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Coming in from the Cold

The Instruction of Writing in a Collaborative Classroom

"I've learned to write with my soul, not my pen."

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by

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Abstract

This teacher action research study documented the effects when a lifelong newspaper and magazine journalist, and author of six non-fiction books and one Young Adult novel, returns to the classroom to teach the craft of writing to twenty freshmen at a liberal arts college.

The purpose of the study was to see if a professional writer could demystify the word "writing" to students who come to college often indifferent about the act of writing, and by so doing, free the students up to write with more facility, joy, satisfaction and comprehension.

In addition, the study was designed to ascertain, where possible, whether a transactional and student-oriented classroom dynamic, might, through the free exchange of ideas, lessen some of the anxieties facing freshmen in late-adolescence, when not only does neuroscience suggest that they are more vulnerable to anxiety than children or adults, but are living away from home for the first time.

Several strategies were used, from having the students do all of their writing in class by hand in personal notebooks, which became journals/portfolios, to using a curriculum designed to be accessible in subject matter to a cohort of 18-year-olds with their own intellectual interests, both as individuals and as members of their own clan.

The data comprised a) artifacts, b) at least one personal one-on-one interview with each student of a minimum of one-half hour, but usually longer;

c) surveys (one survey administered by the instructor near the end of the class assessing many aspects of the course; two anonymous student-evaluation forms issued by the Moravian College English Department), and d) field notes, written both after classes and after casual interactions with students in various campus settings.

Data were analyzed by coding field notes and individual interviews, and student writing. The answers to the survey spoke for themselves, revealing that, along with other data analysis, that giving the students "ownership" of their own writing allowed them to gain confidence in their written expression, and that the "open" classroom, where discourse was encouraged, in a face-to-face circle configuration, resulted in students gaining confidence not only in their ability to write, but in their ability to speak out with confidence.

With out of class time devoted to the readings, the classroom became more than a center of learning. It became, in many ways, a refuge where, the data suggests, the anxieties of freshman year in college could be left behind, and a sense of "family" evolved.

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Dr. Joseph Shosh has guided this text since the first day we met, two weeks after I came to Moravian to interview the college president for a biography I was writing about a professional basketball coach. As the head of a visionary education department, his idealism, ideas and intellectual rigor immediately made me want to enter his world of thought. Without his support and encouragement every step of the way, I would not have been able to get this project off the ground, let alone into the full, glorious flight it has taken.

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Trustworthiness

As is the case in all of our everyday interactions, the most important variable in any study of students is the establishment of an ethical framework wherein trustworthiness is paramount in two arenas: with regard to data collection analysis and findings, and between facilitator and student. For while the data must be above reproach in terms of trustworthiness in findings, the conductor of a study involving fellow learners must also establish trustworthiness with the students in order to ensure that those findings, are, indeed, valid.

In undertaking the study of my first-year writing seminar, I took several steps to ensure that results were valid and trust in the entire process was ensured.

The most essential aspect of trustworthiness is the certainty that the facilitator has laid the personal groundwork to be *worthy* of professional trust as he undertakes his study. To that end, having already taken several Education courses at the graduate-level as I pursued a Master of Arts in Teaching at Moravian prior to the study, with a 4.0 GPA, I was well-versed in the ethical responsibilities of the action-research process, as well as the steps best undertaken to ensure trustworthiness in a process that requires a building process toward achieving that trust (Hendricks, 2003).

In addition, I entered the study with certainty that from the first day, I had to act with respect, diligence and care. After all: My data derived from analyzing the actions of young human beings, entering a confusing time of their

lives. Their psychological state of mind had to be of paramount concern to me as I collected my data.

In addition, in the previous semester, in the spring of 2014, I had studied a Young Adult literature class, in dry-run fashion, interviewing each student individually and administering a survey, the results of which indicated that I had gained the students' trust. This experience was instrumental in allowing me to lay a strong foundation -- a Hendricks-style "base" for building on the knowledge that would help me build a solid framework of trustworthiness with my first-year seminar group.

Before I undertook the study, I submitted the required documents to Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board, which oversees the protection of any and all subjects in a research study. I presented my HSIRB application (Appendix A) to my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh. Upon receiving approval, I submitted it to the HSIRB board, which approved it (Appendix B).

I presented each student/subject with a letter of consent (Appendix C). I made it clear in my consent-form letter that each student's anonymity would be guaranteed, with each subject being identified by either name or number codes. I also indicated that if they chose not to participate, their decision would have no impact whatsoever on their class standing. I also advised that if, during the term, they chose to leave the study, this decision, too, would have no impact on their class standing. The data that I collected, as my HSIRB application made clear, would be kept in a locked location for five years, and then destroyed. This data would include transcripts of private individual interviews.

I made a concerted effort to gather data from a wide-ranging field of sources, to make sure that my findings would be authentic. These comprised myriad sources, the better to ensure that I heeded Hendricks' notion of "triangulation" (but with more than three elements) (2012).

Hendricks had prepared me for the possibility that any preconceived notions I might have had about possible results of my study might prove different from what had been anticipated, and that keeping an entirely open mind through the process would not only help guarantee data-analysis trustworthiness, but could, in fact, enhance my exploration of teaching as a second career. In addition, the valuable feedback and input of my inquiry support group -- two teachers with extraordinary insight into the classroom habits of adolescent students -- helped me to understand that my own way of questioning the value of my teaching protocol was only one of many.

Lastly, and most importantly: My own pedagogical belief system demands that any student is deserving of the highest degree of trust and respect from her/his teacher/facilitator; to be a teacher without making the utmost effort to establish a trustworthy relationship with a student is to demean the profession. Therefore, I made the establishment of such one-on-one trust, as well as with the class as a whole, a daily mandate.

Introduction

I wished to determine what would happen when a lifelong journalist and author, four decades removed from college, returned to the environment of a liberal arts college to teach the language arts.

My primary question: How would someone with a non-academic background -- but equipped with a set of writerly tools that had made him a decent living -- be effective at instructing the craft of writing to students at a freshman college level?

Further:

How might someone who'd spent his life writing for readers of popular books, magazines and newspapers bring something to a classroom that could supplement the more traditional instruction of the craft they'd received in secondary school?

Would someone who routinely interviewed more than one hundred people (and sometimes more than two hundred) for book research be able to ingrain an approach to writing that valued inquiry as well as subject matter?

Would someone who had spent his life interviewing people by gaining their trust and respect be able to use those skills to gain his students' trust and respect?

Would someone teaching writing-as-"Journalism," using a curriculum reflective of his own diverse experiences and reading, and not readings from the half-dozen accepted "journalism" and (oxymoronically) "creative non-fiction"

anthologies, be able to bring put together a syllabus together that might be more inclusive and attractive to 18-year-olds?

Would someone whose often-careening life-journey had included rapids, calm waters, ups, downs, and everything in between -- and had finally emerged not only safe, but whole -- be able to temper some of the anxiety, through James Paul Gee's idea of a transactional "voice" (Gee, 2010) which, as neuroscience suggests, an adolescent away from home for the first time possesses in greater measure than an adult? And by using, as much as any other pedagogical tool, Nel Noddings' notion of "caring?"

If, as Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Stephan Salisbury has observed, "Newspapers stitch people together, weaving community with threads of information," (Adams, 2015), would a lifelong journalist be able to make his students feel as if their classroom was a similar kind of affectionate community?

If, as John Dewey said, "(a) teacher ought to have an unusual love and aptitude in some one subject: history, mathematics, literature, science, a fine art, or whatever" (Dewey APT, 2010), would my passion for my craft be effective in enlisting new recruits to a world of expression of which most of the entrants are wary?

Researcher Stance

I needed work. I needed a health plan. Hell, I needed *any* plan. The 13-year run as a staff writer at *GQ* had ended in the beginning of 2004. The editor-in-chief of two decades had been axed, and the new, young, cost-cutting guy was looking to lop off some heads.

My top-heavy salary -- and waning interest in writing celebrity profiles as I began to write my first serious biography -- made me highly expendable. By the same token, after 13 years, I was, in a real way, pleased that a transition was being forced on me. Where journalism had once existed to serve the role of watchdog and town-hall forum, writers and broadcasters more concerned with their own fame were increasingly driving it. Ironically, the celebrity bestowed on Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein when their reporting on the Watergate scandal changed history, changed the whole dynamic between journalists and subjects. Thereafter, the field began to attract more writers who were looking for their own slice of fame.

"At first I enjoyed it, but then journalism changed," a veteran journalist told the authors of "The Attractions of Teaching." "I valued the community side, but now the whole community aspect is gone ...I had had 8 to 9 happy years in journalism... This decision to leave and go into teaching crept up on me" (Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003.)

I would make the decision to move in six months into my new boss' tenure. The severance was generous.

I had a few talents. I could write for clarity and content. I could find good stories on my own. Having written two biographies, I could do deep research. And I had a knack for helping other writers become better writers.

I approached the head of a local private intermediate school on the Connecticut-New York border, and asked if he would take me on to the faculty.

Two weeks later, he made an offer: I'd teach two ninth-grade English classes and two ninth-grade Ancient Civilization survey classes five times a week, and I'd be the head of the drama department, with daily rehearsals for the fall and winter productions.

*

I'd found a new home. And I wasn't alone in doing so. In the United States, the craft of teaching increasingly beckons as a satisfying second career. As Mundane et al. noted as far back as 1991, "the most striking age trend" in the profession of teaching was "the doubling of the percentage of men and women licensed at age 31 or older" (Chambers, 2002).

More recently, the growing influx of older teachers led the authors of a 2008 study for The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation to conclude, "Over the past two decades, the number of programs designed to bring career changers and other delayed entrants into teaching has increased significantly" (Haselkorn & Hammerness, 2008).

In other words, the second career that beckoned in 1991 is still calling. It was certainly calling me. It felt right.

In the United States, proficient teachers have never been needed more. A study conducted by the National Commission in Teaching & America's Future in 2009 predicted a loss of one third of the nation's 3.2 million teacher over the next decade. Recent guidelines adopted by the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation that raise admission standards for those applying to teacher colleges are likely to worsen an already thinning landscape.

As long ago as 1990, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development was warning, "Concern has grown about the prospects for replacing a generation of experienced classroom practitioners" (Serow, Forrest, 1994). But according to the NCTAF in 2013, in the two decades after that study, first-year teacher attrition rate increased by more than 40 percent.

Journalist as Second-Career Instructor: A Good Fit

In the meantime, another once-vital American workforce has fallen on hard times -- but this cohort isn't leaving its profession voluntarily. According to a report by Pew Research Center (2013), in 2012, 32 percent of all newspaper reporters and writers lost their jobs due to the increasingly drastic shrinkage of the print advertising base. The percentage for editors being handed a pink slip was almost as dismaying: 27. Seasoned journalists -- experts in the "language arts"-- are finding themselves out on the street at an exponential rate. In the last decade, one-third of print journalists have lost their jobs (Adams, 2015).

Those who recover often find themselves working for literal pennies on Internet sites.

The research suggests that second-career teachers are "...highly committed to the path they have chosen and usually possess a sense of altruism" (Powers, 2002). Do those attributes guarantee effectiveness? No; but they are valuable assets. And the overlap in skillsets is considerable. Although journalists may not realize it, they really are trained to be action researchers, having honed the craft of researching, writing, and editing throughout their career.

Ornstein describes an effective teacher as a "guide for problem solving" and "an agent of change" (Ornstein 2011). The best journalists I've known for the last four decades all set out to solve problems and effect change.

Why would a successful professional want to embark on a new path in later life? Because a healthy mind is one that continues to search for personal meaning and purpose, and has not lost the essential life-giving capacity to be curious. As Erik Erikson noted, one of the "eight stages of man" involves the struggle between "generativity...and..stagnation" (Erikson, 1950).

The growth of social media and the widening of the global information highway expose us all to more and more alternate ways of life, and stories of individuals who, dismayed by the mainstream path, are re-inventing themselves. The daily grind appears to be increasingly wearing us down.

As Boyatzis, McKee, & Goleman noted, "...sometimes, a job that was fulfilling gradually becomes less meaningful, slowly eroding your enthusiasm and spirit until you no longer find much purpose in your work." (2002).

And, as Priyadharshini et al note, for a variety of reasons, teaching is seen as "an antidote to careers that left people feeling alienated, isolated, bored or empty." (2003).

In an exponentially advancing culture, to stay vibrant as we age -- to literally stay alive and healthy -- is to stay vital by continuing to possess a personal sense of purpose. To never stop looking for new callings, vocations and ways to contribute -- or, in the words of author Elizabeth Gilbert, to be a "maker in life, not a consumer" (Gilbert, 2014).

To presume that leaving your life's work to bask in a golden sunset will bring rewards can prove to be a sad mistake. Retirees are 40% likelier to experience a heart attack or stroke than those still working at their age (Moon, Glymour, Subremanian, Avendano & Kawachik, 2012). To achieve fulfillment in this increasingly competitive culture, is to not settle into complacency, but to further to enrich life: by continuing to grow, rather than wither on the vine.

But how to so do, when one's lifelong vocation no longer satisfies? According to George Vaillant (2003), the "reinvention" of those who age successfully age often involves embarking on a new path that is not radically different from one's first vocation, but more of a branching off from the path already chosen. Taking a nearby path allows the second-career professional to stay within reach of the old arena -- all the better to be able to pass on one's life

lessons to the next generations. As Vaillant's study suggests, if you reach your sixties still wanting to be the best at what you do, you have missed much of life's reward (Vaillant 2003).

