experiences, Ruth knew as Atwell that “[w]riters are vulnerable. That’s the writer, there, on the page” (Atwell, 1998, p. 217). Ruth’s past experiences in the Southwest Virginia Writing Project personalized two important concepts that she applied daily to her

teaching: first, that a writer feels anxiety when asked to read her writing to someone else for feedback and second, positive feedback, rather than negative response, is essential for growth in writers (Personal Interview, August 8, 2002). Over time, Ruth grew to know that "[w]riters want response that gives help without threatening…dignity" (Atwell, 1998, p. 217). If we agree that our writing is in fact our "essential selves laid bare [on paper] for the world to see" (Atwell, 1998, p. 217), then we as writers will not seek out a response that might compromise our inner being. During the Southwest Virginia Writing Project, Ruth felt the anxiety of waiting her turn to read her own writing, frequently making up excuses, saying she did not have anything ready to read, delaying the inevitable response to her writing. Ruth was not merely told that positive response to writing was essential for writers, she felt it since it was modeled to her during the Writing Project experience. When she finally did share her writing, she was intrigued by her response to the positive comments and her willingness to receive feedback in a positive manner (Personal Interview, spring, 2002).

Since "[a] writer becomes vulnerable by revealing part of her inner self" (Fletcher, 1993, p. 25), the very act of reading our writing aloud or allowing another person to read our writing is construed as an intrusion into our personal selves. Ruth's students were novice writers. She facilitated writing from their lives, their hearts, and their souls. She perceived positive response to students' writing in her classroom, either from her, a fellow student or another adult, as a key element leading to their success as writers. Most professional writers can reveal a response, horror story from their past, a time when someone important to their writing, threw his or her written document across a desk, calling it "garbage" (Rief, 1992, p. 3). To avoid a similar situation in her classroom, Ruth modeled positive response daily for her students and taught effective conferencing to insure proper implementation of responding skills.

Using this conceptual basis, Ruth wanted students to first understand that writing is a multi-layered process, second, that the writing process moves in various directions, and finally, that any movement is the result of the various decisions writers make as writing progresses (Journal, Fall, 2001). As Wood Ray

(1999) explains, "…[w]hat we want is for students to understand their own writing as a process of decision making" (p. 124). Hence, Ruth taught her students about conferencing as a way to entice the decision making process, extending it in various directions, testing words and ideas, and making the many decisions necessary to ready their writing for publication.

Ruth used Lane's (1993) conferencing lesson to instruct students in understanding how to obtain additional information from a writer. Vygotsky (1962) explains that "[i]n the child's development…imitation and instruction play a major role" (p. 104). Ruth used Lane's (1993) story to imitate a conferencing situation student's could learn from. She told Lane's story to students:

> I have a really important story to tell you…It's a scary story too. This is it. It happened when I was little and it was the most scared I had ever been in my life. There was this dog. And then my mother came and she rescued me. That's it…Any Questions?" (p.13).
>
> Students posed these questions:
>
> - "What happened?"
> - "Was it a rabid dog?"
> - "What kind of dog was it?"
> - "How big was the dog?"

Ruth responded: "That story lacked a lot of information. If you were conferencing and your friend left out information, it is your job to ask good questions. What if you don't have someone to conference with and you are by yourself, how can you conference? You could ask yourself these questions and see what information you could add to the piece" (Journal, Day Twenty-Four, Fall, 2001). Ruth knew that "[a] large part of writing is simply trusting your own instincts and asking questions that will help you dig deep enough" (Lane, 1993, p. 16). She taught conferencing to her students by modeling and imitating "teacher-student and peer conferences [because they]…are at the heart of teaching writing [and] through them students learn to interact with their own writing" (Calkins, 1994, p. 223). Ruth knew that by asking questions, students could help each other search for ideas and add them to their writing. This was

Ruth's way of teaching conferencing with this class. It ultimately became a skill that many students mastered, but was difficult for some students to implement (Journal, Fall, 2001).

Conferencing With Students

A writing conference in Ruth's classroom had one purpose: to develop the writer, not the writing (Graves, 1983, Calkins, 1994, Atwell, 1998). A writing conference, focused on the writer and the ideas he wanted to include in this piece of writing. Decisions during conferencing "must be guided by 'what might help this *writer'* rather than 'what might help this *writing*'" (Calkins, 1994, p. 228). If we cause the writer to doubt his own judgment, then the conference may do more harm than good. Our goal is to build skills in the writer in order for future writing decisions to be based on what the writer has learned about good writing (Calkins, 1994). Ruth's purpose was to cause her students to develop into independent writers, capable of making important decisions about their own writing (Journal, Fall, 2001). She conceptualized that "[w]hat the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1962, p.104). Ruth taught conferencing skills to her students hoping that eventually they could conduct productive conferences independently with their peers.

Ruth mandated three requirements from the writer during a conference: first, the writer was to read her piece aloud; second, only the writer was allowed to hold and use a pencil during the conference; and third, the writer made all the decisions about his/her writing (Journal, Fall, 2001). The second requirement was especially difficult for Ruth during a conference. She usually sat beside students, as they read their piece aloud, so she could follow the writing as the student read. The urge to pick up a pencil and make corrections was sometimes too much for Ruth to endure. I watched her many times, conferencing with a student, sitting on her hands so she would not be tempted to grab the pencil from the student and make corrections to the paper. She frequently demonstrated this important part of conferencing for students (Journal, Fall, 2001).

Understanding conferencing as an experience to develop the skills of a writer is exemplified in the following stories of Denny and Tyler. Each

conferencing situation portrays a teacher and a student, locking minds and engaging in conversation. These "[s]tudent writers need[ed] response while the[ir] words were churning out, in the midst of the[ir] messy, tentative act of drafting meaning" (Atwell, 1998, p. 218). In each situation, the questioning and conversation that occurred during the conference, brought about additional thinking in the student's mind and new ideas for consideration and inclusion in the written piece.

On day fifty-six, Denny came to me for a conference. We worked on his rough draft of "Panting." Denny had already conferenced a few times with students in the class, so this piece was in relatively good condition, but it had some confusion in it. Together we looked at the line that read, "The wool knitted hugs surrounded me" (see Figure 1). This wording did not fit into my realm of thinking – it just did not make any sense to me. I locked eyes with Denny. "What does this mean?" I asked. He replied, "You know, knitted hugs." "Explain that to me! What is it?" I asked. "You know knitted," he replied. We were getting nowhere. I did not understand him, and he could not say anything that helped. By this time we were giggling and playing with words back and forth, trying to find some word we both understood. I thought that maybe a knitted hug was a special, knitted tube that cold-natured people stepped into before they sat down to watch T.V. When I explained that to Denny his eyebrows wrinkled up and a big grin came on his face. "No!" he exclaimed. "Then what is it? Are you sure it is knitted or is it woven?" I asked. Denny grinned, "I don't know!" I tried to start over, "A knitted hug – how else can we say that so your readers will understand?" "I guess I'm talking about a blanket," he finally admitted. "Oh," I said, "I wonder how we could put blanket into this sentence and still be surrounded with knitted hugs?" When I looked over his shoulder later, I noticed that Denny had changed his sentence to read, "The wool blanket surrounded me with hugs" (Journal, Day Fifty-Six, Fall, 2001). This conference had been for figuring out what Denny meant by his words. It opened conversation and searched for meanings. Denny needed to bring the meaning in his head onto the paper, and thus to his readers. He knew what he wanted to say, but his words were not conveying a message

that was understandable for the reader. There was much more in his head than was down on the paper. It became my responsibility to redirect his thinking, to assist Denny as he made the critical content decisions that facilitated meaning within his written text, and brought his written message to full meaning for his readers.

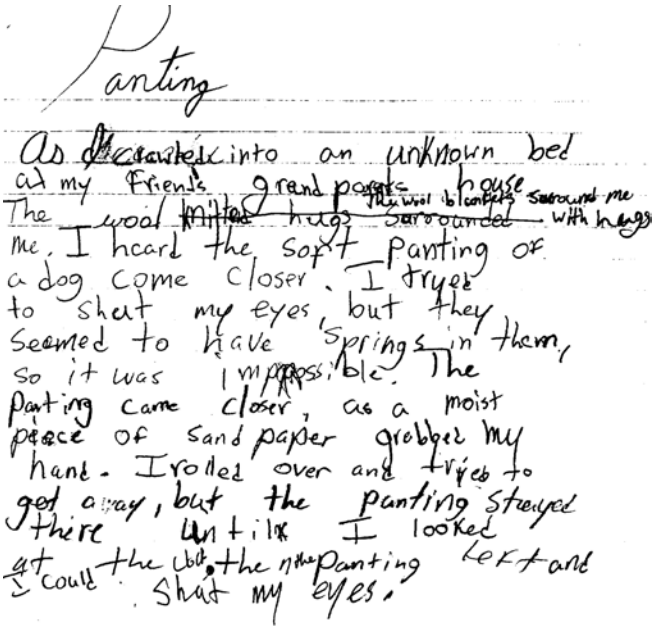

Figure 1

Tyler wrote a piece about taking his dog for a walk at Pandapolas Pond. On day forty-five, I found Ruth and Tyler sitting on the carpeted floor in the front of the room. They were sitting beside each other having a peer conference. Tyler read his piece aloud to Ruth (she was sitting on her hands!): “I was walking my dog at Pandapolas Pond. I threw a stick in the water. My dog went, tiptoed in then came out like a big fish was chasing him out. I thought, “Chicken!” Ruth and Tyler had this conversation:

- Ruth – “What are you going to call this piece?”
- Tyler – “Chicken.”
- Ruth – “That’s a great title. Do you think we could juice it up a little? Think about that stick you threw in the water. Did it go far out or did you throw it close to shore?”
- Tyler – “It went out a little ways.”

- Ruth – “Read it again. What did that stick look like?”
- Tyler- “It looked like a car crashing through a puddle of water.”
- Ruth – “Close your eyes. Think about your dog. Did you tell him to go out there or did he run on his own?”
- Tyler – “He went after the stick. He tiptoed out in the water.”
- Ruth – “Read it again.” (Ruth looked at the text and went over several parts out loud.) “It’s actually very good. You have a lot of voice in it. If you want to juice up the top – think about that.”

Later I talked to Ruth about her conference with Tyler. She explained her purpose as she had talked to Tyler about the day he and his dog went to Pandapolas Pond: “I tried to get Tyler to think back about his walk around Pandapolas Pond and to look closely in his mind to see his dog again, as he threw that stick into the water. He might not change anything, but I wanted him to think again about that day, that moment, and remember it once more” (Journal, Day Forty-Five, Fall, 2001).

Conferencing into the Zone of Proximal Development

The task of conferencing in Writers’ Workshop conceptualizes the Vygotskian idea of the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Ruth knew that asking students to listen to and question each other about their writing was beneficial since “…students become active participants in their learning through the use of language and interactions with others” (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 86). Wink and Putney (2002), in discussing Vygotsky’s framework, reiterate that ”…after a student receives instructional support…from someone, who happens to be more capable in that particular context, the learner internalizes the new idea and will be more able to perform independently in the next similar problem-solving situation” (p. 86). As Ruth imitated and taught conferencing skills to her students, she recognized that students could facilitate growth in each other’s writing by listening to and questioning each other in their “zone of proximal development.” One student became the “more capable,” asking questions and eliciting verbal response from the other. As students’ experience with conferencing grew, their questioning and inquiry skills developed as they

internalized new, experiential knowledge from previous conferences, bringing fuller texts into print before they reached their next conferencing stage of writing. As students experienced additional conferencing with their classmates, their writing development grew as their experiences with this new kind of thinking and questioning expanded (Journal, Fall, 2001).

The "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) is abstract and individual. "…as students collaborate to construct meaning, they create their own personal zones and move through those zones toward realization of their potential" (Wink and Putney, 2002, p. 85). With each new experience of conferencing, skills and knowledge of writing grew. "It is through…interaction that students arrive at a higher level of development than they would realize alone" (Wink and Putney, 2002, p. 87). Students realized additional potential from conferencing because for any reason or many reasons they came to understand writing concepts in a different way, from a different viewpoint or under different circumstances. Conferencing was an opportunity for students to interact with people, ideas, and memories. They built knowledge by reconfiguring or adding onto what they already knew. Changes occurred in the students' thinking, but the interaction had to be stimulated in the area of exchange, the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1987) between the student and the source of the interaction. It is Vygotsky's belief that development is the change that occurs in the way we connect and relate things in our lives (1987). This was also true in Ruth's writing classroom. The goal of conferencing for students was to share their ideas and ultimately change each other as writers (Journal, Fall, 2002).

The key element of workshop, in Ruth's classroom, was conferencing. It was a time when students shared ideas and made decisions about what to include in their written pieces. Each conference provided opportunities for sharing life experiences, hearing written pieces read aloud, and experiencing growth as a writer and as a person. Not all conferences were as productive as the two I have described here. Many times I observed students nod positively and simply say, "That's good," as they sat facing each other in conference, but even those observations were positive ones. These students sought out a

conferencing partner, sat facing each other, read a draft of writing, and responded. Conferencing is perplexing work for young writers. “It’s difficult to learn to confer well, and it’s difficult to learn to manage the workshop so that frequent, effective conferring is possible, but it’s worth the struggle” (Calkins, 1994, pp. 223-224). These students had the opportunity to act like writers in this fourth grade classroom. It was an experience they will carry with them for life.