*

I had reached the stage where it was time to find the setting where I could find personal satisfaction and self-worth doing what I knew I could do: Facilitating the language arts in a way that allows the learner to both appreciate the power of the written word and be to able to comprehend its use, as well as to use the written word to express, in a genuine and authentic (to the writer) manner.

There's no question that this nation's students, taken as an entire cohort, are being underserved. According to data from the Program for International Student Assessment, studying 31 countries, the United States slipped from 11th to 21st in reading (20th was Estonia), 25th to 31st in math, and 20th to 24th in science (PISA, 2013).

In 2010, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, less than one quarter of students were assessed at a "proficient" level in U.S. history (NCES, 2011).

I cite these statistics not to imply that our nation's teachers cannot provide an adequate education; only to suggest that if the students whom we are educating are not learning in a well-funded school district, the "oppressed" (Freire, 1971) are being so underserved that the nation's global status is slipping because of our inability to educate across all socio-economic strata --

in part because of the emphasis on common-core testing.

"There are various ways in which the high stakes environment is detrimental to minority students: Most noted...is a teach-to-the -test syndrome that focuses on the lowest level cognitive skills, such as formulaic writing (Harry & Klingner, 2005).

If an anecdote from Ron Berler's book *Raising the Curve: A Year Inside One of America's 45,000* Failing Public Schools* is indicative of a trend, this disparity in the quality of the education that urban students are receiving suggests a situation that should send red flags shooting to the sky: "Listen to me carefully," a principal says to a prospective job seeker. "I'm offering you a job. I'm advising you not to take it" (Berler, 2013).

The recently reported shortcomings of American students in the sciences continue to receive widespread media attention. But equally disconcerting (to a writer) are the results of a study undertaken by The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Partnership for 21st Century Skills and the Society for Human Resource Management (2006), which found that 81 percent of the high-school students they studied were ranked "deficient" in writing.

For a variety of reasons, professionals from another field returning to the classroom could scaffold the next generations of language-art students. Professionals who have chosen teaching as a second career bring a new lens to how they might help students examine subjects through which veteran teachers have not looked. "Second career teachers utilize past experiences to solve

current problems and to help explain complex content to students" (Powers, 2009).

In addition, if, as Maxine Greene has observed, humans possess the ability to "surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise" (Greene, 1988), it would stand to reason that those who have been away from the classroom are looking beyond "the given." Those of us who have wandered far and wide, over the course of a successful professional lifetime, have long realized that, in a world whose communication avenues are shifting in hyper-speed, there's no such thing as a "given."

The second-career teacher is also likely to bring a more elusive, but still tangible, attribute to the classroom: Enthusiasm. Studies of educators who have chosen teaching as second career reveal that those who join this sector of society at a later age are driven to do so from a desire to give back to society (Powers, 2002).

As are journalists.

*

The workload at my new school, teaching the ninth-graders, quickly proved to be heavier than any I'd ever faced in my previous profession -- while paying one-sixth of my previous salary. I was exhausted each day by lunchtime, but had to keep my wits together until 6 p.m., the end of drama rehearsals. Then? Grading. Preparing for the next day's classes. It was a routine schedule for the average teacher. It was a jolt for someone accustomed to rolling into the office in midmorning, writing whatever the hell he pleased.

Harder still? I now had to teach myself how to teach. Private intermediate schools demand little of their instructors. They need no certification. Some of my peers were in their first job out of a liberal arts college. Their value as instructors derived from their ability to relate to their students. But their ability to instill a love of the curriculum may have been less than ideal; the wealth of most of the parents ensured a comfortable future for the students, perhaps making learning less of a priority that it may have been in a public school system.

To get a footing, I undertook mental surveys of all the teachers who had taught me effectively, through intermediate boarding school in seventh and eighth, and prep school, and then college, and realized that the two most influential teachers -- by far -- were men who taught unconventionally. We were not their empty vessels to be filled with a professor's knowledge; we were to be enlisted in the process. They wanted to enter into my world, the better to be able to reach me.

Using their blueprint, I set out in that first year to try and find a space where each student and I could effectively transact. I made an effort to know each and every one outside of class. I had to anchor a lunch table, which also allowed me to tap the brains of all of the students who rotated through my domain. The private-school early adolescent is a special animal, often burdened with as many psychological weights as her or his blue-collar peer but perhaps in a different guise.

My experience as a journalist and author of non-fiction books had taught me that the devil could, indeed, be in the details -- when the details obscured the larger lesson. The way I saw it, knowing the name of the Greek god of wine was far less important than knowing the Greeks *had* a god of wine. Knowing the name of an obscure Roman emperor was far less significant than knowing the impetus of Ancient Rome's desire to rule the Western world.

But I was at sea.

Lesson for the rookie teacher: sure, you can fake it, but you're doing every kid in your classroom a serious injustice – and betraying yourself. Thus was two hours spent every evening attempting to re-learn every ancient civilization from Mesopotamia to Rome. And because of that diligence, and my belief in the kids, I believed I was becoming a more-than-competent history teacher...

...but what about my first love, English? As a cocky writer, I was a terrible teacher of English. I told my stories, I gave them tips...and gradually I realized that they deserved far more. I was that ditzy lovable out-of-the-box guy...but I wanted more. I wanted to know how to teach.

As the end of the school year loomed, I was undecided whether to return. I could barely make a living doing the teaching thing. On the other hand, I couldn't deny: I was more engaged with my daily profession than I'd been in a decade. And after learning so much in that first year, it would be something of a waste to not be able to take my data, analyze it, and come back for a stronger second year.

On the other hand, with luck and enterprise, I reasoned, if I left the fold of my small private prep school, I could make the same amount of money writing books and articles. (And sleep past 6:30. And not have to monitor a lunch table. And the only correcting of manuscripts I'd have to do would be correcting my own texts. I was leaning toward leaving.)

It was two passages of writing that won the day. Two weeks before the year's end, the yearbook came out.

"*Mr. Richmond...You're the kind of teacher people remember forever and tell their children about,*" Chloe had written in her paragraph of thank-you's. And after the students had asked to sign my yearbook, one inscription stood out in particular, from Jessica, one of my English students: *"I like to tell people I don't take English, I take college-level philosophy. I have learned more from you than the way you've taught. I've learned from the way you live...I can't explain what an inspiration you've been. You've believed in me fully: the greatest compliment I have ever given anyone."*

After a lifetime of thinking about myself, I had made a difference to others by thinking about *them*. I'd stay.

In Year Two, I stuck to the curriculum, and taught writing as more of a craft and less as an art, assigning regular, short essays instead of heavier "papers." I began to devise ways of reaching those with learning disabilities, and I learned to quiz orally. Buoyed by the signs of intellectual awakening around me, I encouraged, I encouraged and I encouraged. Some of those ninth

graders gained confidence, and even, perhaps, a newly whetted appetite for learning.

Year Three, though, wore me down. Increasingly dismayed by the institution's atmosphere of high privilege but low academic standards, I wondered whether whatever skills I was developing as a teacher were being wasted on students whose futures seemed to be to be already assured by their parents' status in society.

I landed a lucrative book contract, and resigned. But as soon as I left, I missed the teaching. I missed the give-and-take. I missed my metaphoric fountain of youth. I took an adjunct slot at a community college. But here I felt that the students cared nothing about writing or reading, and were only taking the composition course because it was required. Their high-school educations had clearly been of the chalk-talk variety: I talk, you memorize, then I test, test, test. My particular brand of social give-and-take was foreign and a little scary to students preparing for technical careers.

Then fate intervened. I happened to be writing a profile of a basketball coach who had been good friends with Chris Thomforde, now retired past president of Moravian College -- a school with which I'd not been acquainted. I had a delightful visit with Thomforde, and at the end of it, an idea had dawned: The campus felt nice, the people were nice, the kids seemed to be smiling, and so I asked my interviewee, "Do you have an MA in Teaching degree?"

"We've been thinking about it," he said. "Why don't you meet with the head of the Ed department?"

It took two glasses of wine with Dr. Joseph Shosh at the Hotel Bethlehem to convince me: This was a man whose visionary educational philosophies were exactly in synch with my own (but, of course, light years ahead of mine). On this we agreed: Only by constantly inquiring into the effectiveness of his/her own pedagogical practice could a teacher be effective. Only by seeing the student's point of view, style of discourse and styles of learning could one begin to be effective in the classroom.

Was I ready to take on the role of an action researcher? I thought so. I suspected I'd been one for decades.

Journalism as Action Research

Defining "action research" by describing the steps involved in doing the research in a linear fashion is problematic; doing so risks implying that there is a beginning and an end to the process, when the process is never-ending. This is why the "Lewinian Spiral" -- envisioned by Kurt Lewin 70 years ago -- remains such a workable model. When Lewin wrote "...a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action, (Lewin, 1946), he was laying the groundwork for a never-ending process.

(Or, as Gustave Flaubert, the father of the "novel," put it, "The rage for wanting to conclude is one of the most deadly and most fruitless manias to befall humanity. Each religion and each philosophy has pretended to have God to itself, to measure the infinite, and to know the recipe for happiness. What

arrogance and what nonsense! I see, to the contrary, that the greatest geniuses and the greatest works have never concluded." (Flaubert, unknown date)

In *How to Use Action Research in the Self-Renewing School*, Emily Calhoun offers a cycle that serves nicely as a blueprint: Select the area of study (focus on the students); collect the data (artifacts, surveys, etc.) organize and analyze it, and take action...knowing that, all the while, that action itself is open-ended, and always in need of re-examination via subsequent reflection (Calhoun, 1994).

Now, let's examine the process of journalism, using my story for *GQ* magazine of the crash of an MV-22 Osprey, a revolutionary hybrid airplane-helicopter, during testing in the Arizona desert. I decided to examine the factors behind the crash and find out whether the tragic deaths of 24 young marines were justified.

In other words, I selected the area of study. I then collected the data: the accident report provided by the marine corps, which identified pilot error as the cause; an interview with the four-star general in charge of marine aviation in his office in The Pentagon; interviews with family members of the survivors; an interview with the congressman in whose district Osprey fuselages were manufactured, and finally, a personal ride in an Osprey.

I organized the data by transcribing the interviews and typing up my notes of observations, from the Oriental rugs in the general's office to the shuddering sensation when, during my ride, the Osprey tipped its wings at

5,000 feet and went from being an airplane flying at 300 miles per hour to a helicopter that came to complete stop in mid-air.

I then took action: writing the story in several drafts, and coming to the conclusion that, as long as there are wars, there will be deaths in testing new technologies, but those deaths will not have been in vain, because they will save lives down the road in combat. Finally, in writing "The Crash of the Osprey," I was able later to reflect on how the piece could have been better.

And yes, for the story to be published, I had to finish it -- but that hardly represented an end to the research. I have kept close tabs on the MV-22 and its making of history, from its use as the craft to take Osama Bin Laden's body out of his Pakistan compound, to a friend whose husband is an engineer on the project, to the changing face of war in which battlefields have disappeared as hot-spots are growing: urban battlefields which will increasingly need such craft as the Osprey. There is every likelihood that I will be writing about the Osprey again.

Any journalist may be an action-researcher, constantly researching not only his subjects but also his craft. The author of a 10,000-word investigative piece for *The New Yorker* will likely interview fifty sources; the author of a definitive biography, 200 to 300, minimum. It's a constant, ever-evolving process: learning to understand the person/subject you are writing about, understanding the world from his or her point of view, and constantly assessing your craft.

Other vocations involve questioning -- detectives, lawyers, accountants -
- but often only to ascertain hard and fast answers. The journalist asks
questions to learn about people, their motivations, their reasoning...their
meaning. The journalist is ever researching, so that his text will be
thorough...and, hopefully significant. As Gee has said, "evidence means trying
to do something in the world" (Gee, 2014).

The journalist is ever-curious. As the late paleontologist and Darwin
scholar Steven Jay Gould once put it, in explaining his lifelong search for
knowledge, "There's some deep internal need to keep learning" (Gould, 2000).

Journalist as Researcher

In addition, the journalist/non-fiction author is also well versed in Gee's
multi-modalities. As Gee continually stresses -- he, the gaming king -- we are
moving into an age of many pedagogical media, where social media allow for
enhanced "pastiche" learning tools. For example: A thesis seeking to establish
the biological inability of the adolescent brain to assess risk, for example,
could augment its research by linking to one of the countless videos on
YouTube that show adolescents doing stunts that are inherently dangerous,
often painful and sometimes fatal.

The idea of using multimodal composition methods gains increasing
traction as the barriers between modes of expression are fast breaking down.
As Jody Shipka suggests in her essay "A Multimodal Task-Based Framework
for Composing" "(W)e might also begin asking how the purposeful uptake,

transformation, incorporation, combination, juxtaposition, and even three-dimensional layering of words and visuals—as well as textures, sounds, scents, and even tastes—provide us with still other ways of imagining the work students might produce for the composition course" (Shipka, 2008)

In the case of Shipka's own students (first-semester college freshmen), her loosening of the definition of "writing" resulted in far-reaching "texts," such as the one a student turned in after being asked to write about the definition of the word "scare." The student turned in a disc (in 2006, predating DVDs) that contained written definitions, frightening stories to be read aloud alone, at night, by candlelight, and images of ghosts, accompanied by screams. The student, freed of the strictures of the written word, was allowed to define the word "scare" more effectively.