The final section opens a different window from which to view Writers’ Workshop. Here I describe and portray vignettes of student learning. While some might view these as problematic situations in Ruth’s classroom, my analysis explains the progress of each student and the importance of Writers’ Workshop in facilitating growth in writing.

Meandering Through Writers’ Workshop

Writers’ Workshop meanders – sometimes like a lazy stream winding its way through flat, rocky valleys, as it slowly tests the terrain and ventures to find paths that feel comfortable and support the rush of water as it flows. And sometimes it meanders like spring water that seems to appear out of nowhere, all fresh and clean, ready to pick up speed, anxious to see where the forces of nature might best lead it.

Some elements of Ruth’s Writers’ Workshop were predictable – the looking at and responding to the world, the drafting, the revising, the conferencing, and the polishing of writing before a piece is finally published. But within this structure of predictable, required, writing processes, were little – and big – surprises. These surprises were individual, they were challenging to the teaching of writing, and they were necessary for student growth. They occurred because time and opportunity in Ruth’s classroom allowed students the freedom to become individual writers, working through their individual writing challenges.

When our teaching recognizes the individual needs of each student, the stories of their learning become places to examine. Students’ experiences with writing in Ruth’s Writers’ Workshop were individual. Students wrote from their own life experiences and developed their own writing processes. Students entered this writing class with their own set of skills, desires, and potential

reactions. They mingled their own interpretation of looking and responding with their individual ways of written expression. Opportunities for growth in writing varied with each moment of the day and with each student's response to his or her writing process.

To an untrained eye, the many classroom activities occurring in Writers' Workshop might look random or out of control, meandering aimlessly without purpose. I have many pictures in my head of Ruth's classroom, when students were busy going about the many activities they needed to do as writers. Simultaneously, there were students seated, students moving around, students typing, students talking, students quietly thinking and writing. It might appear to some that there was no order since students were busy, going in all directions, and it might appear that learning and focus, and purpose and drive were nowhere to be found. But within what seemed to be children left to meander out of control, were individual, student-centered curriculums – each driven by the wants, needs, and purposes of developing student writers.

This section views some of those individual students. The vignettes of student learning presented here provide an inside look at how some students responded and progressed within this Writers' Workshop. They portray a wide view of specific challenges and an inside look at how those challenges were met and used to facilitate writing progress. Specifically described here are the challenges of spelling skills, student variations in writing topics and ability, discipline, student use of time, facilitating student relationships, and the timely building of conferencing skills.

Grayson's Misspellings

Grayson was one of my favorite students. Through numerous encounters, Grayson and I developed a great rapport and conferenced together several times. I wrote this about Grayson in my journal: "My goal was to make Grayson smile! He used his dry wit everyday, but was stingy with the number of smiles he released. Conferencing with him was a delight and a pleasure. He did a lot of thinking. He listened to his writing, he expressed his ideas, and he considered changes. This was the part that intrigued me the most. When he considered

changes during a conference, Grayson listened and pondered – he scrunched his lips, barely squinted his eyes, and went into his thinking mode. I loved his thinking mode. It was a serious kind of mode that was a rethinking of his words and a consideration of the new ideas we had discussed. I knew when he was finished thinking because his pencil would go to work. He never spoke first, he always wrote. He would not tell me what he was thinking and his hand blocked my view as he wrote. The new versions of his writing were always a surprise. He always read the new version out loud to me and the new version was always more vivid, clever writing. The important part of all of this was the wait time. Grayson had to have his own time to think and ponder – time to put together his ideas with my probing and mix them with what he had already written. There had to be this wait time for him" (Journal, Day Sixty, Fall 2001).

I include this information about Grayson in order to paint a picture of the complex nature of his writing and revising processes because his written rough drafts do not tell this complex story of thinking and revising to an unknowing eye. It is important to know that writing for Grayson was much more than all of the misspelled words that appeared in his drafts like this one of "The Noisy Night:"

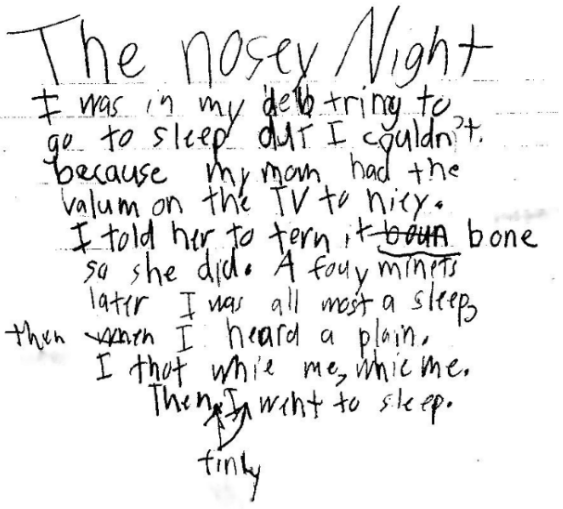
The nosey Night
I was in my debtrine to
go to sleep but I couldn't.
because my mom had the
valum on the TV to nicy.
I told her to tern it bone
so she did. A fouy minets
later I was all most a sleep
then I heard a plain.
I thot whie me, whic me.
Then I went to sleep.
finly

Figure 2

If someone saw only Grayson's rough drafts, he would be one of those students that a teacher would wonder and worry about. His spelling caused his

rough drafts to be difficult to read and understand. When words are spelled wrong, meaning within a text is difficult to find, since “[m]isspellings seem to throw readers…more than any other kind of error in texts” (Atwell, 1998, p. 196). For Grayson, spelling was a challenge. In his draft of “The Noisy Night” (see Figure 2), he spelled volume – valum, high – hiey, why – whie, down – boun, bed – deb, but – dut, turn – tern, minutes – minets, trying – tring. When one sees the spelling of his words, it would be easy to be engulfed by his mistakes and neglect the many conventions that he used correctly. Knowing his spelling skills provides a sense of where his abilities lie and how future instruction might be structured. Here I analyze what Grayson knew about the spelling of the words he used:

- Grayson was confused about the direction of the letters d and b. When he wrote bed as “deb” he knew that the beginning sound and the ending sound were different because he used two different letters to spell them. His problem was not with the sounds of the letters, but it was instead a problem of which direction the d goes and which way the b is turned.
- Grayson spelled high – “hiey” and why – “whie.” He consistently used ie to spell the long i sound. He thought that ie had the long i sound. In this piece he used it consistently to create the long i sound in these two words.
- Grayson also confused the usage of ou and ow. When he spelled down – “boun,” he has two problems surfacing. First, his d is written in reverse and second, he has used the letters ou to represent the sound that should be spelled ow – he knows the sound, but has chosen the wrong letters to include in the word down.
- Next look at the words turn – “tern” and minutes – “minets.” Both words are spelled as Grayson heard them – as they sounded to his ears. Both are a problem with the letter u, a problem that was pointed out to him and helped him conquer the spelling of these two words (Journal, Day Fifty-Five, Fall 2001).

- Grayson also spelled trying – “tring.” In this case he was trying to change the y to i and add ing, but it did not work for him. His solution was to leave out one of the i’s and add the ending he needed. The result was a misspelled word.

Students’ language grows with time, use, and additional knowledge, but that growth can only begin with what the student knows right now, today. These words, the ones Grayson misspelled, were included on his personal spelling list for future mastery. In his life and in his writing these were the words he needed to use; therefore, these were the words he needed to learn how to spell correctly. Spelling was not ignored in this classroom. It was an important part of the final editing of each and every piece of writing students chose to publish. Students took advantage of these avenues of spelling support offered in this classroom:

- Each student had available an adult editor who first identified the misspelled words and then helped students find the correct spelling by using the dictionary or some sort of reminder of where the word is used visually in the room or somewhere in their life, i.e. volume is written on a remote control, a TV, a radio, etc. Students were guided and nudged toward accurate spelling by an adult editor before any piece of writing progressed to a published stage. (Journal, Fall, 2001)
- After adult edit, students were required to type all of their written pieces on the computer and use spell check to correct any misspellings that still existed in their writing. Spell check is a factor in our lives now – our students are growing up using it. Students used spell check as their final tool for correcting spelling. (Journal, Fall, 2001)

Grayson wrote from inside his life – from inside the moments as he was trying to go to sleep one night. His poem said what he wanted it to say. He felt free to write about the problems of trying to get to sleep. He wrote his ideas not just with words he knew how to spell correctly, but with the words he needed to convey his messages. He did not fear red ink all over his paper because he knew

there would not be any. His ideas flowed using the words he needed because he knew that someone in this classroom would help him with his spelling. Figure 3 is his final copy of "A Noisy Night," a poem he included in his published collection of poetry.

The Noisy Night

I was in my bed
trying to go to sleep,
but I couldn't.
My Mom had the volume
on the TV too high.
I told her to turn it down, so she did.
A few minutes later
I was almost asleep
when I heard a plane.
I thought, "Why me, Why me."

Figure 3

Brandon's Writing Process

There are as many writing processes as there are people who write. In a writing classroom it is sometimes difficult to identify student activities as pieces of writing progress. Atwell's process includes "…time to think, rethink, wander around [her] garden, make a cup of tea, talk with others, reread, revise, and polish…" When she does these things she says, "…chances are I can produce something halfway coherent" (1998, p. 92). Writing process has many faces and many configurations, and just as Atwell's process, sometimes looks very far removed from putting words on a piece of paper.

At first, Brandon rarely wrote in his journal. At a time when other students had written eight and ten pages in their journals, Brandon had written only a few words, spread out over three pages. While other students read entries from their journals during share time, Brandon held his journal close to his face and told

stories he was making up as he went along – this helped to develop his language and story sequence and was part of his writing process. Brandon could tell a grand story, but for him the hardest part was getting that story down on paper (Journal, Day Thirty-Five, Fall 2001). And while other students sat and wrote and conferenced and typed their final pieces, I watched Brandon at different times as he wandered around the room, played with pencils and erasers, rearranged his portfolio, and typed pieces that had not yet been edited (Journal, Day Thirty-Five, Fall, 2001). At times, I have to admit, watching Brandon was unsettling to me. I wanted to sit him down, put the pencil in his hand and "make" him write. I soon learned that Brandon was there, doing things that looked like his version of being a writer, making his own progress, in his own way.

I conferenced with Brandon many times, asking him questions about his life, searching for topics he knew about and could write about. One day, after a big Virginia Tech football game, he mentioned that his family had tickets to the games in the first row, on the forty-yard line. I told him that my seats were way up high in section twenty-three and I would love to know what it was like to sit on the front row, so close to the field. We talked about what he could see and what he could hear from such close range. Before I completed my observation time, he wrote a piece about sitting in the front row, on the forty-yard line, at a Virginia Tech football game. He was not happy with it and threw it away (Journal, Fall, Day Thirty-Five, 2001).

I wrote this about Brandon in my journal one day during my time in Ruth's classroom. It typifies my view of him: "So what is it that Brandon does during Writers' Workshop? He might sit, but only for very short periods of time. He might go up front to get his portfolio from the shelf and rearrange things in it. I have seen him join someone else's peer conference to chat awhile. I have seen him go to a computer when he had nothing to type. He shares during share time with nothing written in his writing journal and he also shares with lots written on his page. He writes stuff that makes no sense and he writes wonderful, thoughtful stories and poetry. What is his writing process? I think only he knows!" (Journal, Day, Thirty-Five, Fall 2001). Ruth was patient, allowing Brandon the time and the

space to develop his writing skills in his own way. Daily, Brandon meandered around in his own garden, sipping his own cup of tea, working on being a writer.

Denny and Hannah as Writers

Ruth's students exhibited a wide range of writing skills and a wide range of depth in the topics they chose to write about. Denny came from a home where family games were played using the dictionary, while Hannah came from a home where finding food and clothing each day was a challenge. Students came to this Writers' Workshop with their own set of priorities and their own set of life experiences. Their writing in this fourth-grade class reflected how they viewed their life in whatever they chose as a writing topic. As share time progressed each day, students shared experiences from their own lives and heard how their classmates were viewing life as well. Teaching writing using workshop methods allowed each student to venture into topics of his or her own choice. Students saw the world from their own eyes and from their own set of life happenings. Writing growth takes time and opportunity to develop. This writing class provided the time and the opportunities necessary for individual student growth in writing since development of writers and their writing takes time (Atwell, 1998). Students need their own individual, developmental schedule to make writing progress and only time will allow students to develop, as they need to.

Here in Figure 4, is a piece of Denny's writing – a piece he wrote about world hunger. It shows great depth and understanding of a worldly topic, using very few, well-chosen words:

I hold in my hand…
Dirt, seeds, planting
Growth
Grass, sunlight, rain
Growth
Harvest, hay bales, food
A fraction of world hunger solved.

Figure 4

In contrast, Hannah's focus with this next piece came from an incident she participated in during a family holiday activity. The fact that she chose this topic shows she has grown to value what happens in her life and feels free to express what she experiences in her writing. This is exactly what Ruth wanted her students to do – look at their life, react to it, and write about it. Hannah wrote this story about her cat and her Christmas tree. She chose to create a picture book with her story, illustrating each page with bright colors and cute pictures. I conferenced with her on this piece. She took great pride and ownership in this story and was very proud when her book was completed.

The Christmas Star and the Star is a Kitten

1. This kitten named Star was the star of the Christmas tree this year.
2. Let me tell you how Star becomes the star of the Christmas tree.
3. Well one day when me and my Mom and my brother were decorating the Christmas tree, my kitten Star found some tinsel hanging from the Christmas tree.
4. Star begins to pat at the tinsel with her paw and started to chase the tinsel around the tree.
5. Also while the Christmas lights blinked Star jumped on them with her paw.
6. She was chased down with her paws under her neck getting ready to attack all the blinking ornaments.
7. She flew in the air at the blinking ornaments.
8. Since our Christmas tree was small she jumped on the branches.
9. Once she was on the tree she carefully started to climb up to the top.
10. Once she reached the top of the tree she sat down and became the star of the Christmas tree. (Journal, Day Sixty-Five, Fall, 2001)

Both pieces, Denny's piece about world hunger and Hannah's piece about her Christmas cat, were at the top of each student's achievement bar. Both students were writing, both students felt success, and both students considered themselves writers. Both meandered around this Writers' Workshop on their own paths, expressing themselves and adding to the world's writing in their own way.

Cody and Eli – Comprehending Conferencing

In order for students to bring a piece of writing to the final publishing stage, Ruth required a content conference, a peer editing conference, and a final adult editing conference for students at different points during their writing process (see Appendix B). Ruth spent several sessions during share time explaining and demonstrating conferencing. She modeled conferencing in front of the class several times, using individual students and their own writing. Some students were ready to use conferencing at the time of the instruction, while others were not yet to that point. One day while I was working with another student, Cody and Eli came to me with questions. Eli wanted to know what a content conference was for, and Cody wanted to know what peer meant. While these two concepts had been taught during share time, Cody and Eli had not been ready to comprehend them. At this point they were standing in front of me, with written drafts in their hands, ready to learn about conferencing. (Journal, Day Sixteen, Fall, 2001) Their writing skills had taken time to progress as is true with any writers since, even when students participate in Writers' Workshop everyday, their writing development is slow (Atwell, 1998). When Ruth taught conferencing, Cody and Eli were not in need of the skill. They were still working on looking at their world and writing and reacting to it in their journals. Ruth taught it at a time when many students were ready for it. When Cody and Eli came to me with their questions, they were ready to learn about conferencing because they needed it to make progress on the pieces of writing they were working on. They had meandered around on their own mountain stream until they were finally ready to emerge and learn about conferencing. Writers' Workshop provides for this structure of learning too. The three of us conferenced together. Cody and Eli learned about conferencing at a time they chose to be beneficial to them (Journal, Fall, Day Sixteen, 2001).

Joey – A Big Disruption

One of the best writers in this class was also the biggest disruption to the class. Joey was a child with a lot of uncontrolled energy that seemed to disperse itself any time, in any direction. His lack of self-control was his biggest problem.

The freedom to move around during Writers' Workshop probably enhanced his lack of self-control. Joey wrote lots of great poetry during this time. He even won a poetry contest that he entered, but his actions toward other students and toward classroom property were not always respectful. Actually his writing process in this classroom was not within the realm of proper classroom activities (Journal, Fall, Day Sixty-two, 2001).

One day after Joey had disrupted the entire class yet again, I asked Ruth about the situation. This was her reply: "I can spend my whole day pouncing on him to force him into the class routine, but that would wear me out, it would take everybody's class time, and it would take away his spark for life and learning. So I choose my moments to steer him back on track. He is a wonderful writer and has lots of great ideas. He will learn to gear his skills toward the workings of a classroom. Sometimes there are children who need a different set of rules" (Journal, Day, Sixty-two, Fall 2001). Ruth knew that each student would create their own way to meander through Writers' Workshop. She was very aware that Joey's version was different. She was patient, and when it really mattered, she let him know it. Joey was yet another example of the varied paths of "meandering" that occurred daily in Writers' Workshop.

Hannah, Amber, and a Crooked Hammer

Hannah and Amber were both ready to sew their writing together with hard book covers at the same time. Hannah was going to construct a book for the story she had written about her cat's adventures with their Christmas tree and Amber had finished a collection of twelve poems. Ruth had printed out their writing from Adobe Page Maker, a program that situated their writing in book form and each girl had glued her favorite fabric onto precut mat board to create covers for their books. The hammer and nail work that was required in order to sew the pages and the cover together took place outside on the concrete sidewalk, just on the other side of the classroom door which leads to the playground. I went outside and sat down with these girls as they proceeded through the necessary steps to sew their books together. I had not seen Hannah and Amber interact during classroom activities and was struck by their teamwork

and support of each other as they worked toward a common goal. They were using Ruth's crooked hammer, perhaps abused and bent by someone along the way, to hit a large nail that punched sewing holes in the binding of their books. As Hannah smashed her fingers with the hammer, Amber comforted her and proceeded to demonstrate how to hold the nail and hit only the head of the nail. As Amber reared the hammer back and readied it for pounding, Hannah squinted her eyes and covered her ears. Amber's aim missed the nail, hitting her fingers and crashing the hammer into the concrete sidewalk – perhaps rendering the crooked hammer a little more crooked. Both girls looked at me with pain still in their eyes, begging for help with this hammer and nail task. We giggled and laughed as we relived their crazy aim with the hammer, and then I demonstrated how they could hold the nail and just punch it with the hammer (Journal, Day Twenty-Four, Fall 2001). After all, the holes they were making were just going through paper and fabric. It did not take a lot of force to make the holes. They were using Ruth's crooked hammer to punch sewing holes in the binding of their books. This part of the procedure was the final one where book covers and stories were bound together into a publication ready to read.

It is important to note the similarities and differences I had noticed between these two young ladies. They were both very diligent, hard working girls. Both were striving for their own level of perfection. Each had a work ethic that pushed them to their limits. The difference was that one had natural achievement levels way above grade level while the other one, at her best, achieved below grade level. The activities in this Writer's Workshop were an equalizer. Each girl worked hard and to the very tip-top of her ability. Each was proud to publish what she had written. And to top off all the other advantages of Writers' Workshop, these two girls got to sit outside together, giggling and exchanging stories, as they pounded with a crooked hammer, and sewed with green dental floss, in order to publish their first book ever.

A Final View of the Meandering Stream

These vignettes of students maneuvering through Writers' Workshop surfaced during various stages of my research process. While my ultimate

utilization of them was not apparent until my final analysis of the data, they were stories that helped to frame my vision of Ruth's teaching throughout my stay in her classroom. Each story presents an avenue of Writers' Workshop exemplary of many other similar stories – stories which relate positive learning situations facilitated in Writers' Workshop. Ruth knew she must somehow address the introduction of various writing techniques, sources of writing topics, the building of a community among students, spelling difficulties, and various discipline problems. My inclusion of these vignettes serves to take readers into these specific situations to understand how students reacted to this structure of writing instruction; how their individual needs were supported, and how their reactions to this learning situation helped to develop their writing processes.

It is also important to note that this is only one way to teach writing using Writers' Workshop methods. It would be difficult for another teacher to use this information as a step-by-step set of instructions to replicate in her own classroom. Each of the over three and one half million teachers in the United States could address this way of teaching and each teacher might tweak some different part of it to fit her own way of teaching and the needs of the specific students in her classroom.

Equally important to note is that Ruth did not write lesson plans in advance. Although she had a broad knowledge of the teaching of writing and a skeletal outline of what she needed to teach, what she did on any given day was determined by her observations and interactions with students from the previous day or days. Many times, as the day was just beginning, Ruth would say, "I need to give them (students) another shot in the arm." She would pull a book, Calkins, Lane, Fletcher, etc, from her shelf, and find a skill to introduce or another lesson to reinforce a previously taught skill (Journal, Fall, 2001). Her agenda and knowledge were in her head, and she used them as she determined their usefulness for students. Ruth, too, meandered through this Writers' Workshop, one step ahead of her students as she suggested possible paths for students to test with their writing. The foundation of her teaching path was determined by the specific flow of student ideas and skills. Ruth's teaching path led students to new

writing possibilities, new ways to express their ideas, and various skills to enhance their writing. It is a way of teaching writing that developed and grew over years of learning and teaching, and it changed yearly, daily, and repeatedly as is evidenced in this biography of her.

The grading system that Ruth used for Writers' Workshop helped her keep the students focused on what she considered most important in their development as writers. The problem of grading came into our conversation as Ruth prepared report cards at the end of the first six-week period. Ruth explained to me that she did not grade the quality of writing. These were fourth graders with limited writing experience. She thought it would be unfair to put a grade on what they wrote. What she had decided to value was how much they wrote in their journals. A few times during each grading period Ruth went through student journals and counted the number of pages each student had written. She then set up a grading scale and assigned a letter grade to each student. Ruth explained, "At this point, the process is more important than the quality of finished products" (Journal, Day Thirty-two, Fall, 2001). Ruth wanted students to experience their own writing process and come to value the conferencing and revising necessary in the progression of their written pieces. She took away the pressure of producing written pieces that would be graded. She instead focused students' learning on writing frequently, and revising journal entries into poems or picture books.

For students and teachers, Writers' Workshop does meander like a stream as they choose paths that best fit the flow of their ideas and their writing. Like the freedom of a stream as it chooses its own course, Writers' Workshop affords students the opportunity to test pathways their writing might take, to wade through murky waters in search of good, clear writing, and to sit by the side of the stream at times, to ponder different ways to express their ideas. The moments of "meandering" described here are exemplary of the wide range of skills and activities accommodated within a Writers' Workshop. Writers' Workshop is a broad frame of classroom structure. Within that frame numerous levels of achievement are deemed as successful. Students worked on their own individual

level, making progress in their own time. Ruth understood that completely. Her teaching reflected that understanding (Journal, Fall 2001).

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Appendix A

TIMELINE

Spring 2001	Searched and found Ruth as a research subject. Obtained permission from Ruth, her building principal and her county school system.
Summer 2001	Study approved by the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech.
August 2001	August 20 & 21, 8:30-12:00 noon – School workdays with Ruth.
August 22, 2001- December 20, 2001	Classroom study. Sixty-nine days of observation and participation in Ruth's classroom - 8:30-12:00 each day.
August 8, 2002	Three-hour life history interview with Ruth in her classroom.
March 10, 2003	Email contact
April 29, 2003	Email Contact
May 5, 2003	Email Contact
May 8, 2003	Email Contact
May 12, 2003	Peer edit with Ruth of Chapters 3 and 4 – Ruth's life biography.

Appendix B

WORKSHOP PROCEDURES

These are Ruth's ideas, taken from a handout she developed for teachers who were interested in knowing more about Writers' Workshop.

Useful tips for physically setting up a Writers' Workshop and steps that need to be taught to the students as they begin actively going through the writing process.

1. Remind students that the workshop will involve a lot of interaction with classmates during content conferences and they should be held on the floor using soft voices. When students sit on the floor, the sound of their conversation does not seem to bother the writing at the desks as much. Small pieces of carpet samples might make the floor more comfortable if the room is not carpeted.

2. Student desk areas should be special writing spaces. Emphasis needs to be placed on authors needing a quiet, undisturbed place to concentrate on their writing. Explain that when students interrupt another student it breaks that student's concentration and train of thought.

3. Students bring their writing journals, writer's folder, and pencil up to group share time. At the end of share time it is helpful to have students think about what step they are on as they head into workshop. A calendar inside the writing folder is a good place for students to write the topic and what stage they are on in the writing process. When share time is over the students who need to work on a draft can return to their desks to write. The students who are left can then pair up with a peer to conference or go to a computer to type their writing.

4. When the student has completed first drafts, content conferences, revisions, self-editing, peer editing, they put their name card in the adult editing box and begin searching in their composition book for another writing piece. It is important for them to understand that they do not sit idle while waiting for the adult editing step. (Noise, disruption and wasted time often occurs if students do

not know to start right in on choosing a new topic to write about.) some teachers like to have those rough drafts put directly into the adult editing box, I prefer having the students maintain possession of the rough drafts until the adult editing step. They can keep them in the pocket of their writing folder and just put their name card in the adult editing box. A three by five card, with the student's name at the top, can be moved by the student from the "not needing adult editing" box to the back of the "needs adult editing" box. The adult editor can then easily pull out cards from the front of the box.

5. Stapling a small piece of paper, with the writing process steps on it, to the top of their notebook paper (draft 1) gives the student a place to keep track of the writing process steps by writing the name of the person below the step. Ruth used this form to help students keep track of their revising:

6. Writing the date and putting rough draft on the top of the paper helps the student feel comfortable about marking corrections and changes on the paper, and helps the student and the teacher see progress of student work by date.

7. Write only on one side of the rough draft paper. This allows the back to be used for adding on ideas, making rewrite changes, or cutting the paper apart and rearranging the parts of the writing. The student can put a number in a circle where he/she wants to make an addition or change in the text. Then turn the paper over and use the same number along with the changes. The student can then incorporate those changes when the paper is being copies or typed for final publication.

8. It is helpful for the teacher to jot down an on-going record of the students' progress. This makes it easier to monitor student progress at a glance. The students can call this information out to the teacher at the completion of share time when they are deciding which step they are on in their calendar. It can be as simple as: Teacher, "Doug?" Student: "My dog – content conference" or "My dog – draft 1" etc.

9. Individual student calendars in the student's writing folder help the student to know where they are each day and over a period of time.

10. A self-evaluation every three weeks or so really helps students realize their own progress, and identify weak skill areas. These pieces of writing can be put in their portfolios to use for overall evaluation times and parent conferences.

11. Writing folders should have "Skill Sheets", preferably in another color so that they are easy for the student to find among their rough draft papers. These accompany the student when they go to the adult edit step. The end of the adult editing step is a good time to look over the entire piece with the student and discuss areas that were changed. The skill sheet is a good lace to have the student write some sort of note about one or two skills that he/she is working on (being positive rather than saying "troubles" the student is having). Students can take these skill sheets out when they are self-editing to see if they remembered to work on their particular skills. They are also helpful when the students are setting goals for improving their writing.