As John Trimbur (2000) notes in "Composition and the Circulation of Writing, "...neglecting delivery has led writing teachers to equate the activity of composing with writing itself and to miss altogether the complex delivery systems through which writing circulates." Trimbur argues that adding new media mechanisms to a student's repertoire -- texting, YouTube clips -- falls short of the aim of multimodal composition if they do not enhance the delivery of the author's message.

In researching *Fever*, the biography of jazz/pop singer Peggy Lee (2006) I listened to original recordings of her music at the Lincoln Center Library and Rutgers-Newark's jazz library; watched countless hours of her television performances at the Museum of Television and Broadcasting branches in both

New York City and Los Angeles; downloaded movies in which she appeared, and e-mailed a man who is widely considered the most knowledgeable fan of the late singer and convinced him to fact-check the manuscript, with all of our correspondence done on the internet.

(My biggest multi-modal failure? My inability to get the rights to her songs, which I could have then put onto an attached CD.) (The biggest failure of a book I wrote about my father's actions in the South Pacific? I didn't include a map of all the islands he fought on! But my editor wasn't into multi-modalism.)

No serious author/journalist would take on a project in today's publishing marketplace without exploring every possible multi-modal research avenue. Author/friends of mine routinely announce the publication of upcoming books with self-produced YouTube videos.

In the classroom, then, the seasoned journalist is likely to come in knowing every information highway out there. When, in the future, journalism content is going to increasingly appear on the web -- and the journalist's research increasingly involves graphics, music, video, etc. -- the transition to the classroom will perhaps become seamless.

Would scholars of "literature" accept the multimodal description of "text" or "writing"? Well, consider the reaction of one Lady Florence Willerts, who had met (arguably) America's greatest Twentieth Century author, F. Scott Fitzgerald, on the Riviera when he was writing *Tender Is The Night* in 1933 -- and said of that most remarkable of novels, "It is a living thing -- it is a miracle.

It is writing and painting in one -- and instantaneous photography, too, transmuted into the highest art...It is a colossal work." (Fitzgerald, 1934)

If an appreciator of one of America's greatest novelists saw, eighty years ago, that Fitzgerald's text should be praised in terms of multi-modalism, what more need be said about "composition" being a form that transcends the form of actual "writing."

There's another important arena where a journalist's professional skills overlap with the best practices of a good teacher: the asking of questions. A teacher who doesn't ask meaningful questions of his students, whose only questions are those that, delivered transmissively, demand a correct answer, is hardly likely to gain effective strategies for teaching a love of the craft of writing.

As Brent Dudek observes, "Some questions can promote thinking and learning. An effective question sizes up the context for learning, has a purpose related to the lesson and unit plan, and, ideally, is related to larger essential questions in the discipline" (Dudek, 2014). Similarly, the journalist who asks the right questions will elicit illuminating, instructive answers from his subject.

But it was another Dudek observation that really struck home to someone who, in his first serious newspaper job, was told that the lead paragraphs of any story had to answer "Who, what, where, when, why" (which doesn't make for compelling storytelling).

Probing suggests there's always more to know. Asking the standard questions (Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?) may lead to an

initial set of student responses that satisfy the requirement for getting through the lesson in time for Friday's quiz. But formative assessment is more than a march toward the known. It's a process for uncovering deeper understanding, which means having access to evidence about what students are thinking" (Dudek, 2014).

Lastly, in addressing relevant overlaps between the two professions: neither is likely to be filled with people who choose their profession for monetary reward. The best of both professions enter their respective fields because, to use Nel Noddings' resonant word, they "care."

Or, to use Bullough & Hall-Kenyon's term, each feels a "calling." (2012).

As the actor-turned-novelist Ethan Hawke told me for that *GQ* story, discussing his own career change, "It's never too late to have a happy childhood," (Richmond, 2004).

*

In the spring of 2013, I was offered a fellowship to be a candidate for a Moravian Master of Arts in Teaching degree; I would also be offered an adjunct instructor position to teach writing to undergrads, and I could become faculty advisor to the newspaper.

I was coming in from the cold, for real, and finally. From a very different world: the real one, where, as a journalist for five newspapers (15 years) and a national magazine (13 years), and the author of six non-fiction

books, I had spent much of my life nomadically, roaming the country observing, interviewing, reflecting, and writing. I had honed my craft through experience.

And so, in Pennsylvania, 120 miles from my home in upstate New York, it was natural for me to take up lodging three nights a week in a discount motel located five miles, but metaphoric worlds away, from my 18th-century campus, with a classroom once used as a bedroom by John Adams.

The motel's occupants were of all shape and stripe, but had this in common: they occupied a place in American society where they had to work hard in order to simply stay afloat. By conventional standards, they were on the edge.

A few of their stories were of success-- just not traditional academic, American-dream success. Like the six-man highway-painting crew from Ohio, working a nightly 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift on the Rte. 33 overpass. They hadn't been home in a month, but they'd get a stopover en route to their next job, in Oklahoma. They had steady work. Bridges always need painting.

But most were not living the life they'd likely envisioned as adolescents, with thoughts of happiness and fulfillment. Like the man wearing the frantic expression in the elevator late one night, frantically tapping his phone.

"You okay?" I said. He explained that he'd just spoken to his wife, whose car was stranded by the side of the interstate. "Can you pick her up?" No, he couldn't. She was home, in Indiana. He was in Allentown looking for construction work. No, they didn't have Triple-A. There was nothing he could do but worry.

If one tableau summed up my stay out on the fringe, it was this: I'd returned to do some writing at my plastic desk, in my usual room, with its cigarette burns on the plastic sink. I heard loud rock music. Stepping into the hallway, I saw a wide-open door, and walked toward it. Inside were two large suitcases, opened, with women's clothes spilling out. When I knocked loudly on the door, an attractive transvestite in her underwear stepped out of the bathroom, with lipstick in her hand.

"If you don't mind," she said, not happily, "I'm getting ready for a show." She slammed the door.

But no moment was as jarring as the woman whose shouts awoke me in the middle of the night, out in the hall: "Get the fuck back in that room!" she yelled, clearly just a few feet from my room, her words easily audible through my particle-board door -- followed by the distinct sound of four evenly spaced slaps. And no sound of protest from the child.

As I lay awake for the next several hours, knowing I'd be teaching my writing class that next morning on very little sleep, one question bounced around my mind: Where had been the mentor who might have diverted that young mother from this tragic path she was on, dragging a child through thickets of anger and frustration at the life she'd been dealt? She hadn't been born malicious. How could there have been no one -- no one! -- along the way who could have saved her and her child from this fate?

Where had the scaffolding been for the once-handsome man who now had to make a living out of suitcases in clubs featuring transvestites?

Why had the young man whose job on the painting crew was to do the paperwork for the nomadic crew not risen to a good accounting job back in his hometown, instead of having to take a job figuring out payroll hours at a tiny table in a motel lobby at dawn, drinking weak coffee?

My motel wasn't quite as raw as the motel across the road, which, it turned out, was renting rooms for liaisons with under-aged prostitutes. The only (apparent) prostitutes I saw in my motel were not young. When they climbed into the taxis idling outside the lobby door, the expressions on their faces didn't suggest they'd just been living an American Dream.

For six weeks, I'd leave that motel and drive a few miles to my parallel universe, with its historic atmosphere of time-honored respectability. I dove into my classwork that first term, delighting in trying to teach seven talented English majors in the craft of non-fiction writing in an upper-level English Department elective. Some were clearly on a good path. One was riding on a rocky road. One was doomed -- born with a disease that would, as he pointed out to me, likely end his life before his thirtieth birthday. He remains the most peaceful, happy person I have ever met.

To a man and woman, they were optimistic about the future. They'd weathered three years of college, and were eager to make the jump to the real world. And I was determined to do whatever I could to help them realize that future -- if, by nothing else, giving them my own example of how to reach a place of peace and fulfillment, including the stories of my own very dumb veering-off-the-path episodes, which, somehow, I had survived. If they needed

to be assured that the human spirit is capable of triumph and ultimate happiness, I would provide an example.

Of course, I came in with an agenda. As someone who had made an actual living as a writer, I hoped to instill in my seven writers, all of whom had talent, the realization that a life as a writer was not only feasible, but, perhaps (gasp), realistic.

According to a 2011 study conducted by the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, two-thirds of the 13,500 students, those who studied arts in college reported a "close match" for the kind of work they wanted in their first job. Seventy percent of graduates employed as writers, fine artists and photographers were "very satisfied" with their first jobs -- despite low pay. (Berrett, 2011) Among those students, though, whose first jobs were in sales, management, health -- and teaching -- only one third reported satisfaction with their jobs.

Why would "artists" being paid less than healthcare workers find greater satisfaction? Perhaps because making a (slim) livelihood in field they've likely practiced since grade school (drawing, writing, acting, playing an instrument) allows them to be less burdened by life's colder realities, because the arts allow them to continue to keep in touch with their younger selves -- personalities that were curious, capable of learning new things, eager to learn new things, to seek out new venues for creativity.

In the words of adolescent psychologist Laurence Steinberg, "prolonged adolescence, in the right circumstances, is actually a good thing, for it fosters novelty-seeking and the acquisition of new skills.

Studies reveal adolescence to be a period of heightened **'plasticity'** during which the brain is highly influenced by experience. As a result, adolescence is both a time of opportunity and vulnerability, a time when stressful events can be particularly devastating. As we leave adolescence, a series of neurochemical changes make the brain increasingly less plastic and less sensitive to environmental influences. Once we reach adulthood, existing brain circuits can be tweaked, but they can't be overhauled...If this is true -- that a decline in novelty-seeking helps cause the brain to harden — it raises intriguing questions about whether the window of adolescent brain plasticity can be kept open a little longer by deliberate exposure to stimulating experiences that signal the brain that it isn't quite ready for the fixity of adulthood. (Steinberg, 2014).

The takeaway? In common vernacular, "You're only as old as you feel." In pedagogic terms? As a writer for no fewer than seven news and feature organizations, and author for four different book editors, writing about a new subject every time out, my own brain had likely retained more "plasticity" than many of my peers, age-wise. If I were able to encourage students to retain the sense of wide-eyed wonder they already possessed, rather than drum it out, I

might be able to help them to keep the scope of their radar on the world as wide as possible!

*

Each night I'd go back to the motel south of the airport, on a highway clotted by every mind-numbing chain franchise America has to offer. At my usual chain restaurant, I'd be greeted at the door by someone dressed in a furry bird suit, right down to the really scary big red-robin head, like some mascot for a minor-league hockey team in, maybe, Savannah. I'd often find myself thinking, "I hope they're paying him/her enough to make up for wearing that costume."

Then I'd eat at the bar, often with at least a semi-lost soul or two -- a weary, beaten-down trucker; a salesman checking his phone every eleven seconds and then looking up at a flat screen where a soccer match was being held between two English cities none of us could locate on a map with a gun to our head. We'd invariably be served by one or another weathered woman with a dazed look on her face.

And I'd ask myself, "What's happened here? Why did all of these lives get shunted into the ditch on their way to a decent life? Why was there no one - - no one! -- there to show them the way in high school? Could no one have taken an extra moment to put a little wind under their wings when everyone else thought they'd never fly?"

What was I myself doing out there, in this ghetto of fringe-folk? Well, I'd always preferred to get a motel room when I was researching a story off the

beaten path: an inexpensive place where I could be an anonymous face in the crowd, and mingle with as much of the America we relatively privileged folks like to ignore as I possibly could.

Why? Because no serious American writer can write meaningful texts without knowing the pulse of the people who occupy every social stratum. And no researcher can do meaningful research if his vantage on the world is from a safe, secluded place.

The last biography I'd written was about the most successful coach/teacher in professional sports. Phil Jackson is a man who preferred to be away from the mainstream, but within its reach -- "out on the fringe of the pasture, but still within its fences" (Richmond, 2013). Growing up, he preferred to have the distant perspective -- but not so distant as to not be able to see what's going on in the mainstream. It's hard to see what's going on around you when you're in the middle; you'll miss the big picture.

Similarly, back on the campus, as I taught my first college class, I vowed to not be in the center, not to be the center of attention.

My classroom would be a place for transaction, not transmission. It would be a place where the facilitator learned as much as the students. It would not be a room shut off from the real world. It would shave walls, but the walls would be transparent. They would let the real world in.

My classroom would emphasize assets, not deficits. It would be a place where students who have been labeled, categorized, shunted or starved would belong.

The ancient Romans believed in gods who protected doorways, because they knew that going from one place to another was a journey that needed protection, since the transition's outcome was not knowable.

My classroom would need no gods to ensure a safe entry. My students would find it a safe place. And in a safe place -- a place where their instructor considered himself an ally in their journey -- they would want to learn.

Best Practices

"Given that I am talking about experience as part of education," John Dewey wrote, "I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience. Or, that the new philosophy of education is committed to some kind of empirical and experimental philosophy...But...to know the meaning of empiricism we need to understand what experience is." (Dewey, 1936)

Then again, anyone coming back to a classroom after a lifetime of real-world work has experience. Dare I think that I might be bringing a more elusive attribute?