12. An "Adult Editing table" that has room for two people to sit side by side is good to have in a Writers' Workshop room. The table should have a container with pens of a different color than the pencil that the student writes with, a dictionary, and a thesaurus. (The different color-correcting pen helps students see where they made corrections. Crossing out and writing over the errors should be done instead of the student erasing). It needs to be in a place where it will not disturb the writers at their desks.

It is very important for the adult editor to let the student maintain control of the editing pen. This reinforces the student's ownership of his/her own writing as well as the responsibility for improving his/her writing skills. (It is difficult to not want to write on the student's paper, but it is important to talk him/her through where and why the changes are needed rather just doing it for them). Adult editing time can be speeded up a bit if the adult has the student underline the misspelled words and look those up after leaving the editing table.

Remember that parents can be a big help in the editing stages. They can free the teacher up to touch base with more students in small conferences and find specific pieces of student work that can be shared in share time to help other students understand a writing strategy. Using student work (with their permission) as examples is very powerful. Usually these are positive strategy suggestions, not negative editing marks.

13. Students should be encouraged to cross out and add words above and to the side rather than erase a lot during their rough draft stage. They may want to go back to some words that they had written and if they have been erased, the ideas are often difficult to recall.

14. Collect the notebooks in small groups and write positive comments in them so that they know you are expecting them to write in them. Collecting them during the school day allows them to have their notebooks with them in the evenings. Reminding them to write in their notebooks each evening and have them in their packs at the end of the day is very important. Sometimes little suggestions like “find a different place to write”, “find a high place”, or “secret place” to put their written feelings in the notebook. Then when these are shared, the students can brainstorm other possibilities. Tell them that different environments cause us to see and feel things differently.

Appendix C

RUTH'S MINI-LESSONS

Day 2 – Ruth read *Owl Moon,* by Jane Yolen, twice for students. The first reading of *Owl Moon* was for listening only. During this first reading, Ruth instructed students to try and picture the events of the story in their heads. A discussion about words and ideas and writing, intertwined the reading of this book.

Day 3 **–** *Owl Moon* – Ruth read this Caldecott Award winning picture book aloud a second time. Students were instructed to make tally marks every time they heard a comparison in the story. A discussion revealed that students heard these comparisons from the story:

- Whiter than the milk in a cereal bowl
- Looked so hard my ears hurt
- Threaded his way through the trees
- Lifted off the branch like a shadow
- (Metaphor) I was a shadow as I walked home
- Train whistle blew like a sad, sad, song
- I could feel the cold as if an icy hand was on my back
- Felt cold and hot at the same time.

Day 7 – Ruth read Russell Hoban's, *Bedtime for Francis,* instructing students to open their writing journals and have their pencils ready to write bedtime memory shots as Ruth read.

The students loved listening to Ruth read this book. She had a special voice for father and a special voice for mother and a high girlie voice for Francis. She made Francis sing, she made her sound innocent as Francis made up more and more excuses for not going to bed.

Ruth also used this book to teach students about ending stories. "Now what did the author do at the end of this story to wrap things up?" Ruth asked students after she finished reading. A discussion revealed that Hoban had Francis solve her problem of not being able to sleep and reminded the reader of all the things Francis had tried with her parents to avoid going to bed.

Day 11 – To illustrate possible topics for student poetry, Ruth read poems aloud from these books: *Creatures of Earth, Sea and Sky*, by Georgia Heard and *Sky Songs*, by Myra Cohn Livingston. “There isn’t anything in your life that you can’t write about,” Ruth told students.

As Ruth read a poem, from a published book, she related the ideas in the poem to the author’s writing journal. “I bet he took these ideas from various parts of his writing journal and created this poem,” Ruth told students.

Kapok Tree, by Lynne Cherry – Ruth read this book to students during an extra slot of time, just before lunch. She focused on these story characteristics:

- Look at beginnings – dramatic leads, misleading leads
- Tensions – person vs. nature – person trying to chop down rain forest.
- Ending – surprise – he didn’t chop down the tree – is this story circular? Does it end where it began?

Day 15 – Ruth introduced students to these poetry books. She began reading poems randomly, out loud to students. As additional topics surfaced during discussions, Ruth chose relevant poems to illustrate various topics and style for students.

- *To See the World A Fresh,* Lillian Moore and Judith Thurman.
- *Sky Songs,* Myra Cohn Livingston, Holiday House, Inc., 1984.
- *Owl Moon,* Jane Yolen, Philomal Press, 1987.
- *Creatures of Earth, Sea, and Sky* Georgia Heard, Boyds Mills Press, 1997.
- *Poetry for Young People,* Carl Sandburg, 1995.
- *These Small Stones,* Norma Farber editor, HarperCollins Children’s Books, 1987.
- *Opening Days Sports Poems,* Scott Medlock (Illustrator), Harcourt, 1996.

Day 16 –Ruth read many picture books aloud to illustrate writing characteristics and functions authors use in stories. I was not always in the

classroom when picture books were read aloud. Ruth read to students at the end of the day and at other times when there were available pieces of time. Ruth told me that her selection of books came mostly from Ralph Fletcher's book *What A Writer Needs.* I refer you to the Appendix of the book, beginning on page 165 and continuing to page 177, where you will find an extensive list of picture books categorized by a characteristic exemplified within the story. The following is a representative sampling:

- *Wilderness Cat,* Natalie Kinsey-Wamock, inner conflicts.
- *The Relatives Came,* Endings and circular structure, unforgettable language.
- *The Great Kapok Tree,* – Tensions and conflict – person vs. Nature, unforgettable language, distinct sense of place, inviting voice.

Day 18 – On this day, Ruth revisited Barry Lane's ideas about "exploding a moment." I am going to ask you to watch me very closely – watch my hands, watch my face, watch my arm – watch what I do and watch how I do it," Ruth explained. She proceeded with this series of events and discussions:

1. Sitting in a chair, Ruth slams a book to the floor.
    - Students responded: "loud noise," "your face looked mad."
2. "I'm going to do this again. "Watch me and see what else you notice." Ruth slammed the book to the floor again.
    - Students responded: "hand tense," "book opened up as it hit the ground," "book was falling like a bird," "it was like the sound of wind whipping against a tree."
3. "Now this time just look at my hand."
    - Students responded: "your hand shook," "your hand was flying with anger," "your hand turned white like it had just been stuck in snow."
4. "Now look at my knuckles. How do they change when I grab the book?" Ruth slowly lowers the book, and then slams it to the floor.
    - Students responded: "your arm was shaking," "your hand was squeezing hard around the book."

5. Ruth raises up the book to slam it onto the floor, but she doesn't let go of it.
    - Students responded: "your face was squinting," "your eyes were bulging," "your eyes were watering," "your whole face was tense."

Ruth explained, "You could describe this event very simply – 'She raised the book up then dropped it on the floor.'" Tyler responded, "Boring." Ruth elaborated, "You can explode this moment with the look on my face, my hands, or the sound of my book. You don't have to write about lots and lots of things. You can write lots and lots about one moment."

This was Ruth's way of teaching a writing technique Barry Lane terms, "Explode a Moment." Lane explains this idea in his book, *After the End,* on page 67. Here he explains how to write a lot about a small, significant moment. He illustrated this technique with a story about a friend who poured a quart of milk over her sister's head. This moment, which only took a few seconds in real time, is explained in great detail within a story. Ruth taught this technique and assigned students to try it in their own writing.

- I noted that even the reluctant writers in this classroom were getting excited. I had watched as several students slowly came alive, as writing and all the excitement it brings to life have taken over the demeanor of these students.
- Ruth's assignment – "This is what you are going to do tonight. Pick a moment from your life and explode it." Ruth read a poem written by a former student titled "My Eyes Turned into Lakes." It was a moment about how biting into a hot taco, caused this student's eyes to water. "This was just a little moment exploded into a poem," Ruth explained. "Now tonight you are going to take a moment in time from your life and explode it. You can make your experiences come alive. You need to be wrapped up in what you write. You need to carry your reader with you. Also include your thought shots. What you were thinking during this moment. What went on in your head? You are good authors. Take your reader with you as you write."

Day 24 – Teaching Conferencing – Ruth told students a story from Barry Lane's book, *After the End*, page 13. "I have a really important story to tell you and it's a scary story too! This is it. It happened when I was little and it was the most scared I had ever been in my life. There was this dog. And then my mother came and she rescued me. That's it. (Silence) Any questions?"

Questions from students:

- What happened?
- A rabid dog?
- What kind of dog?
- How big?

Ruth explained, "That story lacked a lot of information. If you were conferencing and your friend left out information, it is your job to ask good questions. What if you don't have a friend and you are by yourself, how can you conference? Could you ask yourself these kinds of questions and see what information you can add to this piece?" A discussion about conferencing followed.

Day 25 – From Barry Lane's *After the End,* Ruth created this lesson about fueling good writing, a continuation of conferencing skills. "Good writing is fueled by unanswered questions," Ruth explained. "Now what is fueled? Gas to go on – wood for a fire. We think about more information by asking why. Keep yourself asking questions – keep yourself asking why. Good writers observe and ask questions. Good writers think constantly about how they feel, what they see, how things work. You are such a great bunch of kids. I love coming here to be with you and helping you with your writing. I get excited just knowing I'm going to hear what you have written."

Day 26 – The mini-lesson on this day, focused on describing using details. First Ruth used a lesson from Lane's *After the End,* (p. 22) about a runaway tree, to show students how writers can make things come alive – how they can use detail to draw their reader into their story. Ruth read the following, aloud to students:

"If I were to tell you that the maple tree outside there on the playground just said to itself, 'I'm sick of being a tree. I think I want to be a person now,' and if I told you that maple tree got up and is now sprinting down Interstate 89, what would you say?"

The students pause a minute, then sigh, then groan. "No way! Trees don't run."

"OK, OK. But what if I said, 'The maple tree decided it didn't want to be a tree anymore and is running down Route 89 and there is a little boy named Seth chasing after it and a blue Chevy Cavalier wagon. And it just stepped on my 1979 Toyota Liftback, crushing the box of Twix candy bars I was saving to bring to class tomorrow.' What if I were to say, 'There is a cat up in the tree, and the fire department is chasing after it, and that cat is howling like a wolf on the highest branch, and the principal, Mrs. Stewart, has lassoed it with an orange extension cord and tied it to the bumper of school bus number ten.' If I could tell you enough details, so that you actually started to see this runaway tree, if I could make you begin to imagine something exact and real about this runaway tree, you might, you just might, go to the window and look. That's what writers do. They make you go to the window and look" (Lane, 1993, p. 22).

Next Ruth wanted students to focus in on a particular spot to practice looking for details. "I'm asking you to focus in on one spot like you are using binoculars. You have 10 seconds. You may stand up and look in any direction around the room." After 10 seconds Ruth instructed everyone to sit down. Ruth asked questions: "How many things did you find in your one little spot? What did you see? How can you as writers use this skill of zooming in? You can use this as an author in a powerful way." A discussion followed.

Ruth read from Lane's book: "Turn the knob on the binoculars for a sharper focus. Your room can be messy but readers won't really know it till they see the shirts and blouses wrestling with each other on the tan carpet, till they smell the aroma of old socks and hear the overhead fan whining with the weight of wet blue jeans that spin round and round like a pair of legs trying to dance with their shadow" (Lane, 1993, p. 25).

Assignment: "Tonight in your notebooks write binocular – zero into a specific place, fine focus something. Write juicy details of what you see. They say if you as a writer can bring in the sense of smell, it can be very powerful. You can start this assignment at school now while you have spare time - get going on it."

Day 27 – Ruth read from page 23 in Lane's, *After the End.* This lesson focused on describing an abundance of specific detail. It describes a conversation between a man and a woman trying to identify a specific building. After reading Lane's passage Ruth explained, "You know what you want to say but it is hard to get it down on paper. What happens as details about the bus stop are added? What happens to the picture in your head?" A discussion followed.

Day 28 – Ruth talked about the value of precise nouns and verbs using ideas from Calkins (1994), *The Art of Teaching Writing,* p. 211-212.

"We've been talking about details and how to best describe our ideas. Some people feel like the more adjectives and adverb they use the better their writing will be, but more words are not usually as effective as fewer, stronger nouns and verbs:

- If I said, "The boy walked down the street."
- The boy skipped down the street – a light feeling.
- The boy trudged down the street – a heavy feeling.
- Look how the verb changes the meaning and the feeling.
- Trudged even sounds like it means. Tyler said, "You don't even have to know what that word means. It just sounds like what it means."

Ruth explained, "Too many adjectives and adverbs are signs of weak sentences. Strong nouns and strong verbs can replace adjectives and adverbs

and add strength and clear, precise meaning to writing." Ruth read Calkins' passage from pages 211 and 212 in *The Art of Teaching Writing,* about a piece Calkins wrote when she was young. It contained many adjectives and adverbs that could be replaced with strong nouns and verbs:

- Young dog – puppy
- Walked quietly – tip toed (Calkins, 1994, p. 211)

"It's awesome when you learn all the tricks and tips of good writing. You can really suck your reader in. Bla verbs – see if you have any bla verbs in your writing that need replacing," Ruth explained.