Wisdom

In 1874, the Swiss philosopher Henri Amiel wrote, "To know how to grow old is the master-work of wisdom" (Amiel, 1874). Those who have grown old gracefully have also, by definition, grown up acquiring "wisdom."

According to Jeste et al's report in *Gerontologist*, Expert consensus on characteristics of wisdom: A delphi method study (2010) "wisdom...increases with age through advanced cognitive and emotional development that is experience driven (author italics)."

Living a life that includes setbacks, victories and challenges, Thao Le found, as reported in his "Cultural Values, Life Experiences and Wisdom (2008)," enhances an individual's "wisdom." "Wisdom," wrote Le, "is considered one ideal endpoint of human development across cultures. Studies have provided evidence for certain facilitating conditions such as challenging and stressful life events because they increase differentiation through accommodative changes, resulting in greater tolerance for uncertainty, and less projection tendencies and self-centeredness."

The buffetings of a fully lived life, in other words, can provide some optimum teacher attributes: lack of ego, lack of projection.

Jeste et al., surveying 57 "experts on wisdom" from around the globe (21 women, 36 men), administering a rigorous questionnaire, measured a multitude of the attributes that might be associated with the notion of "wisdom," found what seems obvious: That the older you get, the wiser you become.

On a more layman-like level, as The New York Times columnist Frank Bruni put it, "More than before, you're able to find the good in bad. You start to master perspective, realizing that with a shift in it -- an adjustment of attitude, a reorientation of expectations -- what's bothersome can evaporate and what only seems to be urgent isn't" (Bruni, 2014).

Real-life perspective -- whether it furnishes "wisdom," or simply "experience," can be a valuable trait to pass on to younger generations -- especially in an increasingly fractured Western society, which has never been less likely to regularly attend a church. In a culture devaluing a priest/pastor/voice of reason and increasingly dubious of the aged, the role of "wise man" and "elder" has largely vanished. In the last half-century, we are far likelier to want to tear down our metaphoric prophets (if not outright assassinate them).

In Western culture, amid the increasing marginalization of the aging, "elders" no longer count as "mentors." This was not always the case. Consider the evening of February 27, 1968, when CBS' Evening News' anchorman Walter Cronkite pronounced to a nation, "It is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out of Vietnam will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could" -- and president Lyndon Baines Johnson then said, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost Middle America." He subsequently began to disengage the United States from that conflict.

Today, the idea that an older man in a national media spotlight could be an agent in national foreign policy change is patently unthinkable. According to Jeste, et al, one aspect of "wisdom" is a "reduction in self-centeredness" (Jeste et al, 2010). The first step in loss of ego is aging. The second-career teacher's ability to impart life skills would suggest another

benefit of a "wiser" teaching cohort in a society which grows increasingly devoid of "spiritual" leaders.

It would be natural for those who have both mastered their previous field and decided to leave it to try and fill that void by adopting a vocation which will bring them true satisfaction: a job in which the most effective members are characterized by their search for "hope", "commitment." and a sense of "calling." (Bullough, Jr. & Hall-Kenyon, 2012).

Wisdom could be a beneficial attribute for an instructor of adolescents at this rocky stage, the better to give them a head start on developing coping mechanisms. "Been there, done that," may be a flippant phrase, but in this context, it's apt.

For further perspective, we need only look back at what was arguably the most cultured and educated society in history: that of Athens in the 3rd and 4th centuries B.C., where young men attended "gymnasia:" schools of both physical and mental learning, where philosophy and politics were taught alongside physical skills by 10 chosen "gymnasiarchs:" men of dignity, wisdom and stature. Founders of two of the schools? Aristotle and Plato.

On the other hand, to enter a classroom thinking that your duty is to deposit your wisdom into the students -- using Freire's banking metaphor -- is to ignore that, in the words of novelist Lionel Shriver, "One of the things you lose in the wisdom of age is the wisdom of youth. (Shriver, 2008)."

Perhaps the wisest thing an older teacher can do is to engage with a student in a mutual pursuit of what is "wise". As Shakespeare might contest

modern interpretation of Romeo and Juliet's love as of the "puppy" kind, insisting that it was, in fact, the purest form of love, so could the case for adolescent wisdom, with its un-jaded lens on human behavior, easily be made. An older instructor would not only be wise to listen to the students' take on morality and ethics, but would benefit from it.

It was the novelist Graham Greene who once said, "Life is lived in the first twenty years. The rest is just observation" (Greene, 1966)". Wise words -- and words that suggest that both sides can bring something to the third space where we all learn.

Bringing an outside perspective into the halls of academia, as long the bringer were qualified to do so, might be wise thing, indeed. As the late writer/philosopher David Foster Wallace said in his legendary commencement speech at Amherst, "Probably the most dangerous thing about an academic education -- least in my own case -- is that it enables my tendency to over-intellectualize stuff, to get lost in abstract argument inside my head, instead of simply paying attention to what is going on right in front of me, paying attention to what is going on inside me." (Foster-Wallace, 2005) If nothing else, the writer/journalist who has had to "pay attention to what is going on" in front of him brings an ability to take theory and ground it in reality.

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After six weeks, my motel had worn me down; sleep was impossible. My students (and my grad-school instructors) deserved better from me. I found a bedroom for rent in a large, old house a few miles from the campus. The

other renter, a man in his late forties, was in town finishing his PhD at another local university. He was relatively well off, having spent many years teaching the elementary-school sons of American executives in places like Dubai. He had health care for himself and his family for the rest of his life, thanks to his Dubai employers.

His thesis? That good teachers will stay in schools if the schools have good principals. He'd spent many years on it. I refrained from saying that his thesis seemed a little self-evident. Instead I asked, "So what do you plan to do with the PhD?"

"Nothing," he said. "I just wanted to get one. Probably go back to teaching overseas."

This time my question wasn't about failed promises. No, I was not questioning his years of work, or denigrating his meticulously researched data, or his analysis of said data, or the truth of its message. I was simply wondering whether the academic research field of which he was a devoted part could, perhaps, be enhanced, broadened, to include research that could have a more immediate effect on the classroom (and, perhaps, fewer words such as "Intertextuality"? "Heteroglossic"? "Bidialectic"!)

Curriculum

Finding effective texts for students to read -- that is, texts that will strike a note within a student's own cognitive processes --represents the other side of the same coin of "The Language Arts." I could not have succeeded as a

journalist without knowing that I'd been tasked with self-generating compelling story ideas that were engaging (i.e., marketable). No editor would have retained my services if s/he had to continually come up with the story ideas.

A successful career in journalism entails being able to constantly generate lively texts: the more lively the story, the more buying readers are likely to read it. Every time I pitched a story to an editor and it was subsequently green-lighted, it was because I had considered the way my audience would think in terms of the article I delivered.

I always had to cater my story to the audience-- *GQ* stories written one way, *Architecture Magazine* another, *TV Guide* another, *ESPN The Magazine* another -- by considering the thought processes that they would bring to the story when reading it.

I come into a language arts classroom with a sense for what makes for compelling reading and what does not. I have not spent my life reading the prose of academic journals. I have written for the common vernacular. It has helped me make a living, but it has also shackled the precision and intellectual rigor that academic writing demands.

On the other hand, a lifetime academic who teaches writing -- and has had to produce scholarly articles in scholar-prose -- can't help but be influenced by the prose styles of academic researchers.

There's no doubt that pioneers of a new kind of writing like Peter Elbow and James Paul Gee have attained prominence at least in part because of their accessible writing style. A writer of academic prose is not going to last long as

a journalist...but on the other hand, a popular writer who cannot adhere to the stringent standards demanded of an academic writer is a lesser writer for not adhering to standards of accuracy and truth.

As a journalist, I could bring experience in devising a curriculum into my classroom. As Arthur Costa explains in "The Thought-Filled Curriculum," the process of "thinking" can be, and must be, be taught in the classroom. Metacognition unlocks many doors. Costa suggests that a prerequisite for refining, defining and honing the thought process is engaging students with readings that compel: "Teachers should select relevant, generative, wondrous content to serve as a vehicle for the joyride of learning" (Costa, 2008).

In other words, the livelier the text, the more likely a student will engage in metacognition that will result in enhanced ways of thinking.

Voice

In James Paul Gee's words, "To understand anything fully, you need to know who is saying it (Gee, 2001)." In other words, words composed into a sentence, spoken or written, are not simply conveying one message; any word can have many meanings, depending on their setting/context; the voice speaking/writing them; and the stance of the listener.

For example (author's own), if someone were to say, in a metaphoric vacuum, "This is war!" without knowing the context, we wouldn't have a clue as to whether an actual war was being declared, or the phrase had been uttered casually and in humor.

Gee's "language-in-use " concept suggests that words strung into sentences are meaningful only insofar as they impart a specific meaning as intended by the speaker and understood by the listener. Gee argues that "language-in-use," by establishing identities, "build(s) things in the world and "engage(s) in world building" (Gee, 2010).

In other words: language is "active," and not only in the "active" sense of an "active" verb, but in "acting/doing" as well as "saying." Gee challenges us to explore the interactive nature of speaking and writing, the better to make "meaning"...well, meaningful.

Any journalist easily understands this concept of language. It lies at the heart of effective journalism -- specifically in the commonly known term (for both writer and editor) as "voice."

The sportswriter and novelist Frank Deford, Sports Illustrated's all-time scribe, was the first mentor who told me that an effective story must have a voice, and that the voice had to be my own. It was Deford's conviction that while the author should refrain from inserting himself into a story, for the telling of an authentic storytelling piece of writer, the reader must sense that there is a "voice" that is telling the tale. This interpretation doesn't suggest that the voice has an agenda; it simply means that the voice must be real, authentic and reliable.

It took me years to find my own voice. As a novice, I would often try to imitate writers I admired. Only as I began to write books in which I was called upon to metaphorically "surround" my topic did I find myself writing in a

confident voice: confident that it was accessible to readers, and confident that they would sense my own confidence.

For example: the voice of the author of a newspaper article about a mass murder in Kansas is going to differ significantly from the voice of the author of a book about the crime, even if the facts of the crime are identical. An Associated Press reporter writing the deaths of the Clutter family for 1,000 news outlets across the country will be representing the crime in a different voice than Truman Capote telling the tale in his non-fiction/fictitious account, *"In Cold Blood."*

More significantly, any good editor will tell a writer of meaningful texts that she or he must have a "voice" -- as in, the reader will only respond to your words (note the sense of "respond": the word suggests that an interaction is occurring) if she or he senses exactly where you are (metaphorically) coming from; as in "Who is telling this story, and from what perspective/stance?"

For example: In my story about the crash of the experimental and controversial Navy plane in testing, my voice was that of the son of a war hero. I am empathetic with losses that occur in peacetime, and made a good case for testing to continue. (Today, that aircraft is not only used in combat, it was the plane that extracted Osama bin Laden's body from his compound in Pakistan.) My voice was authoritative: that of a 50-year-old journalist who was confident in his reporting and storytelling.

Had a writer with an anti-military bent written about a test crash that killed 24 marines in the desert, the voice would have been far different, and the reader would have responded quite differently.

Further: The author of a celebrity profile of the troubled actress Lindsay Lohan who sympathizes with her addictions (and has done enough journalistic/academic research to know all of the variables in the equation of the actress's life) will possess a far more effective and trustworthy "voice" than someone railing against the phenomenon of spoiled celebrities. (As an academic paper on "second-career teachers" written by a first-career teacher will present the language in a far different voice than I, a second-career teacher reflecting on his high degree of job satisfaction.)

In each case, the "voice" speaks of Gee's insistence on understanding of context. If the journalist's words strike the reader as genuine, and give a sense of "expertness" to the author, the reader will buy in. If the words are coming from an inauthentic, biased, one-way, top-down, transmissive voice, and the reader discerns the voice to be inexpert, or agenda-laden, then the text will be ineffective (at best).

I have lived by Gee's theories for my entire career, using a voice that first began to develop when I was fortunate enough to study with John Hersey, a Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist, in his senior writing seminar at Yale. Gaining entry into the hallowed room where he annually taught his senior seminar, "The Craft of Writing," represented the apex of any Yale writer's career. He taught us three things on the first day: 1) Writing is a craft, not an

art; and 2) Write in a real voice. No one else's. Yours. 3) Do not let the form get in the way of a story.

Freewriting

Donald Murray (1973) and Peter Elbow (1976) both advanced the notion that the "process" of writing should be just that: an ever evolving. When Elbow encouraged instructors to use "freewriting" as a way to liberate the writer (i.e. paying less attention, right out of the writer's gate, to structure or organization, and more on the act of pouring thoughts onto the page), he was suggesting that ideas can trump the insistence on adherence to "Standard English" (which does not, exist, and never has. There is no standard in an ever-evolving medium of communication. Trying to keep the language from evolving in ways you don't want it to is like trying to stop the encroachment of a glacier by erecting a snow fence.)

After all: We "free think," and, among friends, we "free talk." Literarily, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* violated countless syntactical rules. But as works of writing, they're in the pantheon of great literature. So why not encourage freewriting as a way of painlessly passing through the portal that many students see anxiety-inducing? If the reluctant student writer is to open up and explore the craft without anxiety, rigid notions of "first draft, second draft" have to be replaced by much more fluid and elastic stages of creation, so that the process never, at any point, inhibits the possibility of triggering new thoughts and new perspectives as the work evolves.

Any work of my own journalism, whether a 1,000-word commentary or a 120,000-word biography, begins with freewriting, whether it's the first paragraph that springs to my mind about the subject on the first day I sit down to compose, or the middle-of-the-night note I scrawl on the back of an envelope on the bedside table. It is most often, if not always -- not incidentally -- handwritten.

In the later stages of the actual writing, Elbow's notion of "overlapping" stages where new insights spring up is an essential component of the process. Any honest journalist will freely admit that the plot-flow of many articles/essays/books end up going in a distinctly different direction than the one in which they began. In my experience, the most salient proof of the value of overlapping stages is illustrated by the final stages of writing a book, when the manuscript is in pre-publication "galley" -- that is, when the author is supposed to be simply fact-checking and proofreading a "finished" manuscript, when it is anything but finished (as the editor knows!).

Often, the author will make significant changes in this final stage. "Please don't rewrite the book in the galley!" my editor pleaded in the final stage of a biography I'd written. But I made many major changes in that final stage: new material added, stale stuff deleted -- which resulted in a fairly cool review in *The New York Times Book Review*...the ego-highlight of a career, for what that's worth.

The best journalist is the writer who can write fluidly, on a continuum, without artificial platforms of "progress." Going from first draft to second draft

to third draft in the belief that each subsequent revision builds on the last, as an iron-clad progression for refining the text, is counterproductive to true creation. Imagine a painter who is not allowed to paint over his brushstrokes of the day before, or enters that day of painting thinking, "I must only improve upon and refine yesterday's brushstrokes; I cannot back up."

There would be no painting.

Similarly, the journalist who must write a text in rigid sequence is not going to produce a readable text; a treatise, perhaps, but not a text. Teaching writing as an ever-shifting, malleable thought process not only lessens the pressure on the reluctant writer, it makes for a more accessible text.

Pedagogy

Soon after arriving at Moravian, having never taught a college course, I halted in front of a lecture hall with a window in the door, and was able to look over the shoulders of the students, down at the teacher in the front of the room.

I watched him spend a full minute at the PC on a podium, trying to bring up a map of the Soviet Union's border with Germany, during which time he was not speaking. During that time every student in the back row was doing something on her/his laptops that had nothing to do with The Russian Front. Some were shopping. Some were on Facebook.

When he finally got his map up on the screen, he began to point his laser at various spots, lecturing all the while (loudly enough for me to hear his voice).

Some of the students in the lower rows took notes, some didn't. Some were looking at him. Some were looking at their phones. I vowed at that moment: "That will not be me. I will not lecture. I will not instruct. I will not ask students to learn my way of writing. I will encourage them to find their own. I will not ask questions expecting a certain answer. I will interact."

Not long ago, I hung around a friend's recording studio as he recorded some of my daughter's songs. He was sitting in front of a huge soundboard, and a large computer screen. The soundboard can simulate any instrument, any sound, any drumbeat. My daughter played a song on the guitar...and within a few hours, the song had been produced, sounding as if she'd been playing with an entire band. Violins. Horns.

"Man," I said, "you didn't even need Hillary. She could have just sent you the original song."

"Naw," he said. "It's more fun with people. I enjoy humanity. I enjoy the interaction."

And that, in a nutshell, would provide one of the philosophies for my classroom, where I would bring "real-world" experience into the classroom. In the work world, and the social world, society lives to interact with others. We are social animals (anyone at Moravian can attest to this, if they drop into the student union between classes, where packs of students gather to talk, exchange notes on the day, plan the rest of the day).

Why should a classroom be any different? Why would we expect students to be engaged if they're being talked *at*? Transmissive communication

of the chalk-talk kind would seem to be the least likely-to-be-effective means of imparting knowledge to students whose brains are not yet fully formed.

I would not use a white board, or any technology. There's no question that the effectiveness of asking students to look at a display depends on the nature of the prompts and the nature and context of the display. But in the context I was studying, I wanted to emphasize active engagement, and I wanted to see whether engagement with a person could be as effective as engagement with a screen.

We would interact in a horseshoe-configuration of desks, where we could all see each other. After all: Each discourse pattern that we use in everyday, social, life should also factor into an instructor-to-student interaction. At a cocktail party, if four or five people are chatting, does one speak while the other four remain silent, lined up in front of him? When a corporation holds a board meeting, does the chairman stand at a podium?

If, as Courtney Cazden (1977) notes, "teaching is a linguistic process in a cultural setting," then it stands to reason that the more frequently this discourse occurs with the participation of every student and his/her "culture," the likelier that group learning will occur. Put more simply (and colloquially), I hoped to learn where each student's learning style was "coming from."

As James Paul Gee has suggested, if you speak to another person -- in this case, a student -- it won't be useful to either member of the dialogue if the speaker (teacher) is making assumptions about the listener's (student's) state of mind or being, which she/he can never know if the teacher is doing the talking.

It's only when the discourse is recognized as a fluid and organic relationship that meaningful dialogue can take place. It's only when the instructor recognizes the various methodological strategies at play in each unique discourse that the student's response takes on a more heightened, and valuable context.

In the spring of 2014, in the semester prior to the semester I studied for this text, I surveyed my Young Adult literature class (in which we did as much writing as the writing class in this study) about the semester. I implored them to be honest, knowing they would be, because we had a good relationship (and because the results were anonymous).

The result? Several themes emerged.

My efforts to make the classroom a setting for two-way discourse were appreciated (*"Instead of forcing opinion onto students, he sought to hear and understand our points of view"*) (*"Talks to, not at, the students."*)

My emphasis on casual collegiality, trying to make the "classroom" more of a salon, elicited this observation: *"The idea of casual yet structured fascinates me, and it is an effective way of teaching and getting the best from the students."*

My efforts to convince them that a syllabus packed with required reading need not be a daunting one seemed to have resonated (*I...never realized how much I enjoyed reading books."*) (*"Got more literature read"*) (*"Re-opened my old reading hobby."*)

Most satisfying was an addendum that Amanda had attached to her final project, unsolicited. It read, in part: *"There are two kinds of teachers...those who*

teach subjects and facts...and those who give skill, knowledge, hope, and tools to build a student's better tomorrow. Those are educators. Continue to be an educator Mr. Richmond."

Reflecting on the (satisfyingly) exclusively positive responses, it struck me that, in many ways, my pedagogical style may have resembled that of the 19th-century one-room schoolhouse teacher, who, over the course of a school day would be called upon to teach many different subjects to learners of all styles (and ages).

In trying to make the things we were discussing relevant to all in the Young Adult Literature class, I had, day in and day out, instinctively drawn upon any and all of the diverse subjects I'd been conversant with in the last four decades. As a general-interest journalist, I was something of a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. But there were very few areas of history and modern culture that I hadn't poked my toe into.

I had also cared, perhaps in a way that only someone who has raised two children to adulthood can.

Caring

The notion of "caring" and "trust" as foundations of effective pedagogy has been most effectively explored by Nel Noddings, who makes a persuasive case (1999) for the assertion that while most teachers "care" about their students, simply empathizing with a student's life, challenges and goals is not enough to maintain an authentic, caring dynamic; there must exist, for effective

transactional learning, a relationship that allows the student to know that she or he is cared for.

The notion of "the ethics of care" is characterized by the belief that recognizing what is "just" or "unjust" is not enough to constitute actual "care." If the "ethics of care" are to come into play in the classroom, "response" must occur -- and be case-specific. A metaphoric "conversation" between student and instructor, Noddings explains -- wherein the student knows that the teacher is engaging in a relationship that allows for authentic caring -- enables true transactional learning.

No journalist ever ascends to success without employing Noddings' interactive notion of caring. The writer who makes a splash in the media by being critical of someone/thing, and exposing someone else's mistakes for the sake of sensationalism, never lasts long in the business.

But: Even caring about the ramifications of someone's life when one writes about them doesn't represent being compassionate enough. Authors who engage in a relationship of mutual trust with their subjects from the onset write the most enduring works of journalism and non-fiction books.

In writing in-depth profiles of people of note, a writer can be certain that any newsworthy and/or public individual will have done his/her own research on the writer to see how compassionate the writer has been about previous subjects.

A writer with a history of writing stories which result in subjects responding with variations of, "Thank you for respecting my point of view,"

will continue to succeed, for s/he'll have left a paper trail of ethical, trustworthy behavior: that is, conjoining with the subject to find a space where both are comfortable as the project goes forward.

Further, a caring journalist is a journalist who will gather an audience of readers who know that they are in the hands of not only a professional, but a fellow human.

The responsible journalist will be accustomed to bringing Noddings' "ethic of care" into the life of each of his students.

The Study

It is time to discover, via inquiry, data collection, reflection and action, how my pedagogy and curriculum can have an impact on a first-year student's cl experience of writing.

But within the first moment I step into our assigned classroom, my heart sinks.

The freshman English course -- to facilitate the craft of writing, with an emphasis on the craft of journalism -- has been gifted a drab, cramped, windowless classroom in the campus library.

Elba.

The classroom's two-person desks face forward in lockstep toward the front of the room. Having already taught two semesters at Moravian, I know that this configuration discourages dialogue. It infers that the teacher is the lecturer, the student, the lecturee. It's the optimum desk arrangement for Paulo Freire's banking metaphor for ineffective teaching, where "...the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (Freire, 1971), Standing in front of a class always makes me feel as if I'm throwing out factoids to be deposited and never seen again.

Facing rows of students from the front of a room, wouldn't an instructor invariably loom as a monitor? Wouldn't college freshmen entering classrooms

configured like the ones they've come from in high school instinctively see the upcoming semester as an extension of the old days?

Shouldn't college signify a break, if not from their accustomed learning styles, from learning environments which, more often than not, seem to not carry the greatest of memories?

So I ask the class whether they would like it if we could find a new room, and they definitely want out! I'll try and find us a classroom that feels less like a tomb. I'm encouraged by the sense that, on Day One, we have taken action as one.

Methodology

In the meantime, I share the news: I am going to be studying them, if they're up for it, to find out what happens when a journalist teaches writing, and I explain the methodology of the study: with their permission, I will be using their essays as sources of **data**. I will use a survey to be administered near the end of the term as data.

To collect that data, I will be meeting with each student individually, one-on-one, for a personal interview, the scope of which will be dictated by the student. My belief in the interview as a way of gaining insight into a student's learning styles goes beyond my journalistic instincts; it relates directly to Noddings' notion of caring -- unlike some of my journalistic relationships, my relationship with the students will be an authentic one. Having taught two previous language courses at the college, I am aware that my desire to impart a

Nodding notion of "care" is an integral part of my pedagogy. Personal interviews will allow me discover, as best I can as a journalist/inquirer, where each student finds herself socially-in-the-world (their "situation" in Paulo Freire's sense), and I will then hope to maximize learning opportunities.

I will use the transcripts (and observations) of one-on-one interviews as data. I will use my "field log" -- my observations of them -- as data. I will take all of this data, code it, analyze it, and study it to produce a thesis.

As for our classroom discussions: They'll be free and open and mutual. I will not be pronouncing Truths, or, to use Freire's vivid metaphor, I will not be depositing knowledge as if money into a bank. "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who they consider to know nothing (Vygotsky, 1970)."

Instead, we'll be learning in a zone where a metaphoric "third space" is created so that no "learner" is subjected to one-way, transmissive instruction. I stress that the discourse will be free-flowing in this class.

Why? In real-life conversation, the best exchange of ideas happens among friends in a comfortable setting. As Wicks and Reason wrote in 2009, in the journal *Action Research*, a comfortable setting is a prerequisite for a student to feel included: "The challenge...is to help people feel free, comfortable and able to contribute, while at the same time providing a sense of challenge and stimulation."

We'll talk about current events, about what's going on that morning, about news from the day before. "If I were asked to name the most needed of all reforms in the spirit of education," Dewey wrote, "I should say: 'Cease conceiving of education as mere preparation for later life, and make it the full meaning of the present life.'"

To that end, I tell them, we'll all be using writing to gain knowledge that matters to us now; the "now" is where true learning happens, and that "now" involves all of the experiences that surround them every day. They won't simply be responding to the assigned texts; they'll be responding to the world in which those texts occur, and the social trends that gave birth to those same texts.

Most importantly, I stress: We will not simply be learning to write in order to be able to "write;" we will be writing to learn. It was Lev Vygotsky who best expressed the relationship between the "writing" and "learning." As Janet Emig characterized Vygotsky's theory, "...higher cognitive functions seem to develop most fully only with the support system of verbal language -- particularly, it seems, of written language. (Emig, 1977). For Vygotsky, "development" does not precede "learning;" they are mutually inclusive in the instructional process.

I'll ask them to talk about what interests them and about what they're thinking about things that are happening outside of class, in the hopes that when they set pen and pencil to paper in their notebooks, the writing might be an extension of the discussions -- and in expectation of finding out whether their

development as young adults, both in and out of the classroom, will be a factor in their development as writer/learners.

Talking and writing, any non-fiction writer knows, are two sides of the same coin, and I expect that the more confident they become in their own speaking voices the more confidence they might have in their writing.