Day 33 – Ruth asked students to write down all of the strategies they had learned so far to use in their writing. After a few minutes of thinking and writing Ruth held a whole class group share to generate ideas. They began by recalling and listing strategies they have been using so far in their writing:

- Exploded moments
- Composition – composing in writing journals
- Verbs – strong, forceful, specific verb – taking away mud verbs
- Free verse poetry
- Zeroing in – binoculars
- Common topics in writing journals
- Like phrases
- Strong nouns
- Personification- making objects come alive
- More details – description – makes writing more realistic – create pictures
- Getting to the juicy parts – take out extra parts.
- Cutting out repeated words.
- Grammar things, commas, apostrophe, punctuation marks.

Day 45 – On this day, Ruth discussed Fletcher's (1999) ideas about a writer's toolbox from his book, *Live Writing*. Ruth explained, "We aren't thinking of pencils and pens, but instead of tools that make writing clearer and more precise.

Things like “words, imagination, a love of books, a sense of story, and ideas for how to make the writing live and breath” (Fletcher, 1999, p. 2). These are the tools writers’ need.

Day 46 – Ruth read ideas about the importance of a writer’s place to write from Fletcher’s, *How Writers Work.* “Your writing place doesn’t have to be a spacious one. It could be an easy chair in a corner of a room or a breakfast nook in the kitchen. It could be a place in the woods where you can lean back against a tree or rock. You may have to try out several different writing places before you settle on one that feels right” (2000, p. 7-8). A discussion followed.

Using ideas from Fletcher’s (1999), *Live Writing*, pages 15 and 16, Ruth talked to students about creating characters in their writing. “If characters are to come alive on the page you have to first start imagining them in your mind.” Fletcher (1999) explains: “I get ideas for my characters by keeping my eyes open wherever I go” (p. 16). A discussion followed.

Day 48 – For this mini-lesson, Ruth focused on Fletcher’s (1999) chapter, “It’s About Time” from *Live Writing*. In this chapter, Fletcher suggests four ways to control time in writing: “Cutting;” “Focusing on a Narrow Slice of Time;” “Slowing Down the Hot Spot;” and “Using Flashback.” After a discussion on this topic, Ruth asked, “How do we slow a moment, a day?” Cody replied, “Write every single detail of one moment.” Ruth then commented, “The more details you add the more the reader gets caught up in the moment.

Day 52 – Ruth used the picture book, *Charlie Anderson*, by Barbara Abercrombie to conduct a lesson on questioning. Ruth asked, “What do you wonder about?” After a discussion Ruth began reading *Charlie Anderson* and asked students to interrupt her whenever they thought of a question. Before she read to the second page, Ruth had written seventeen questions on the board. The list multiplied with the reading of more pages. As the questions were answered in the story, Ruth wrote the answers on the board next to each question. Ruth had to remind students: “Don’t make silly questions. Make questions that might really pop into your head.”

After finishing the book, Ruth asked, “Which questions were answered in the book?” Ruth went through them one by one. They discuss what the answer might be to each question. Some questions were not answered. Ruth explained that writers present information at different times during their writing.

Day 59 – Ruth read a Christmas story: *Red Ranger Came Calling* a picture book by Berkeley Breathed.

Students sat Indian style on the rug around Ruth as she read: Ruth reminded students, “If anything sparks an idea you want to use in your writing, write a little seed in your writing journal so you can use it later.” As Ruth read each page of this book, her voice changed with the characters. She exhibited a high, raspy voice, a low gruff voice, and a strained old voice. Ruth asked, “Do you hear all these like phrases in here?” She wanted students to notice how a real author uses like phrases in writing.

Ruth has read this book many times, but still she read and shared it as if this was the first time she had heard the story, and the first time she had seen the pictures. Ruth was like a little kid, sneaking glances at the pictures to come as she read, pausing from her reading, for long moments, to be sure every child has plenty of time with each picture – plenty of opportunity to become a part of this story.

The story had several up and down tension moments. Ruth asked, “What was the overall big problem that had to be solved?” Students answered, “He wanted a Red Ranger bicycle.” Ruth wanted students to think about story characteristics: “Think about the like phrases. Think about the tension points. Think about the big problem in this book that needed to be solved. Remember when I asked you to predict what would happen next in the story and you thought you knew what would happen – but what a surprise. The author took you on a very different journey.”

Day 62 – Ruth read a picture book, *On Christmas Eve,* by Margaret Wise Brown. Ruth gave this instruction, “This book is full of descriptive words and phrases. Get your writing journal open and your pencil ready. Make tally marks each time you hear a descriptive word or phrase. This book does not have a

deep plot, but it does have good descriptive language. If anything rings a memory note for you, write a notation in your journal and leave a space so you can explode it later."

Ruth pointed out some descriptive words and phrases from *On Christmas Eve:* "Listening all over with eyes, and hands and feet." "Wood creaked in the dying fire." "A fire is very mesmerizing." Ruth asked students to consider the span of time in this story: "If we looked at the time involved in this story how much time do you think has passed? The kids wake up, they come downstairs, they hear the carolers, and sneak back upstairs. How much time might have passed?" A discussion followed.

Amber asked, "But what about the wish?" Ruth tried to answer, "I don't know. The wish was never answered. When you write, you can use other books to help you. They can be your teachers."

Day 67 – Ruth read a picture book aloud to the class, *Night Tree* by Eve Bunting. This is a story about a family who lives in the country. On Christmas Eve they back into their pickup truck and head to the woods to find their special Christmas tree; they walk deep into the woods to find the tree they decorate every year. When they find the tree, they decorate it with tangerines and string adorned with nuts and popcorn. It is a tree they decorate for the animals. At home the family has thoughts of their tree and the animals they decorated it for. Ruth discusses these story characteristics with students:

- Distinct sense of place
- Unforgettable language
- Misleading events – we thought they were searching for a tree to cut down.

Appendix D

WRITER'S WORKSHOP:

HOW DID WE GET THERE FROM HERE?

Ideas From Colonial Times

The research in the teaching of writing in this country is at best huge. The volumes of books and articles prescribing research, theory, and "best" practice about the teaching of writing to our children run in large stacks and along more than one hundred and fifty years of our calendar. Ideas have changed, methods have varied, but still there is a thread of various elements of Writers' Workshop, which holds steady from the beginning until now.

Lucille Schultz, is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Cincinnati. She rummaged through old English textbooks in the Library of Congress in the days before sections of the library were closed to the public. She was searching for ideas from these old textbooks that would explain the basis for the instruction of English during colonial times. While she found many traditional ideas about grammar, mechanics, and ways to teach writing, she also found hints of the thinking and support we give writers in Writers' Workshops today.

> [John Frost] taught students to write "freely and boldly"…In his 1839, "Letters to School Children," Frost recommended that students keep journals. "Keeping a journal," he wrote, "of all that you see and hear of any importance is an… extremely useful way of employing your pen. This not only gives you ease in writing, but it makes you attentive to what is going on around you, and observant of what you see"…Frost anticipated the kind of free writing we associate with Peter Elbow and the cautions against premature editing advocated by Mike Rose, Linda Flower, and John Hayes. (Schultz, 1999, p. 148)

Schultz found that throughout the 1800's, ideas about journals, peer review, and conferencing can be found in school textbooks.

> In 1867, Bonnell recommended…that students exchange early drafts with each other "for mutual criticism" and then return them to the author for revision; in 1876, Quackenbos suggested the class exchange compositions, read each other's aloud, then offer their recommendations for revision and in 1892, Shaw wrote, "Occasionally it will be found of value to let pupils exchange papers for criticism." (qtd. in Schultz, 1999, p 148)

In Brouson Alcott's school founded in 1834, students kept journals but he resisted the temptation to correct text errors. "…petty criticism [keeps] the art of composition from being developed in children," he said (qtd. in Schultz, 1999, p. 148). W.W. Davis' work in the mid-1800's, speaks of students keeping their written work in portfolios, each year separately, to give students "'the satisfaction of tracing their gradual improvement as shown in a long succession of trials.'" (qtd. in Schultz, 1999, p. 150).

While ideas of Writers' Workshop were in textbooks during colonial times, I think it is important to note, as Schultz discusses in her book, that the earlier writers were under a far different umbrella of communication than we are today. Many who wrote about the teaching of writing were teachers themselves and most of the time their ideas spread little farther than the walls of their own schools. Most did not write articles for any professional journals, or give workshops for classroom teachers. Many published their ideas in books, but sale and distribution of them was limited. Spreading the word was difficult. These ideas about the teaching of writing remained isolated within close ranged pockets of their original educational community.

A Paradigm Shift in the Teaching of Writing

The journey to Writers' Workshop, as we know it today, is a journey of change necessitated by our deepening knowledge of the writing process. It has been influenced by public criticism of the writing skills of our nation's students,

broadened by research, and deepened by our studies of children at work. The changes in our thinking create an exciting story, one that details the opening of literary doors for our children through the teaching of writing.

Today, I think we can safely say that the teaching of writing is on the new side of a paradigm shift. We have moved through a series of changes in our knowledge and thinking about the teaching of writing. In the beginning our thinking was of the old, traditional teaching of writing as a product, composed individually, from an assigned topic, and whose evaluation focused on correct spelling, proper grammar, and mechanics. Then we hit bumps in the road, changes in society, which forced us to look at writers, their writing, and how we teach. Next was a period of time when research viewed writing as a rigid, cognitive, step-by-step process to be taught and followed by students as they wrote. And then onto where we are today, viewing writing as an individual, recursive, process, which must be supported as it develops through social interaction.

Early Events

The paradigm for the teaching of writing is the conceptual model that governs the way we teach writing. It is the set of beliefs that frame professional thinking, and molds our teaching. The paradigm is usually based on research and is interpreted by experts into professional, effective methods of teaching.

Lucy Calkins says, “When I went to school, writing was rarely taught, rather, it was assigned and then corrected” (Calkins, 1986, p. 13). This was the basis for teaching writing within the old paradigm. There was an emphasis on the written product, which was planned before it was written, while assessment focused on proper form, grammar and spelling within the finished product. This was our way of teaching writing for a very long time. Colonial textbooks reeked of lessons supporting these methods. “In 1823, William Russell wrote that ‘[e]very error ought to be carefully and distinctly shown, and minutely discussed: and the pupil should be required to recite the rule of Syntax, Punctuation, Structure, or Style, which, in any instance has been violated’” (qtd. in Schultz, 1999, p. 146). The 1887 textbook author John Scott Clark wrote, “’The real thinking…should be

almost entirely done before the first definite sentence is written'" (qtd. in Schultz, 1999, p. 147).

These ideas lead to this statement made by Maxine Hairston (1982) as she describes the basis for the old paradigm:

> It is important to note that the traditional paradigm did not grow out of research or experimentation…mostly it seems to be based on some idealized and orderly vision of what literature scholars, whose professional focus is on the written product, seem to imagine is an efficient method of writing. It is a prescriptive and orderly view of the creative act, a view that defines the successful writer as one who can systematically produce a 500-word theme of five paragraphs, each with a topic sentence. Its proponents hold it *a priori;* they have not tested it against the composing processes of actual writers. (p. 5)

So, if we taught writing this way for a very long time, what happened to make us stop and rethink our methods? What caused this method to cease being the best way to teach writing?

Signs of Change

> Once upon a time, several decades past, it was rumored that a student named Johnny couldn't read or write, and that this was mainly the fault of schools and colleges. (Foster, 1992, p. 1)

And then there were signs of change. Maxine Hairston brings several events into focus as evidences that old thoughts were being replaced with new ones. She says it was in the mid 1950s that "changes in theory probably started…from intellectual inquiry and speculation about language and language learning" (Hairston, 1982, p.7). She notes Noam Chomsky's, 1957 theory of transformational grammar, (looked at processes of language rather than rules of grammar and language), Francis Christensen's early 1960s essays about the generative rhetoric of the sentence and paragraph, (added to awareness of process in language development), and the Anglo-American Seminar at Dartmouth College, on the Teaching of English held in the summer of 1966 – (British and American participants emphasized engaging children in the writing process rather than formal teaching of grammar and usage), as three events

which began to changed thinking and added to the progress of a paradigm shift in the teaching of writing. (ideas from Hairston, 1999, pp. 7-8)

While these supports were coming from within the profession, society was exhibiting its own pressures. There were “embarrassing stories about college graduates who [could not] pass teacher competency tests, and …angry complaints about employees who [could not] write reports” (Hairston, 1999, p. 8). Hairston explains that professors agreed and were embarrassed. Their methods for teaching writing were no longer working.

The question then became why, at this time, were things not working anymore? Hairston (1999) answers it this way:

> I believe that the external conditions which have hastened the crisis in the teaching of writing are open admissions policies, the return to school of veterans and other groups of older students who are less docile and rule-bound than traditional freshmen, the national decline in conventional verbal skills, and the ever larger number of high school graduates going on to college as our society demands more and more credentials for economic citizenship. Any instructional system would come close to collapse under such a strain, and our system for teaching writing has been particularly vulnerable because it has been staffed largely by untrained teachers who have had little scholarly interest in this kind of teaching. (p. 9)

Since that time attempts have been made to remedy and patch the writing inadequacies of students in our colleges with writing centers and remedial course work. We have tried to offer a quick fix for unscholarly work being done in scholarly environments. So far we only have small patches on big problems.