My pedagogy will belong to the students, nor to me, but to both of us as we discover how they want to learn (Bird & Sherman, 2015). To do so, I tell them, I want them to be confident enough to use their own voices in their writing. If I am going to help them engage with the craft of writing, I have to let them be themselves. "Write in your own voice," I tell them.

*

Then I share some of the ways we'll be learning together:

Final **grades** will be decided by both of us, largely based on semester-long effort. Not every student is capable of writing evocatively and professionally, but all of are capable of effort. Assessment will be an ongoing, diachronic process, based on growth throughout an entire semester, instead of several synchronic judgments on that particular day's knowledge of that particular day's facts.

I had taken a grad-level course on assessment during the previous semester and it had convinced me that assessment for an entire semester that relied heavily on a fireworks climax (The Final Exam! The Final Project!) was at best a questionable way of grading a student's semester-long effort -- or

ascertaining whether s/he had actually learned anything. It would be as if you were trying to cram many months of days into one day. The metaphoric laws of physics suggest that this wouldn't work...

...not to mention the stress to which the phrase "final exam" enslaves a student. The closer they get to the dangerous glow of the Final Assessment, the less they're likely to take in the curriculum. "Happiness is a journey, not a destination," said The Buddha (probably apocryphally). The joy of learning something, as any journalist knows, is in the process of reporting and researching-- not the subsequent summing up of everything you've learned.

Next ground rule: They'd be doing most of their **writing by hand** in their personal spiral notebook. Except for a final research paper, all of that writing would be done in class.

On a pragmatic level, these artifacts might make it easier to track progress -- for the students, for my research. When someone writes by hand every week, in the same personal notebook, with cross-outs and erasures, they're leaving a diachronic record that could be graded on a Dewey-esque continuum -- not synchronic, arbitrary moments of "testing."

But this is not to infer that "ease of grading" was a factor in my decision to write in class, on paper. The handwriting protocol, I believed, might make the act of writing more personal -- and more authentic. As a journalist, when interviewing, I have always -- like many of my peers -- used a notebook to take handwritten notes, even if I was recording the conversation. Writing notes in a notebook (as well as on envelopes, receipts and business cards, and any

available surface) had always given me my sharpest insights, observations: the kind of details that make or break a piece of writing.

Also, when someone was speaking, I found that the notes I committed to paper were the most relevant statements about what I was researching. Our brain filters when writing. When it's typing on a screen, it does not have to do any filtering. The page can fill up with casual observations.

Handwriting on a pad with a stylus might seem to provide an effective alternative to a generation schooled on screens; handwriting, whether with a pen or stylus, would enhance the learning process by allowing time for editing while the process of writing is occurring. Nor would writing on a telephone or laptop necessarily short-circuit the creative wires. One of the finest writers to grace one of my classrooms was the quadriplegic of whom I earlier wrote, but he had never picked up a pen or pencil in his life, and typing with his thumbs had always been his only natural means of written expression.

I had another relevant consideration in mind when I decided to try the handwriting approach: that the ubiquity of pads and phones and laptops is, developmentally, clearly changing interpersonal behavior -- and not for the better.

Research done by Clifford Nass, the late communication professor at Stanford University, suggests that "young people were spending so much time looking into screens that they were losing the ability to read nonverbal communications and learn other skills necessary for one-one-one interactions" (Feiler, 2015).

Another intriguing -- and disturbing -- aspect of the relationship between the user of the device and the device, according to Nass and his co-author Byron Reeves: it's an actual...relationship.

"Everybody thought they were tools, that they were hammers and screwdrivers and things to be looked at in an inanimate fashion," Reeves told the writer of Nass' obituary this year. "Cliff said, 'No, these things talk, they have relationships with you, and they make you feel good or bad.'"

(It's hard to imagine a student feeling that s/he feels the need to be liked by her hand, as it transmits her own thoughts.)

As Jean-Luc Velay and Anne Mangen note in their book *Digitizing Literacy: Reflections on the Haptics of Writing* (2010), writing by hand involves several sensorimotor interactions that enhance the analytic process through motor feedback. Slowed down, the brain will reflect more deeply as it creates.

The high speed with which students are experiencing life is not conducive to reflection, which is the soul of good writing. Freshmen know this: "We've lived with technology but it will be our downfall," wrote one of my current students in an essay about the future. As *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik writes, "The point of living in a technologically advanced society is that minimal effort can produce maximal results. Making hard things easy is the path to convenience; it is also the lever for catastrophe (Gopnik, 2014)."

In the hope that freeing up their language will free them up to write more easily, I stress that using everyday language in their writing is encouraged. In-class writing gives students a deadline and a time frame that encourage active

thought. The classroom is a setting that encourages thought and effort -- and tangible achievement, as each member of the class sees first-hand how her colleagues are doing their work -- and they, her.

And, I tell them, their writing should be a direct expression of the thoughts they are creating. This means that abbreviations (etc.), symbols (+) and numbers are entirely acceptable: We're writing to learn, not learning to "write." They will soon be taking courses in which a specific style of writing is demanded. This is not the case in our first-year writing lab, where the act of writing is designed, most importantly, to facilitate learning.

The above arguments for a handwriting lab are not meant to exclude the role of technology in this particular writing course. For one thing, the articles and texts they will analyze and write about will be read, of course, on-line.

The students will be encouraged to do further research on both authors and topics...on-line.

They will reach me by text and e-mail, as I will reach them. As a form of immediate communication, "texting" is a gift on a college campus, as it binds us all in real time.

Cell phones should always be off. Not only because they distract the student, but because the research suggests that every time a student gives in to the impulse to check messages, s/he is diminishing her ability to retain what she is learning (Leviton, 2015)...but, yes, there will be a time during class when they can check their e-mails and their texts; asking 18-year-olds to go 70 minutes without checking in with the rest of their brethren, their tribe, their peers, is not

only an unrealistic demand; it goes against the underlying philosophy of this course:

That we are all in it together. That we will all -- each a different person with a unique learning style -- have a say, every session. And that we will all be learning from each other: by practice, by discourse and by example.

*

I've gotten our first-year seminar better lodgings by the time we meet again: a pleasant setting on the top floor of an historic campus building, with gabled windows in two of the four walls, and a vibe of coziness. The classroom is equipped with technology, but I'll use the blackboards and chalk -- not to write down notes that the students have to memorize; to spontaneously record things that a student has said, to give her words emphasis, so that all of the students can take them in at that moment.

I am not purposely avoiding the in-class use of the laptops and pads issued to each student; I am not including them in the processes of this writing laboratory because I am interested in finding out whether the handwritten word is a valuable learning tool on its own. As a journalist, I know that writing down a thought gives it primacy, a power that a word spoken but unrecorded lacks.

I do not know if writing student observations on a screen, for all to see, would have been as instructive. I did sense that when I heard a student observation that was particularly powerful, and immediately turning to write words on the blackboard with chalk, in any class, I have noticed that students watch me do it, and watch the words unfold, and then see them as I step back. Is

there more power in the permanence of the chalk-scrawled word than in the project one? Each will disappear.

The research of Naomi Baron suggests that 92 percent of a 300-college student sample prefers print books to digital (Baron, 2015). They are more effective for retention. This does not infer that writing by hand will be more powerful than writing done on a screen. But if a student is more engaged with the written word when s/he is holding it in her hand, it's not irrational to suppose that words on paper might also command their attention.

*

On that first day in our new aerie, we rearrange the desk-chairs into a horseshoe **configuration**, and discuss the summer reading: a novel written by an Iraq veteran about the grimness of war. At one point, no fewer than three students have their hands in the air. Part of the reason: when I ask how many of them have a family member or friend in the military, three-quarters of the class raise their hands.

While they are, as a group, passionate about the role of the military, few enjoyed the novel: it's stylistic devices turned them off. The author had effected a "writerly" first chapter that was heavy on syntax and phrasing that seemed overly self-referential, obscuring the story.

It is my first hint that if the students are reading texts that are not accessible to them, then their writing will not be as free as it could be. Writing and reading are simply different sides of the same coin.

It would take a whole lot of time for this first curriculum lesson to sink in.

*

In the third class, we finally introduce ourselves. The autobiographies are perfunctory -- until it's Sarah's turn. She has barely spoken in the first classes. With a straight face, she now says, "I'm Sarah. I like ice cream. Ice cream is the way to my heart."

The classroom fills with laughter. The ice has been broken, as if the serious-older-sister of the family had given her approval to the way we were learning so far: as if we were among friends. Just as importantly, her language allows me to bring up the value of **figurative language**, an essential part of writing well.

As a writer, I have long known the effectiveness of figurative language. The use of metaphor allows thought to open up its (metaphoric) boundaries. As Lakoff & Johnson have written, "The fact that abstract thought is mostly metaphorical means that answers to philosophical questions have always been, and always will be mostly metaphorical."

But in a very real sense, as someone with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, I consider any essay we will write to fall within the realm of philosophic thought. I will encourage figurative language in the conventional sense (metaphor, simile). But I will also encourage another kind of language that is not conventional: colloquial language that might be familiar enough to the writer to be a more evocative way of expression for an author.

How prevalent is figurative language at every level of discourse? It's universal. In a visit to a ninth-grade English class at Nazareth Area High School, I asked, "Who doesn't like to write?" A girl in the back row raised her hand. "I don't!" she said, quite merrily.

Why?

"I talk instead. I'm an open book."

I had to laugh: in dismissing writing, her choice of metaphor was unwittingly brilliant.

When the greatest orator of the Twentieth Century told his followers, "I've been to the mountaintop," had he climbed an actual mountain? No. Martin Luther King Jr. had simply chosen a powerful figure of speech to make the final oration of his life more compelling. King knew as well as anyone who has ever used the spoken word to sway an audience that figurative language engages the recipient more meaningfully than literal speech. I will stress figurative language in their writing all semester.

*

Our first in-class writing is an essay discussing Martha Gellhorn's "The Third Winter," Ernest Hemingway's (eventual) wife's report about the siege of Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War.

Some of the students spin out a full page of writing effortlessly. Others stop and start, cross out, erase, stumble, re-attack. Some concentrate furiously, biting their lower lips. Others act as if it were second nature to open a notebook

and write, even though all of their writing for high school has been done on a keyboard.

After about ten minutes, most are done. I sense that my presence during the writing session, in my chair-desk at one end of the horseshoe, was inhibiting them. I will leave the room when they write from now on in.

The following class, I read aloud my favorite passages from each of their essays -- as I will throughout the term -- in the hopes of bolstering everyone's confidence. I quote something Sarah wrote: "The opening sentence was a brilliant move on Gellhorn's part: 'In Barcelona, it was perfect bombing weather.' How the hell can someone consider any type of forecast suitable for bombing?" (How in hell..." -- a terrific use of conversational/effective writing language!) Sarah is expressionless, but I can tell that she has taken ownership of her writing.

And Caroline's observation that a scene in a children's hospital "killed my heart" is a casual and strong figurative phrase.

Taken as a group, the essays are thoughtful. Whether the group handwriting has any effect, I do not know, although in a subsequent interview, Nicole will tell me, "It's more natural."

Perhaps the "natural" feel has something to do with the setting: a quiet space, in a room full of windows looking out at autumn leaves, with no pressure, and no time limit. Unlike the nights when they try and churn out last-minute papers in a dorm room amid the chaos of dorm life, this environment might be more conducive to creating thoughtful and meaningful (to them) work.

*

I hand out copies of my latest published biography, of the basketball coach Phil Jackson, to whomever wants one, figuring it couldn't hurt for them to know that I not only talk the talk, but walked the walk...because our next reading is a story I wrote. Because I wanted to see the effects of **connecting the readings to reality.**

In my previous Young Adult literature class, the author of one of our favorite books, Katherine Marsh, joined us via Skype, and she happily shared her thoughts and answered questions (a remarkable use of technology!) As she spoke to the class about how she'd come to write the book, and why, the class had been riveted -- not so much by Marsh's words, but by the fact that the author was, in effect, among them, and talking to them.

That day, it struck me that a student who is able to have an on-hands participation in the text, by personal interaction with an "author," becomes more intimately involved not only with the text, but the craft of writing. And so I decided that in this class I would not shy from bring my own varied experiences as an author and writer into the classroom. In effect, I could embody "writing" in a way that might help to demystify this mysterious craft.

I'd chosen "Tangled Up in Blue" because it had been selected for the "Best American Sportswriting of the Twentieth Century," published by Houghton-Mifflin. I figured it was as good as I ever got in combining writing and reporting.

But it was controversial. I out-ed the late son of a baseball icon, revealing that he died of AIDS. I knew that they loved each other, despite the son's flamboyant and legendary nightlife, but I was angry with the father for denying that the son had died of HIV. This was 1992, when the virus was considered incurable. I told the class that when we wrote about it in class, one issue could be: Was I ethical?

The next class, after everyone was settled, I said to the class, "What do you think?"

"That was fucked up," says Alan, leaping in, and the room fills with "ooooohhs..." Alan tries to explain that the story was good, but that he thought I'd gone way over the ethical line. I immediately thank him. I am pleased that within two weeks of a class where I'd begin by stressing the free flow of thought and idea, I'd seen it in action.

But then Sarah counters: "I disagree. The guy was already out. I think he had every right to write that story, and maybe even had to."

A poll of the class finds it pretty much split down the middle. Then, asked by a few students why I wrote the piece against the father's wishes, I seize the occasion to fill them in on two decades of history they entirely missed: the plague. They are rapt as I describe visiting a friend on his deathbed, and I am astonished to learn, as we talk, that an all-freshman seminar on STDs had not even mentioned HIV/AIDS.

As the Roman orator Cicero said, "Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child." Equally eloquent was a quote I then

shared, from the Spanish philosopher George Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." (1905) Perhaps my own experiences, in recounting my career, will fill in some of their gaps.

On 9/11, I decide that, rather than have them read the essay I planned, I'd ask them about that day, and what it meant to them. "I was in kindergarten," Kathy says. "In New York. They sent us home, and I remember that my mom gave us mac and cheese for lunch. I could smell the smoke."

In the meantime, thus far Eddie has been sitting next to Phillip at the bottom of the horseshoe, as far away from the front of the room where they could get. Eddie is a natural performer in class...saying outrageous things just for the hell of it, performing in phrase and gesture, drawing attention to himself. When we rated the summer reading on a scale of one to ten, the rest of the class gave it anywhere from a seven to a ten. Eddie gave it a four, just to be Eddie.

In class, Phillip and Eddie had been showing a tendency to drift away from the conversation: "knucklehead" behavior, I'd call it, and I would call them out on it, good-naturedly, but making it clear that they were taking advantage of the vibe in the class. On this day, Eddie sits near the front, away from Philip.

In a subsequent interview about that day, a few days later, when I ask him why he'd moved, he said, "I feel like if I sit next to him I will probably talk to him."

It's encouraging that he's serious enough to do so. In private, Eddie is reserved, questioning and looking for stability. He likes to take long solo walks, and I sense that the attention-grabbing act is a carapace, some sort of defense

mechanism to keep people from knowing how serious and questioning of life he is.

He reveres his war-hero grandfather. He has a true sense of history. And when I ask him what his goals are, he reveals his true, thoughtful self.

"Hopefully, get married, with one kid and another on the way. Stable job as an architectural engineer." The interview gives me new insights about his classroom behavior, and increases my degree of tolerance for his goofiness.

After our 9/11 class, Jorge sticks around to help me rearrange the desks. He is a big sports fan, and his own man -- always sitting in the same spot, close to me (when I'm not wandering into the center of the horseshoe.) After class, we walk out together. He says he likes the classroom interaction, where I don't demand they take notes on what I'm saying, preferring to bat my ideas around so that they can make their own observations.

"I never liked learning history from someone talking for a half hour and you have to take notes," Jorge confides. "I take terrible notes."

*

In our fifth class, Luke and I have a breakthrough.

From Day One, Luke had seemed to be in another dimension: Staring off, saying nothing. We could not find **a common learning space**. With no Letter of Accommodation to refer to, (under ADA, the college student owns his learning history, and is not required to share it unless he wants to) I had no idea what his learning style and/or disability status might be. After two classes I expected he had some form of autism. He was averse to eye contact.

In his mumbled self-introduction, after he reluctantly revealed to the class his name and where he was from he then revealed his "favorite thing to do:" "I run track."

His second in-class writing exercise was a little longer, and he'd taken more care with finding the right grammar and spelling. Happily, he was getting a little looser by now with his body language, even if his gaze was still aimless. But I needed a strategy -- a fact made clear when I got an e-mail from the track coach who had recruited him: "One of our cross-country student athletes, Luke ---, is supposed to be in your journalism class." (Well, I know that, coach. He actually is. Physically anyway.) "I'm concerned about him and was wondering if you could provide any insight on how he is doing in class."

I told the coach that he was fine -- a little reserved, but a good kid. He was doing the readings, and if I asked him for an opinion about a story we'd read, he'd give a short, thoughtful answer, and trying to get him to expand was always futile.

I didn't tell the coach that I still hadn't found a key that fit Luke's lock.

But I began to noodle a strategy: if we could get to a place where he could feel that he was part of the group, of a class that already had a distinct dynamic of give-and-take and mutual friendship, he might open up a little. I had to find a way to open him up to the group, so they could take him in. I was determined to follow DuFour and Mattos' finding that "The most powerful strategy for improving both teaching and learning is to create the `collaborative culture and collective responsibility of a Personal Learning Community (Dufour

& Mattos, 2013)."

If I could get the class to sense that we all had a responsibility to get Luke more engaged...but how to do so? Happily, fate intervenes.

One morning, Luke comes to class wearing a tee shirt that reads, "Lancaster Lebanon League Track and Field Championship." So track isn't just fun. Maybe it's his passion.

After we settle in, I ask Luke, in front of the class, "So what's your event?" The class is paying attention; they are as curious about Luke as I.

"400. But I'm changing to the 800" -- the two most difficult and tortuous races in all of track and field.

"How'd you do in that tournament on your shirt?" I ask. I have a hunch.

"I won," he says, barely loudly enough for the whole classroom to hear.

Now, from the other end of the room, Butler, himself a varsity athlete in another sport who seldom speaks, speaks up: athlete to athlete: "What's your PB (personal best)?"

Luke looks over at him: maybe the first eye contact he's made with anyone. "Fifty-eight."

"*Whoa,*" Butler says -- a prized recruit, deferring to the runner! Eddie, also an athlete, shakes his head in admiration.

"Is that good?"

"Anything in the fifties is great," Butler says. Luke is looking away, but I can tell he's not displeased. I will soon discover that track is an absolute passion.

I feel like running across the room and fist-bumping Butler: We have inclusion! You played captain, and just helped the team!

Luke has just been welcomed into the club. Let's see if it bears fruit.

*

The next in-class writing assignment is to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of two celebrity-downfall profiles from *Rolling Stone* and *The New York Times Magazine*: Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan. I leave the room, telling them I'll be back in ten minutes or so. When I return after 10 minutes, four or five more kids are still writing than in our first exercise at the ten-minute mark.

The exercise is followed by a lively discussion about celebrity obsession -- a topic close to their generation. The writing is getting longer, and more insightful. Eddie's essay is longer. Butler's piece is a step up from the previous two: insightful and conversational. "America is obsessed with watching the downfall of celebrities...am I siding with Britney and Lindsay? Not necessarily, but I'm looking at the bigger picture."

Virginia is clearly the most accomplished writer in the class, naturally combining figurative language with conversational style, as well as well-organized structure and a very strong voice. A segment of her insightful essay: "Their failures bring the immortals down to a relatable level. (Tearing down

celebrities) takes away the green-eyed monster and, honestly, can transform someone's basic life so that it seems just a little less shitty. Let's face it: America thrives on democracy. The idea of equality is like music to the masses' ears. Where's the harm in using someone's misfortune as reassurance and amusement?" Virginia's sophisticated syntax and ironic/sarcastic last line represent terrific writing. (I expect she'd be turning it out on a laptop, too.)

As usual, I read a good line or two from each essay...except Alan's, a one-paragraph disaster.

I say, "Al-an," as I pick up his notebook, and he nods. "I bullshitted it," he says. "I know, it's lame. I didn't read the stories."

There's a hush. Then, from Sarah. "Well, at least he admitted it" -- and others nod.

Honesty counts for something, especially in front of the class. He could have said nothing, then told me privately. Maybe, I think, he confessed as a way to punish himself in public, to give himself a boot. But I also had to decide whether he was testing me.

"How will you make it up to us?" I say.

"I'll read them and write something good."

Then I say, in my role as faculty advisor to the school newspaper: "Also, write me a few graphs about the prospects of the football team, so I can know what to watch for on the team."

At the end of class, he hands me a full page he's written about the football team.

The next morning I see Jamie in the campus cafe. I ask her: "Did I handle what happened yesterday well? With Alan? Was I too easy on him?"

"Virginia and I actually talked about that," she says. "We thought you handled it perfectly."

*

For the first time in the term, when I get to the classroom five minutes early, the desks have been arranged into the horseshoe in advance by the class. We are now a team. They're starting to think of our family and our "setting" instead of themselves. They know that we're a much better class "in the round," where we can have face to face discussions with each. In real life, people face each other to exchange ideas. Why not in a classroom? In addition, the horseshoe allows me to roam inside of it, which makes mutual discourse much easier.

On this day, I tell the class that we've been given \$200 by the Academic Affairs Office to do something together as a class. I explain, "I think they think it will help us bond."

"I think we've already **bonded**," says Kathy.

This can't be a bad thing. Nor can the feedback from my handful of student interviews so far.

"I like the class," Butler says. "It's relaxed, but we still get work done. A lot of other classes I'm stressed in. I don't have stress from your class."

"It's my favorite class," Andrew says. "Not just because it's relaxed. You understand what it should be about. It's not about putting all this stuff into my

head, a test every five chapters. We can say whatever we want. I'd rather it be like that."

"I like it," Caroline says. "I always, like, I was never really open. Writing was the only way I can open myself. I feel like this class is really helpful in that."

There are no negative feedbacks in the one-on ones in regards to the class. And while I stress that I want them to be frank, only one has a suggestion as to how we could improve things; "Don't let the football layers talk so much."

*

The next in-class writing assignment: answer three prompts pertaining to "Among the Thugs," Bill Buford's terrifying story of being caught amid a wild pack of marauding football hooligans. I leave them alone, saying I'll be back in ten minutes. But this time I wait fifteen minutes, and when I return to the classroom, half of the class is still writing. Five minutes later, at the twenty-minute mark, four are still writing!

My favorite analysis of why a group of young men could go off the deep end and riot, terrorizing bystanders, is Butler's, which features a simile that shows real insight: "They get all amped up to the point where they do stuff they would never think about doing if they were alone. It's just like when you're out with a bunch of your friends. You feel invincible, like nothing or nobody in the world can stop you."

But I am most impressed by Jack's work. His first essay, on Gellhorn's essay, was cursory: a decent five-paragraph essay with a typical five-graph

essay conclusion: "So altogether, the reading was decent, but it didn't truly capture war as a whole. Instead, it focused on what happens to innocent people, not the soldiers" -- a simple observation.

His essay about celebrities was better, but still safe: "Overall," he'd written in conclusion, "these two stories did make valid points while providing a laugh at the artificiality and corruption that is Hollywood" -- again just an observation.

But his essay on "Among the Thugs" is a whole different animal. It's not only twice as long as his last one (he was still writing at the twenty-minute mark) -- it's full of figurative language: "The common acceptance of violence within the mob makes it a barrel full of gunpowder." It brought in an historical parallel, describing the mobs of mothers filling the streets of New York when the Union Army began conscripting their sons.

They are learning to like writing, to have it feel like a natural way to express themselves -- I hope. I am certain of this: trying to instill a love of -- or at least, a truce with -- the craft of writing is my main goal for this semester, not drilling in grammar and syntax which might prove counterproductive to my mission: to knock the capital "W" down in the word "writing," and demystify it. Writing, I've seen in these last two classes, has been taught to my students by a series of rote rules, with the stress on organization. Clear grammar and syntax are important, of course. But to master those, wouldn't it make sense to have the student first feel something more than indifference toward the form?

*

The next reading, an excerpt from John McPhee's book *The Pine Barrens*, is not met with universal joy. A few students have summarily dismissed the work of the consummate non-fiction writer of my lifetime! I have forgotten what the students in my Young-Adult novel class of the previous spring had taught me: That the two most important things in a text -- for this age of students, in this era in America -- are story and character. Description of a tract of deep forest in New Jersey isn't going to grab them, or compete with movies and games.

But when Jack points out that, at that very moment, there's a survivalist who killed a policeman somewhere in the woods north of our campus, the subject takes a turn: a killer in the nearby Poconos is something real and tangible. Discussion turns toward how long he could survive. I steer the discussion toward their own experiences.

Eddie offers that he likes walking in the woods: "Where I grew up, the woods surrounded me" -- a terrific use, I note, of an active verb.

And then I ask Luke if he has any good memories about the woods. He's not looking us in the eye yet, but he's becoming more than happy to talk: "I hate camping," he says, and tells a story about being in a campground: "Some little girl shot herself in the face with mace at 2 a.m. No one did anything and she cried until nine. That's why I hate camping."

The class is laughing as one. Luke smiles in that weird Luke way.

I make a snap decision: They won't write about the McPhee story in class today; essays about why old journalism bores them aren't likely to instill much enthusiasm.

"Write about an experience you've had with the woods," I say. And they do.

The essays are lively and evocative, full of good details, like the crunch of leaves. In some cases, the writers seemed to have enjoyed the assignment -- writing about what they know best: their own lives.

Kathy writes about a night at a friend's cabin in the woods: "The best of all was that after everyone went to bed. I snuck out, laid (sic) down on the ground and just looked up at the night sky. Being in the woods there were very few lights and distractions. I was able to see the simplistic side of a very complex starry sky. Those moments I spent there were absolutely breathtaking...I want to own a cabin. I want my children to be able to experience this."

*

A few days later, in our one-on-one, Nicole, who likes to write, puts an interesting spin on the experience of reading McPhee: "It was boring, but knowing how other writers think when they write down the experiences is a good way to figure out how your own writing style can improve."

When I ask her what I should change about the class, she says, "More modern articles. But everyone really likes the class. There's nothing not to like about it. But no more war stories!"

So I ask the class: What do you want to read?

"No more stories about people dying!" says Troy.

"World-changing things, like ebola," says Jack.

Do they keep up with current events? About half do. Not Melanie: "The news is all problems, and I have my own."