Mina Shaughnessy

Why doesn’t the traditional writing paradigm work? What is wrong with the way we have always taught writing? These questions must be addressed in order to fix the problem. It was Mina Shaughnessy (1977) in her book *Errors and Expectations,* who stopped to ask, “What went wrong?” From her book I quote the following description about what made her stop and look:

> …in the spring of 1970, the City University of New York adopted an admissions policy that guaranteed to every city resident with a high school diploma a place in one of its eighteen tuition-free colleges… thereby opening its doors not only to a larger population of students than it had ever had before…but to a wider range of students than any college had probably ever admitted or thought of admitting to it campus…
> One of the first tasks these students faced when they arrived at college was to write a placement essay…Judged by the results of these tests, the young men and women who were to be known as open admissions students fell into one of three groups: 1. those who met the traditional requirements for college work, who appeared from their tests…to be able to begin at the traditional starting points; 2. those who had survived their secondary schooling but not thrived on it…and whose writing reflected a flat competence; 3. those who had been left so far behind the others in their formal education that they appeared to have little chance of catching up, students whose difficulties with the written language seemed of a different order from those of other groups, as if they had come, you might say, from a different country.
>
> …The third group contained true outsiders…strangers in academia, unacquainted with the rules and rituals of college life, unprepared for the sorts of tasks their teachers were about to assign them…
>
> Not surprisingly, the essays these students wrote during their first weeks of class stunned the teachers who read them. Nothing, it seemed, short of a miracle was going to turn such students into writers…To make matters worse, there were no studies nor guides, nor even suitable textbooks to turn to. Here were teachers trained to analyze the belletristic achievements of the ages marooned in basic writing classrooms with adult student writers who appeared by college standards to be illiterate. (p. 1-3)

Shaughnessy's discoveries were monumental in changing the attitudes toward the teaching of writing. Her insightful delving, which connected the

processes of writing to the teaching of writing, led her to a conclusion that would enhance the thinking of everyone in this field:

> …basic writing students write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes. These they make aplenty and for such a variety of reasons that the inexperienced teacher is almost certain to see nothing but a chaos of error when he first encounters their papers. Yet a closer look will reveal very little that is random or 'illogical' in what they have written. And the keys to their development as writers often lie hidden in the very features of their writing that English teachers have been trained to brush aside with a marginal code letter or a scribbled injunction to 'Proofread!' Such strategies ram at the doors of their incompetence while the keys that would open them lie in view. (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 5)

Within her book, *Errors and Expectations,* Shaughnessy discusses broad ranges of errors, and the expectations teachers can build on as they help beginning writers. When one considers these BW (basic writing) students, where their lives have led them, and how they have used writing and language in the past, we must acknowledge this writing sample, written for college placement purposes, as something very different from their lifelong means of communication. When communication was reduced to pen and paper for the test, BW students lost the luxury of using other means to enhance their communication:

> For the BW student, academic writing is a trap, not a way of saying something to someone. The spoken language looping back and forth between speakers, offering chances for groping and backing up and even hiding, leaving room for the language of hands and faces, of pitch and pauses, is generous and inviting. Next to this rich orchestration, writing is but a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn't know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who

> reads it with a lawyer's eyes, searching for flaws. (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 7)

While *Errors and Expectations* is geared to help teachers deal specifically with this new population of college students, Shaughnessy (1977) conveys universal advice for writing teachers:

> …programs are not the answers to the learning problems of students, but …teachers are…good teachers create good programs…the best programs are developed *in situ,* in response to the needs of individual student populations and as reflections of the particular histories and resources of [those to be taught]. (p. 6)

Mina Shaughnessy's study of over 5,000 freshmen writing samples told society a couple of things. First, the way we teach writing to schoolchildren does not produce good writers. Second, we must study how the human being writes, and then develop ways to teach writing that will support the development of writing skills. "Shaughnessy's insight was utterly simple and vitally important: we cannot teach students to write by looking only at what they have written. We must also understand *how* that product came into being, and *why* it assumed the form that it did…We have to do the hard thing, examine the intangible process, rather than the easy thing, evaluate the tangible product" (Hairston, 1982, p.11).

Janet Emig

About the same time, Janet Emig became the first to study writers in the process of writing. She chose to sit beside high school students as they were composing:

> "Emig, in contrast to studying writing samples, began to interview and observe high school students as they engaged in the process of writing. She talked with them, asked questions, and listened as they talked to themselves. She discovered that high school students were not passive and silent during the writing process…Emig found that writers actively engaged in *thinking* as they write. Therefore, it is not only the end product that shows us something about writers…but rather, it is what goes on

> inside writers' minds as they write that becomes an important indicator for instruction. (Solley, 2000, p.3)

"Emig used her research to identify several categories of composing: planning, starting, composing aloud, reformulation (correcting, revising, and rewriting), stopping, and contemplation of the product" (Dahl & Farnan, 1998, p. 7). The study shows the flexible nature of these components during writing: "…composing does not occur as a left-to-right, solid, uninterrupted activity with an even pace. Rather there are recursive, as well as anticipatory features" (Emig, 1971, p. 84). Emig concluded that writing is a recursive process where writers use these categories in no certain order as they write. "As a result of her work with 12th graders, Emig noted that school seemed to have a significant, sometimes negative, influence on students' ability to think and behave like writers" (Dahl & Farnan, 1998, p. 7).

Emig's work led other researchers to contemplate the processes of writers at work:

> "Peter Elbow…introduced the idea of meaning found within a student's writing and described the importance in communication. It is this meaning, he argued, that may and should be responded to by another author. He fostered the notion of the teacherless writers' group, whereby writers sit together and discuss their writing. In this way writers are able to focus on the meaning and the message the writer has attempted to communicate. These teacherless writers' groups were the precursors to student-directed conferences practiced in many of today's classrooms (Solley, 2000, p. 3).

Linda Flower

In another landmark study, Linda Flower (1981) outlined nine steps, divided into four categories that writers use as they compose.

> Each of these nine steps represents a task you as a writer will need to do. However, these steps are unusual: unlike stair steps that march straight from A to B, each of these steps may need to be taken over and over in the process of writing…the normal process of a writer is not a linear march

> forward; it is recursive. That is, writers constantly return to earlier steps such as planning in order to carry out later ones. (p. 49-50)

Linda Flower studied college writers from think-aloud accounts as they progressed through a piece of writing. What she found was that as we write, we pop from step to step and back and forth from planning to generating ideas, designing and editing in no special order, but in a fashion, which helps us make progress through a written piece. We do what is necessary to draw more relevance into our piece and make it ready for our intended audience.

Flower studied Joan, a college junior in engineering at a large university, as she wrote a letter of application to study medical engineering in London. Her process included thinking and planning for several days before she actually sat down to write. She wrote her first words late at night, in front of her TV. Her first writing was a “humdrum essay” which she was not pleased with. “The first important change in her strategy came about on day six quite by chance when she stopped by to ask a professor to write a recommendation for her” (Flower, 1981, p. 52). This visit resulted in some much-needed brainstorming and generating of ideas Joan had not thought about including in her letter. The professor wanted his letter to correspond with Joan’s goals and purposes for going to London, so he questioned her in order to understand her thinking. Throughout this conversation Joan brainstormed with her professor, set sub goals for her rewriting of the letter, and thought deeply and widely about her qualifications and reasons for going. Joan used the new ideas generated in this conference, to go back and plan a new letter using these more organized, creative thoughts, which focused on her purpose and connected her thoughts with her reasons and her actions.

This writing process for Joan was recursive. She revisited several of the nine steps in the composing process because her thinking was altered by conversation and her realization of new information. Her initial ideas were not extensive enough and needed to be expanded and intensified in order to meet her goals and reach her audience. She planned and wrote and generated more ideas, organized them with her creative thinking, and wrote again. Her recursive

processes enabled her to develop ideas creatively within her letter, tap other aspects of her thinking and incorporate those as well. And all the time she was reviewing her paper and editing for correctness. Truly a recursive process – it was in no way a linear one.

Writing as a Cognitive Process

This research, establishing the belief that writers are active thinkers and questioners as they write, and that writing is a recursive process, lead to a different way of teaching writing:

> Unfortunately, interpretations of this body of research in elementary and middle school curricula in many areas did not embody the recursive characteristic of composing. Instead, it presented a picture of the writing process as a linear progression of process components from prewriting through drafting and, finally, to revising. This picture had a powerful effect on how writing instruction began to be framed…In-school writing tasks at the elementary and middle school level began to take on a predictable format, in which all students would first prewrite, making explicit the ideas they intended to write, through such activities as brainstorming and outlining. Students then wrote the complete text based on their prewriting; only after this stage were they encouraged to revise… While research supported a recursive model of writing, classroom teachers did not yet have an instructional plan to teach writing in a way, which supported writers as they work. Consequently the teaching of writing turned toward this linear conception of composing [prewrite-write-revise], [and] teachers developed myriad instructional techniques intended to make writing less frustrating and more natural. (Dahl & Farnan, 1998, p. 8)

Our knowledge from research and the changes we made in the teaching of writing did not match. Our teaching became this very rigid, structured list of things to do in order to complete a piece of writing. Research was telling us that everyone writes in different ways and that our composing processes vary within and among all of our pieces of writing.

There was a struggle between two constructionist views of writing. In the first version, Foster (1992) views cognitive construction, the view discussed above, as thinking and language, which are "embedded in one another as processes of the individual mind. This view proposes that what we hold as knowledge are mental 'constructs' or ways of seeing which shape our sense of the 'real'." (p.3). In terms of teaching writing we were setting children down with a set of rules on how to write and asking them to follow those rules as they composed by themselves.

The second view that of social construction has more widespread acceptance and is the basis for understanding writing process and the need for Writer's Workshop today. Social construction holds "The view that self, community, and even 'meaning' itself are 'social constructs' emerging from the collective processes of social discourse…From this perspective…so-called 'discourse communities' are said to be the real determiners of individual composing and meaning-making" (Foster, 1992, p. 3).

As understandings of writing process slowly emerged, the need to create a supporting classroom structure became evident. Research was telling us that every student's process for writing is different, progressed on its own timeline, and is enhanced by social interaction. The challenge was then to create a classroom structure, which supports the many different activities of writers.

The Story of Writers' Workshop

Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins

The story of writers' workshop is the story of lives and developing ideas intertwined in close proximity, for many years. The setting is the far northeast, in several New England states. The first two characters become Lucy Calkins and Donald Graves. Their lives began to mingle when Lucy was a young girl. This story might have begun when Lucy McCormick was 12 years old. That is when she met Donald Graves. He was the Director of Christian Education at their local church. Lucy remembers his Sunday morning sermons:

> Often in his sermons, Graves would come out from the pulpit and stand before the congregation. In the quiet, unassuming way we have all come to know, Graves would begin to speak as if he were one of the characters from the Biblical stories. 'My name is Barabbas,' he said one Easter morning…and his tale led all of us to wipe tears from the corners of our eyes. (Calkins, 1987, p. 21)

Lucy was the Saturday baby sitter for all five of the Graves children. She was intrigued by the uniqueness of each one and their father intrigued her. Donald Graves spent his Saturdays attending classes at the University of Buffalo, and he later spent time learning to play the guitar and learning to speak Spanish.

> I had never known a grown-up who was such an eager student…I have since come to realize that the greatest gift Don Graves has given me is that he has shown me the joy of being a lifelong student. From Don, I have discovered how to learn from all the details of life. (Calkins, 1987, p. 22)

A memorable day for Lucy was her wedding day. Donald Graves flew in from out of town to perform the ceremony. Lucy's uncle Ed was killed in a car accident on his way to the wedding, and Lucy's sister Sally, gave birth to a baby girl that morning. Lucy tells the story this way:

> Meanwhile, the families were assembling: John's Norwegian immigrant family, my old-line New England family. Don heard all of this as we drove back from the airport.
>
> Two hours later, John and I stood before him in the church. Don began, 'We come from Oslo, Norway, and from Cambridge, Massachusetts. We come also from the death of Ed Cook and from the birth of baby Rachel. For everything there is a season: a time to laugh, a time to mourn; a time to weep, and a time to dance; and now is the time for the wedding of Lucy and John.
>
> Anyone else would have put aside the family events, put aside the stuff of life, and proceeded on with the wedding. But Don knows that the

> stuff of life cannot be put aside, not even for a wedding. And that has been his lesson to me. (Calkins, 1987, p. 24)

Donald Graves has had a huge impact on the personal and professional life of Lucy Calkins. The two parts of life cannot be separated because the "stuff of life" involves both. If we take this lesson, that the "stuff of life" goes everywhere with us, to our students as they write, our Writers' Workshops will become the meaningful extensions of our children's' lives that they are meant to be.

The Atkinson Academy Study

In 1978, Lucy Calkins joined Donald Graves and Susan Sowers in a research project. It was a two-year study of the writing development of children in grades one through four. This study would become the center of many experiences associated with an intriguing tale of the development of Writers' Workshop. In fact, it was during this study, right before their eyes and quite by accident, that elements of Writers' Workshop emerged.

The vision for this study had been conceived by Donald Graves. Lucy Calkins had been a classroom teacher at an alternative public school and had recently been writing about her work:

> My articles were just beginning to appear in *Language Arts* and in *Learning Magazine…*Writing had turned my teaching into learning, propelling me into a position of actively constructing meaning out of my teaching…The specialized vocabulary and statistical framework associated with research had built a mystique around it and it never [had] occurred to me that my records were data, that I was a researcher. (Calkins, 1983, p.5)

When Donald Graves asked Lucy Calkins to come to the University of New Hampshire as a researcher she was skeptical. "'Why should I leave the children for reams of charts and numbers?'…'Why is he asking me, a teacher?'" (Calkins, 1983, p. 6).

But this research project was to be different – something other than charts and numbers. Donald Graves and the National Institute of Education had a different kind of project in mind. This was to be a project to “show teachers and children in the context of their own classrooms” (Calkins, 1983, p. 6).

Because of the trust built over years of association, Calkins moved to a house near the University of New Hampshire to become a researcher with Donald Graves. At this time Graves had already chosen a title and a place for the project. The study would be “How Children Change as Writers” and the setting would be, Atkinson Academy, the public elementary school in Atkinson, New Hampshire. “The Academy is a four-room schoolhouse nearly 200 years old with a series of more recent additions attached to it” (Sowers, 1985, p. 300).

> When the study began, children at Atkinson, as in most schools, wrote rarely, and when they did, they wrote for teachers who merely corrected and graded the papers. Graves chose Atkinson because the teachers cared about children. He also chose it because he knew the importance of a strong principal…Jean Robbins…[she] was determined to have us use her school. She must have sensed what none of us did at the time: that such a research project would have an immense impact on her school. (Calkins, 1983, pp. 6-7)

In the beginning this was to be a study of children’s development as writers. Sixteen children, eight first graders and eight third graders, were identified for the study. “The research team imposed no writing curriculum. Instead, they became a catalyst for change in writing instruction at Atkinson. The programs or techniques attributed to the study evolved from collaboration between teachers and researchers” (Sowers, 1985, p. 300). Soon after the study began, the whole focus changed:

> Although designed to be unobtrusive, the researchers’ interventions unintentionally became a model for instruction…The researchers entered the school with prepared questions but did not restrict themselves to those questions. Intrigued by the children’s answers to the research questions,

> the teachers also began to ask children questions similar to the researchers'. As a result, the questions became part of writing instruction and the basis for writing conferences. The children, in turn, asked each other similar questions about each other's writing. (Sowers, 1985, p. 298)

While this study began with the intention of observing and recording what happened as children wrote, the mere presence of the researchers caused the elements of what would be called Writers' Workshop to emerge, prove to be effective, and gradually become the way of teaching writing in many of the classrooms within Atkinson Elementary School. Researchers talked to children about writing while teachers noticed. Teachers started talking to children about writing, using the same questions researchers used to question children. The children internalized all of it and started talking to each other using the questions they had been asked. "Young writers altered the instructional climate for each other as they grew more knowledgeable about writing…Each child who learned about writing became a repository of information for others" (Sowers, 1985, p. 299).

To this study Donald Graves brought his rich background of innovative research into the writing processes of children.

> Graves contributed his knowledge of children's development in the writing process [from his dissertation work in 1973]. A pioneer in research in children's writing processes, Graves had observed the behavior of 7-year-old children while they composed instead of simply analyzing their written products. Graves was also director of the University of New Hampshire's Writing Process Laboratory, an interdepartmental group of writers and teachers of writing who constituted a supportive and challenging community behind the research team. They advocated self-chosen topics, conferences between teacher and writer about work in progress, writing for real audiences, and revising only promising pieces of writing in successive drafts. (Sowers, 1985, pp. 300-301)

Lucy Calkins leaned a great deal about looking and seeing and listening from Donald Graves during this research:

> From Don, I have discovered how to learn from all the details of life. I remember our first day of research together…I remember going in to watch a class with Don, looking for data. I walked up and down the aisles, clipboard in hand, waiting for something that pertained to writing. Nothing. The students were simply copying math problems out of a textbook. I went to the back of the room and leaned against the radiator, waiting for some data to appear. Nothing. Finally I signaled to Graves, who'd been popping up and down the aisles, and we left. Before I could let out a weary groan, Graves said, 'Zowie. Wasn't that incredible!' Graves continued, 'Did you see those kids with the low chairs and huge tall desks, writing up at shoulder height? Amazing. And the way they copied those math problems! Did you see that boy looking at the book and saying ' 23, 23, 23, 23' until he wrote 23? And that one kid with an eraser the size of a golf ball? How do you suppose he would write? Zowie, what a gold mine.
>
> I said nothing, but I learned a lesson that day. When we have the eyes to see, the ears to hear, there are lessons everywhere. But so often, in our focused hurry to "learn something" or to "produce something," we bypass the real opportunities to learn. (Calkins, 1987, pp. 22-23)

In the eyes of Donald Graves these children were doing things writers do – it was all in the looking and listening. Donald Graves was Lucy Calkins' mentor that day as he had been and would be at other times during her life.

While others were involved in the Atkinson project, it was primarily the gathering of three minds, Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, and Susan Sowers, to search out and extend, what their backgrounds had already begun to tell them about how children write. It became an experience far bigger than any of them had expected at its inception. For just their mere presence in a school made a difference and changed lives forever. Just their mere presence would change teaching and learning and how a whole profession looks at writing. They meant

to look, and listen, and record. What they did was change the way writing was thought about and taught at Atkinson Academy, and ultimately across the profession.

After Atkinson - Donald Graves

From this two-year research project, and the accumulation of years of experience, came publications from all three researchers. Donald Graves' *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, (1983), describes his knowledge of writing not only from the Atkinson Academy project, but his dissertation work with 7-year-olds as well. This is the story of teachers and children learning the important activities of writers and the various ways of supporting writers as they work. His attention to writing spans the wide range of details needed to organize time, space, and writers into a working arrangement, which meets the changing needs of each student, at anytime. He addresses writing topics, writing processes, classroom organization, conferencing, questioning, publishing, revising skills, grammar, spelling, handwriting, record keeping – all of the teaching skills and the realm of student reactions, which can occur in the workshop atmosphere. It is interesting to note that this book does not have an extensive works cited section. The only list of other publications comes at the end of his chapter 7, "Surround the Children with Literature" and this is just a short list of "Books mentioned in this chapter." This absence of a works cited section gives an awesome appearance of the beginning. No one else's ideas are cited in this book – this must be the beginning of the literature on writers' workshop.

After Atkinson - Lucy Calkins

After the research at Atkinson, Lucy Calkins wrote *Lessons From a Child*, a case study of Susie, a student at Atkinson Academy. In Lucy's words:

> I documented the day-to-day changes in Susie's writing and in her classrooms during her third and fourth grade years. With clipboard in hand, I participated in and followed Susie's – and her classmates' - growth in writing.

> This was the first study of its kind. A great many researchers have examined written products, dividing them into categories and levels. But rarely in the research findings do we catch a glimpse of a youngster, bending over her paper, surrounded by the sounds of pencils being sharpened, of stories being shared. And nowhere in the research do we find a record of daily changes in a youngster's writing process…The method seems so obvious, so logical. It's hard to imagine why no one thought of it before. (Calkins, 1983, p.5)

While the focus of the Atkinson Academy project was not on Susie, but on sixteen children in seven classrooms, Lucy Calkins chose a case study of Susie with good intensions:

> My hope is that through closely observing one child's growth in writing, we'll learn to watch for and to respect each child's growth in writing. My hope is that by understanding the pathways one child has taken in learning to write, we may be able to discern and trust the pathways other children will take. Susie is representative of all children in that she, too is unique…
>
> Although writing development is talked about 'in general,' it always happens in particular. In the end we always teach unique children: all our students are case studies. (Calkins, 1983, p. 7)

At the center of this case study is how Calkins began to look at students' writing. "We were learning to read children's writing in a new way, seeing the printed words as the tip of an iceberg and speculating what might lie under the surface…Only when we trusted that…mistakes as well as…successes were indications of what [students] knew, did we find clues to the thinking between the lines" (Calkins, 1983, p.21). When Lucy Calkins looked at a piece of children's writing she saw ideas, wondered where they came from, and what other ideas the child had yet to say. She saw progress in spelling and language development among the use and misuse of letters and words. She saw the stance of where the child was, and worked to maneuver improvement from there. She knew that

what she saw on the paper told many stories about the child – it became her responsibility to find out about those stories.

The research project at Atkinson Academy and her resulting book, *Lessons From a Child,* began a road for Lucy Calkins, which would put her concepts at the forefront of writing research and classroom practice. Three years later, in 1986, she published the first edition of *The Art of Teaching Writing*, a revolutionary accumulation of years of classroom teaching and involvement in research, which could be taken by teachers into their classrooms.

"When Lucy Calkins wrote the first edition of *The Art of Teaching Writing,* the writing workshop was a fledging idea, piloted by a few brave innovators" (Calkins, 1994, back cover). By the time her "New Edition" of *The Art of Teaching Writing*, was published in 1994, "the writing workshop [was] foundational to language arts education throughout the English speaking world" (Lucy Calkins Founding Director, 2000). But this new edition is not a "restatement…of the original classic. Instead, it is an almost entirely new book" (Calkins, 1994, back cover).

> When I wrote the first edition of this book, I saw writing as a process of choosing a topic, turning the topic into the best possible draft, sharing the draft with friends, then revising it. But I've come to think that it's very important that writing is not only a process of *recording*, it is also a process of *developing* a story or an idea. In this new edition I describe writing episodes that do not begin with a topic and a draft but instead with a noticing, a question. When writing begins with something that has not yet found its significance, it is more apt to become a process of *growing meaning.* (Calkins, 1994, p. 8)

<u>After Atkinson - Susan Sowers</u>

Susan Sowers responded to the Atkinson Academy research project with her article "Learning to Write in a Workshop: A Study of Grades One Through Four." This article describes the entire project in detail, giving a full account of all aspects of it. Sowers divides her article into three sections:

> First, the organization of writing in the classrooms, a theme and its variations over time and among several rooms; second, a series of writing conferences and an exploration of reasons for their effectiveness; and third, a description of children's growth in writing. (Sowers, 1985, p. 300)

Sowers describes this amazing story of how many classrooms transformed into writers' workshops. She details the evolution of talk and conferencing in these classrooms, and the uses for talk the children developed to accomplish the goals they set for their writing. Sowers discusses the use of folders as a means to keep individual student records, and house progress over the months of this project. She demonstrates writing skills at various grade levels but in the end does not see grade level as an indicator of writing skill. "If levels, stages, or phases were present in writers, then…uneven progress between stages was not the exception, but the rules" (Sowers, 1985, p. 329).

Within this article Sowers also addresses children's growth in specific areas of writing. She talks about the skills of handwriting, punctuation and spelling; the development of a child's use of lines, and blank spaces in a page; the development of time children use to complete pieces; and their changing use of the writing process. Each area is a detailed study in and of itself, and provides fascinating details of children as they progress in their writing.

Enter Nancie Atwell

While the work of Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, and Susan Sowers focused on young, elementary school children, another innovative teacher was struggling to build a case for writer's workshop for middle school students. At the age of 23, Nancie Atwell, along with her husband, moved from Buffalo, New York to Boothbay Harbor, Maine. This tiny little coastal town would be where Nancie Atwell changed her teaching of middle school, English students, and discovered that writer's workshop would indeed work for those big, gawky, middle schoolers:

> I confess. I started out as a creationist. The first days of every school year I created; for the next thirty-six weeks I maintained my creation…I didn't learn in my classroom, I tended and taught my creation.

> These days, I learn in my classroom. What happens there has changed; it continually changes. I've become an evolutionist, and the curriculum unfolds now as my kids and I learn together. (Atwell, 1987, p. 3)

Nancie Atwell started out her teaching career set in her ways and unable to budge from her methods of teaching. She taught English from textbooks, imposed her topics on her writing students, and graded the weeks writing assignments with dismay, sometime during the weekend. She strived to be the best teacher she could be and actively recruited other teachers to follow her example.

In 1975, Atwell "became the junior high English department at Boothbay Harbor Grammar School" (Atwell 1987, p. 4). It was that year that she met a student named Jeff. Jeff was a victim of a family who moved around so much that he seldom benefited from the regularity of school. His abilities were the lowest Atwell had ever seen. It would be a teaching year of contradictions for Nancie Atwell, perhaps the first time in her professional life that she would view the results of individualized reading and writing instruction.

Jeff was unable to read the classroom reading book or write any kind of sentences or paragraphs because of his skill levels. He was new to the school and did not have any friends to converse with and so stayed with Atwell during breaks. As a result she learned about his life and his interests, and recommended books, which he read because he enjoyed the stories about things familiar to him.

During writing classes Atwell observed Jeff doing things she would later learn were characteristic of beginning writers. Every time Atwell would assign something to write, Jeff would begin by drawing. During class he would draw and at home he would write. He followed this pattern over and over until the last month of school. "By the end of the year Jeff's writing folder was as fat as many of the others. And although he still drew in his spare time, he seldom drew during the last months' writing classes. Suddenly, he wrote" (Atwell, 1987, p. 7).

Through a friend, Atwell learned of Donald Graves and his study of seven-year-old writers: they drew pictures in order to plan their writing, a characteristic of beginning writers. Atwell was glad she allowed Jeff to draw when he needed to, but the rest of her students stayed under her control, following her rigid curriculum.

The next summer, in an attempt to learn more about writing, Nancie Atwell attended a seven-week session at The Bread Loaf School of English Program in Writing. It was during that summer that Atwell would learn about herself as a writer and researcher while she pondered the learning and writing of her students. She noticed the choices she made and the options she considered and chose as she wrote – not options she offered to her middle school students. When the summer was over and school started again she admittedly started her program all over again:

> But this time around I tried to open up the structures and strictures. I gave kids more options and made my assignments more flexible – now they had a choice of four role-play situations and could write the required monologue as any one of six fictional characters. And this time around I started writing with my students, taking on the tasks I gave them…My assigned poetry was formulaic and cute. My assigned narratives never went beyond first draft; I wrote them at the breakfast table the day they were due…All the while I was writing this awful stuff I was conducting research. I wanted to show the beneficial effects on their writing when students viewed their teacher as a writer. But I wasn't writing; I was performing. I did my real writing at home, mostly poetry and letters for me and for people I cared about. I wasn't even conducting research; I was method-testing, trying to prove the integrity of my creation. In January I called off my research project and buried my writing portfolio in the back of a file drawer. (Atwell, 1987, p. 9)

Atwell tried to blame her failure on anything she could think of. She needed better topics, she needed better students, she blamed it on the previous

teachers, and she blamed it on the curriculum. She even went before the language arts committee and advocated more creative writing within the school system. She wrote up a plan of study to insure that she would, in the future, get students who could write creatively before they entered her classroom. Atwell confesses, “And I was generally, justifiably ignored” (Atwell, 1987, p. 9).

In 1980, Atwell became part of a language arts curriculum committee, in charge of looking into changes and improvements for their school. The Atkinson Academy study was nearing its end. Searching for outside help and support for her thinking about writing instruction, Atwell sought out an old friend:

> Remembering Jeff, I sought out Donald Graves. He responded by sending us Susan Sowers…Susan came to our curriculum committee with copies of reports from their project. She brought her authority as a teacher and researcher, a wealth of knowledge – and patience. What she had to say was not what I wanted to hear…[She made] Atkinson Academy [sound] like Camelot. As Susan extolled it merits, I rolled my eyes and ground my teeth. I wanted to leave our meeting nearly as much as I wanted *her* to leave. As it worked out, however, I kept Susan at school that day much later than she intended to stay, arguing. (Atwell, 1987, p. 10)

Atwell’s battle to stay behind her big desk and in charge of her students and her curriculum, raged on and on into the next weeks:

> I railed at the art teacher: “Sarah, can you imagine what would happen if someone said kids should come into the art room, check out the materials you’ve got here, and come up with their own projects?” I raged in the local service station: “Mr. Andrews, what if someone said customers should come into your garage, borrow your tools, and repair their own cars?” Sarah and Mr. Andrews and everyone just shook their heads.
>
> But all that week, on my free periods and in the evening, I waged a silent, losing battle with Susan Sowers as I read and reread the manuscripts she had left behind. Eventually I saw through my defenses to the truth. I didn’t know how to share responsibility with my students, and I

> wasn't too sure I wanted to. I liked the vantage of my big desk. I liked setting topic and pace and mode, orchestrating THE process, being in charge. Wasn't that my job? If responsibility for their writing shifted to my students, what would I do?" (Atwell, 1987, p. 11)

Ultimately, Nancie Atwell solved her problem by asking her students how they would like their language classroom run. She told her students about Atkinson Academy and the ways writing was taught there. Atwell's students decided they wanted to give it a try and together they put together a plan that took them through the spring months and to the end of that school year. It wasn't easy and it didn't always run smoothly, but they worked through the tough spots and made their classroom a place where everyone learned by taking risks and trusting each other. Atwell's comment: "I couldn't wait to go to school in the morning to see what my kids would do next" (Atwell, 1987, p. 12).

Atwell reflects upon her first moments with Susan Sowers:

> When Susan Sowers described her findings that day in March, I'd traced and retraced two words on the cover of my notebook: *naïve* and *permissive.* I'd thought, 'Here's a sure road to undisciplined writing and general chaos.' But I learned this wasn't true. Freedom of choice doesn't undercut structure. Instead, kids become accountable for developing and refining their own structures. Everyone sits at a big desk, and everyone plans what will happen there. And one of my roles is to move among those desks, helping my kids discover and act on their options, expecting that every writer has something to say and acknowledging that saying it can be a tough job. (Atwell, 1987, p. 15)

So now the contagious bite of Writer's Workshop had spread to Nancie Atwell and it became her mission to spread this way of teaching to her colleagues. The visit from Susan Sowers had only affected Atwell. She now had the task of involving her faculty.

In the summer of 1980, Atwell wrote a grant and received funding from the old Title IV-C and asked Dixie Goswami to help in uniting the ideas and methods

of the teachers at Boothbay Harbor. The project was to be referred to as The Boothbay Harbor Writing Project. The first year fourteen teachers joined the project. By the second year twenty-two had joined. "To his great credit, Bob Dyer, our principal, didn't mandate full-staff participation…Our authority as teachers of writing can't be adopted by others on an administrator's command; it comes from the knowledge we've gained through diverse personal experience" (Atwell, 1987, p. 16). This group of teachers surrounded themselves with professional literature, professional experiences, and conducted their own research of themselves and their students. "The process worked. It worked because it was so complex. Layer upon layer of experience accumulated to form a body of shared knowledge and expertise…Together we learned from ourselves, each other, and our students" (Atwell, 1987, p. 17).

> Rather than design a writing curriculum based on prior practices and assumptions, publishers' materials, or mastery checklists, and then evaluate its effect on students written products, we spent a school year observing and describing students' writing processes and designing a curriculum based on what we learned from the writers in our classrooms. (Atwell, 1982, p. 85)

The underlying beliefs about the teaching of writing, established at Boothbay Elementary School by this group of teachers became these:

- Writers need regular chunks of time.
- Writers need their own topics.
- Writers need response.
- Writers learn mechanics in context.
- Children need to know adults who write.
- Writers need to read.
- Writing teachers need to take responsibility for their knowledge and teaching. (Atwell, 1987, pp. 17-18)

This research project, conducted by the faculty of Boothbay Harbor, brought a new way of looking at writing, students at work, and the teaching of those students.

> Rather than conforming writing instruction to our timing, we adjusted teaching to attend to individual students' needs, progress, and stages in the writing process. We stop focusing on presenting a lesson and evaluating its results, and start observing our students in the process of learning, listening to what they can tell us, and responding as they need us. (Atwell, 1982, p. 85)

From this story, this Writing Project, and this faculty working together, came Nancie Atwell's first edition of *In The Middle*, published in 1987. *In The Middle* is not a day-to-day description of what goes on in a writing classroom, but it is instead a showcase of the possibilities of writers' workshop, and the attitudes toward life and learning which accompany writers at work. It describes an overall structured environment, which contains flexibility and access to the many resources needed to support the simultaneous activities of a classroom full of writers. Donald Graves says this about *In The Middle:*

> The book is filled with the details of conducting conferences in reading and writing, mini-lessons, working with various genres, the uses of time, grading and proofreading. Useful stuff, but still not the heart of the book. The power of the book is in the details of engagement between a teacher who has brought the full meaning of literacy into the lives of students – gangling, emotion-filled adolescents who confess they are too busy to read and lie about the numbers of books they've read in the past…[Atwell] provides a full-immersion approach to reading and writing…There is relevant, literate talk in this room; there are no canned lessons, assigned topics, workbooks, language arts textbooks, or the following of prescribed curriculum guides. (Atwell, 1987, forward by Donald Graves)

This first edition of *In The Middle* would be the beginning of Nancie Atwell's deep and influential involvement in our changing view of writing instruction for middle schoolers. In 1987, Atwell describes it this way:

> *In The Middle* is about one moment in my evolution – my beliefs and practices based on what I know now about teaching and learning. What I do in my classroom next will not look exactly like the classroom I described here. New Observations and insights will amend theory; the process by which I translate theory into action will change. The agents for change are my students. The classroom itself becomes an evolving text – a communal scribble we revise together. (Atwell, 1987, p. 254)

Two years after the first edition of *In The Middle* was published, Nancie Atwell resigned her position at Boothbay Harbor Elementary. Her daughter Anne was born. "I'm amazed to discover…[that] I don't miss eighth graders. Anne is the reason, but eighth graders are responsible" (Atwell, 1989, p. 52).

Atwell filled her time with Anne and she also became involved with several other projects. She directed "Writing to Learn in the Elementary School, a project of the Bread Loaf School of English…[she] worked with teachers of grades 3-6 to develop ways that children can use writing to learn throughout their school day…[she also edited] a new journal for Heinemann, a themed annual about literacy issues. Titled *Workshop,* its contributors are teacher-researchers of grades K-8" (Atwell, 1989, p. 53).

In addition to these jobs, Atwell had "several hundred letters from teachers and dozens of reviews of *In The Middle* [to contend with]" (Atwell, 1989 p. 53). Over and over teachers from everywhere wrote and asked advice about particulars in their workshop classrooms. Atwell responded to these teachers:

> I try to resist supplying answers. Instead, I offer my own 'but': you're on your own now, but you're not alone. When things aren't going as you'd like, close your door and talk frankly with your students. Or kick things around with your colleagues, in a formal study group or with one friend in the hall after school or over the telephone. (Atwell, 1989, p. 53)

She also recommended books and research as means of discovering solutions to the many problems teachers asked about, suggesting new books of the time by Jane Hansen, Tom Romano, and Donald Graves.

The reviews of *In The Middle* came by the dozens:

> Side by side, the reviews are fascinating. Each ends with a 'but' and no two reviewers raise the same objection. One is concerned that I didn't describe how my approach worked with urban kids. One admonishes that a particular state would never allow this approach so don't bother trying. One rejects my dining-room-table metaphor as a 'writing anomaly' and substitutes his own. And one worries that Nancie Atwell cannot be cloned. (Atwell, 1989, p. 53)

In 1990, Atwell "used the royalties from the first edition of *In The Middle* to begin building a school of [her] own, the Center for Teaching and Learning in Edgecomb, Maine" (Atwell, 1998, p. 16). It started as a K-3 school and Atwell, as the director, added one grade level each year up to grade seven.

During this time Atwell continued to learn and grow as a mother, as a teacher, and as a researcher. She read, taught, attended conferences, and rethought the ideas from *In The Middle*. She looked back on this book and discovered it was a book containing many orthodoxies:

- Mini-lessons should be between five and seven minutes long.
- Conferences are more important than mini-lessons.
- Attend to spelling, punctuation, paragraphing only at the end of the process, when content is set.
- Keep conferences short. Get to every writer every day.
- Don't look at or read students' writing during conferences.
- Don't tell writers what they should do.
- Don't write on students' writing.
- Don't praise.
- Students must have ownership of their writing.

The problem with orthodoxies is that even the best of them take away initiative from someone. *Rules* stand at the center of classroom interactions. Rules limit someone's role – in this case, the teacher's. (Atwell, 1998, p. 18) Atwell questioned her teaching asking "*Am I doing it right?"*

In 1994, Atwell returned to middle school teaching, this time in her own school, and this time with the knowledge and experiences of parenthood to include in her teaching:

> My goal in writing workshop is to act as a good parent, with all the complexities that role entails. I want to be a grown-up writer who listens to kids and shows kids how it's done, gives sound advice, and convinces them she knows what she's talking about…I'm no longer willing to withhold suggestions and directions from my kids when I can help them solve a problem…what they need is a Teacher. Today I'm striving for the fluid, subtle, *exhilarating* balance that allows me to function in my classroom as a listener *and* a teller, an observer *and* an actor, a collaborator *and* a critic *and* a cheerleader. (Atwell, 1998, p.21)

Atwell's second edition of *In the Middle* was published in 1998. Eleven years of life changes, growth, experiences, and rethinking the roles of teachers and students, lead to a new book of greater insights, and methods to move students forward. A fresh lens, borrowed from Jerome Bruner is what Atwell used to see the role of a teacher – that of handover. "In handover, understandings and strategies that emerge during interaction between a more competent person and a less competent person gradually become internalized in the learner's mind" (Atwell, 1998, p. 19).

Atwell saw this concept as a way to include more teaching activity into her role. In her classroom she took back part of the more active role of teacher that she had given up in her classroom before the first edition of *In the Middle*. If she were going to "handover" knowledge to her students, she must find ways to present her knowledge so that students would have opportunities to take ownership in and internalize the concepts they needed. She rethought the use of

minilessons and their use as direct instruction. Her minilessons now can run as long as she needs them to (instead of the short ones she advocated before), and contain demonstrations and information for students concerning any topic of help or interest related to the current specifics in the classroom. While before she saw her role as a supporter of her students and their writing, she now feels free to help those students who get stuck, giving advice, asking questions, showing students where something might work or what is not working. She requires writing in specific genres, and certain amounts of writing and finished products in a grading period. She sets goals and requires students to meet them. They know she writes because she brings in her writing and conferences with them about her drafts and she uses the overhead projector to let students watch as she composes off the top off her head:

> The second edition of *In the Middle* describes the details of a writing workshop in which the teacher is as active intellectually as her students. The work is as hard as it ever was; the results ten years down the road are richer, more diverse, and more interesting to write and to read. I have moved from astonishment that kids could write at all, to an appreciation of how hard it is to write well, to an understanding that it's my responsibility to teach my students everything I can about writing well. (Atwell, 1998, p. 26)

This is not the end of the story of writer's workshop, for it is an ongoing story. Nor are these the only characters involved. Many others have added their own stories of teaching, which add layers of rich experiences with children into the volumes written about classroom workshops. But these are the people at the heart of this revolution and these are the people whose influence has combined theory and practice in publications, which have taken us to new places in our teaching of writing.

Final Note

Lucy Calkins is now a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching. She is the founding

director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. . “For almost two decades, she has helped teachers throughout New York City schools turn classrooms into active and interactive reading and writing workshops” (Lucy Calkins Founding Director, 2000).

Nancie Atwell is the founder and former director of the Center for Teaching and Learning in Edgecomb, Maine. Atwell stepped down from the directorship in the fall of 1997 to concentrate on teaching and writing. She remains the chairman of the Board of Directors and teaches seventh and eighth grade English.