Troy says it for the guys: "I got my own shit to worry about."

*

The house I live in now stands about a quarter mile from the railroad tracks, and some nights my sleep is pleasantly disturbed by the low moan of a freight whistle, and then, the squeal of iron on iron as the freight rounds a slow turn east of the neighborhood.

As I lay awake one night, I am worrying about Luke. He is doing well in our class, but apparently not elsewhere. He has missed a couple of mandatory indoctrination seminars for the freshman class, and I've been notified that if he misses the next one, in a couple of days, he'll have to jump through all sorts of hoops in the second half of the semester to get back in the department's good graces. In police parlance, Luke would be entered into The System: his name would be in the record as a problem student.

How could I insure he'd make Friday's seminar, short of dragging him there myself? I decide to take a calculated gamble that next morning. I'm betting that he feels included in our club by now, and can take some good-natured ribbing.

I've noticed by now that the most common interest we all have is sports.

(Within a few weeks, Jorge had penciled the New York Yankees logo onto the back of his notebook, with the added legend: "New York Yankees," in script, followed by, AL EAST: 27-time World Series Championships."

Some of us are fans, others athletes. I'd taken to opening some of the classes with a discussion of some current controversy in the world of sports that raised ethical issues (domestic abuse, cheating) that would provoke discussion. On this day, I ask what the class thought of the current scandal in the National Football League: a player hitting his wife. The discussion is a good one.

Suddenly, I spin from my spot in the middle space of the horseshoe, look at Luke and say, loudly enough for everyone to hear, "You're not gonna miss that class tomorrow, right?"

The chatter quiets down. He meets my eyes and shakes his head. He has not been embarrassed. I'm relieved. And so ten minutes later, conversation having spun off in another tangent, I spin and say it again, with a smile. Luke shakes his head again, with the slightest of smiles. Good-natured laughs signal that my strategy has worked: We are all in on it.

He makes the Friday class.

The next Tuesday, I hang outside the building until Luke lopes toward the door within a few minutes of the start of class. As we ride the elevator I ask him whether the way I had singled him out in class had embarrassed him: "Did I overstep some bounds? Did I make you feel uncomfortable?"

Luke's eyes look at me in that vacant Luke way as his brain processes the question, "No. Unh-unh." Not very articulate, but the way he said it made me feel as if he were saying, "It was totally cool."

Further proof that Luke was growing comfortable came in a class soon thereafter, in a discussion of the war in Afghanistan.

"It's about the money," Jorge says. "We need the oil."

Then I see that -- gasp! -- Luke has raised his hand! Yes! Volunteering to talk for the very first time!

"Luke?" I say.

"Well, I don't want to go too deeply into it, but..."

"Go deeply!" I almost shout.

"The irony," Luke says, looking off into nowhere, "is that if we spent less on defense we could have more money to spend on alternative energy and we wouldn't need the oil in Iraq."

Has the collaborative classroom has loosened Luke up?

*

With the next reading, I'm reminded that I hadn't learned much from my earlier mistake with the McPhee assignment. This time, I'd asked the class to read three short *New Yorker* stories. One was about a homeless man who travelled the country in a canoe; one was about a young film director, and the third was about a woman looking for the oldest patch of living grass in the city.

Some of the students enjoyed the readings, and most were engaged by the story of the man living happily in his canoe. I have told them that a good

story ends with a good ending -- not a conclusion/summation of the five-paragraph essay kind, but an ending that leaves the reader satisfied.

This batch of essays features two terrific closing lines, both about the canoe-man: Jack's "Who says beggars can't be choosers?", and Lorrie's "I hope I can accept my fate just like he did."

I'm also intrigued by the conclusion of Theresa's essay. Theresa's a quiet girl whose work has been solid from the start -- as well as her effort. Leafing through Theresa's notebook one day I see that she has gone back and added a better conclusion to her celebrity-journalism essay.

Now, more than a month into the term, her pensive about the homeless canoeist has produced a nice combination of casual language with a killer ending:

"My only question is Why? Why give up your normal life just to float down some stupid river? Why leave your family and friends in the dark about what you are doing?"

"But I guess, as they say, different strokes for different folks."

But not everyone has been pleased with the assignment. Eddie finds the stories irrelevant.

"I didn't like any of the articles you assigned," Eddie says in class.

"Who cares about a homeless guy in a canoe? Or the director of a movie I'm not going to see? Who cares about old grass? How about stories that matter to an 18-year-old? Like student debt?"

In his notebook, he writes, "*New Yorker*? You have to do better. I am

declaring an `interest.' Publish a story that matters to me and I'll buy up every issue of that magazine."

It's becoming clear that what I consider great "journalism" is, for some of them, about as enjoyable to read as the words on the back of a cereal box, or the assembly directions for a guided missile. How had I forgotten that it had been just a few weeks earlier that I'd been chatting with a sophomore named Charles who was bemoaning all the Old Lit (see "Dickens. Charles) he had to read? It wasn't that the language was too difficult, Charles explained; it was that it was "unfair" to ask college kids to wade through plots that held no relevance or hook to their own experiences.

So: It is **clearly time to take action**, to find readings for my classroom cohort that would spark their reading/writing fire. It's time to scratch that amazing *New Yorker* story of the kid who was falsely arrested spent three years in jail...because Rikers Island, New York City's notorious jail, is a long way from the daily realities of the middle-class students in the first-year seminar.

In my next student interview, amid questions about family, upbringing, school; life, favorite music, I now add this one: "What kind of journalism would you want to be reading? Why?"

"Things that we care about," is Mary's answer.

This resonates.

I begin to assign readings from websites, not journals or magazines -- a curriculum-shift I should have anticipated in first constructing the syllabus. First-year students receive virtually all of their information via their tablets and

phones, and some of those who will go on to write (Diana has already told me she wants to switch her major to something that will allow her to become a journalist) will write solely for websites.

Even *The New Yorker* is adapting: The staid old girl now features a website that includes a dozen *short* pieces by its staff writers, every few days.

The next assignment? Read *The Daily Beast* and *Huffington Post* websites for four days, and write about their effectiveness as news outlets. The *Beast* is a well-edited digest of the day's news that also includes cultural commentary, political columns and features, as well as a "cheat sheet" that includes a long paragraph on a news story with links to other stories about the same subject.

Not surprisingly, Virginia, our best writer in every sense (from language to organization to voice), produces an in-class essay that not only answers the prompts, but explains, in excellent syntax sprinkled with wry humor, what the future of the writing workplace will be.

With her opening line -- "As an 18-year-old college student, I was immediately drawn to the layout, colors and design of *The Daily Beast*" -- we know we're on solid ground. And her concluding paragraph displays all the elements of a strong essay ending:

"In this day and age, it is essential for young people to be caught up on current events. But let's be honest: the newspaper and channels 3, 6 and 10 are snoozers." (She'd written "boring, crossed it out, and replaced it with "snoozers:" a good edit.) "In the next 10-20 years, *The Daily Beast* and other

websites like it will catch on and explode globally. This modern style is definitely the new way of writing."

*

We've had several **personal interviews**, and the conversations have been enlightening. Early feedback on my less-structured methodology is good. I ask each what they think of the class, and a few have said it's their favorite -- "Not just because it's laid back," George says. "You understand what it should be about. It's not about putting all this stuff into my head and testing me, or assigning fifty papers. It's open...we can say whatever we want. I rather it be like that."

"It's relaxed, but we're learning," says Butler.

And I'm pleased to hear Mary say, "I like that it has less structure. More stuff sticks."

I'd like to think that whatever is "sticking" -- observations about writing, tips for writing, ways to make writing pleasurable -- is doing so because it's being delivered in a real-world context. I suspect that the students see a real-world application to what may have been an unreal arena in high school: writing for/to form, at the possible cost of content; reading for comprehension at the cost of missing much of the author's voice and message.

("My history teacher tells me to do thirty pages of `effective' reading," Jorge tells me after class one day. "I don't even know what `effective' reading is!")

In the interviews, all of the students are more than willing to discuss their home life, and often do so in detail. Perhaps it's a reflection of their knowledge that I've made a living out of interviewing, and so they're in trustworthy hands, but I sense that it's simply that they need someone to talk to.

In the case of Jorge, son of an Air Force master sergeant, the interview, gives him a chance for action-research: inquiry into himself. Our session quickly becomes a sort of traditional Freudian analysis session, where a simple prompt -- "What kind of student were you in high school?" -- opens a floodgate.

"I'm smart, and I take advantage of it. I bullshit my way through things," he says, with direct eye contact. "I've worked on that, trying to work a little bit more at being responsible.

"I've caught myself half-assing my way through things. Last year mom was cracking down on me. I said, 'I am going to enjoy life. I see kids killing themselves... see kids working like crazy and dying if they don't achieve."

Jorge has reinforced what I suspect: that the need to "achieve" is saddling the average adolescent with a psychological debt: the fear of failure. Jorge is wise enough to shed that burden, and is the liveliest member of the class -- respected and respectful of everyone else.

A frequent theme in some of the interviews is that the choice to go to college had been made for them. Some felt the future closing in way too early. They felt powerless about their direction. They felt as if too many adults, whether coaches trying to change their athletic styles or teachers trying to teach

them things they found immaterial, were limiting the ways they themselves wanted to grow.

I thought of a metaphor while **weeding the garlic** one weekend, when I noticed that nearly all of the weeds cluster around each garlic plant, instead of splaying out all over the open dirt. Reason: I carefully nurtured the planting of each, with organic compost and such...and so, of course, weeds would want to sprout there, too; they want a piece of the energy. But instead of being scaffolds to my garlic plants, they are leechers. And I had this vision of: a classroom nurtured by an action-research instructor, but being surrounded by a) helicopter parents; b) politicians looking to teach down to a common standard solely for their own political good, but not the good of these students; c) detractors of the action-research method of research; d) politicians refusing to give teachers adequate pay while insisting that they don't work hard: The weeds.

*

It's time to start planning for our final **research papers**. Some have chosen topics, but most have not. Step one: a seminar in the library for the students to learn about research tools.

No Luke.

I walk to our classroom building, to find him coming out. He has, of course, forgotten about the library session. But he has chosen his research-paper topic; the famous English distance runner Sebastian Coe. As we walk toward the library I ask him if he's started his research. Not only has he started it, he is totally into it.

"I found out he never had a coach," Luke tells me, talking rapidly. This is the most animated I've ever seen him. "His only coach was his dad. And his dad never ran!"

He joins his first-year seminar peers in the research lab area. I find a desk at the other end of the library to do some work. At one point, I return to the session to see if each student is keeping up with the librarian's instructions.

I look at Luke's screen. He has clearly already mastered the library's search engines, because, rather than doing the step-by-step instructions, he is doing further research on Sebastian Coe. I refrain from telling him to join the class as it follows the librarian's rubric. He's way ahead of the game, and I'm glad for it.

A few days later, I ride in the elevator with Luke. Our class is on the third floor. Well into the semester, Luke gets off and turns...right. Our classroom is to the left. "Luke," I say. He turns around. "Our classroom is over here." "Oh," he says. Just, "oh." The he follows me into the classroom. I love this kid.

Most of the students haven't written academic research papers before, and so rather than tell them what's required, I decide that hands-on learning might be called for. I've decided that we will be organizing and researching a mock research paper in the class over the next month. I open up the floor for suggestions. "Student-loan debt" is ventured by a few, but while it's a compelling topic, it'd take a book's worth of research to surround the topic. A

few suggest the legalization of marijuana ("Everyone in my house smokes weed," says Jamie. "That way no one has to hide it.")

But the topic that garners the most votes is gay marriage. When I ask the class how many students have friends or family who are gay, nine hands go into the air.

I poll the class: Who's for, and who's against gay marriage. It's 18 for, two against. The dissenting students have no problem with the topic. I assign various research tasks -- state-by-state histories, Supreme Court decisions -- and we're on our way. They've chosen a topic relevant to their own lives.

After that class, I stay in my desk-chair, writing notes into my field log from snatches of conversations I've scrawled on the board. Sarah stays slouched in her chair, texting. Amy, with whom Sarah usually leaves, says, "You coming?" as she walks out the door.

Sarah looks up sort of apologetically and says, "No, I'm gonna stay here a few more minutes. I'm sort of comfortable. See you later."

"Comfortable:" The word was uttered casually by Sarah, but to me, it carries meaning: If students feel as if the classroom is a **comfort zone**, we will be ready to learn. I stay another few minutes, writing my field log, and then get ready to go. Sarah puts her phone away and walks out with me, and we cross the campus together.

Unprompted, she talks of the contradiction between her Catholic faith and her belief in gay marriage. "It makes me uncomfortable that my church

thinks it can tell people what to do based on what it thinks the Bible says," she tells me.

I enjoy our conversation. She's a woman of few words in class, and in our five-minute walk we talk about her church, her cross-country team and her nascent experiences at college. I am learning that the same techniques I use as a journalist work as a teacher looking for the key to a student mind's lock: if they're comfortable, the discourse will be authentic and valuable.

*

One day, as usual, Butler enters class with his earphones in his ears and his hoodie pulled up. He takes the earphones out as he takes his chair, but leaves the hoodie up, virtually hiding his face.

"Butler," I say, and when he looks over, I motion for him to pull the hoodie off.

In a low voice, but just loud enough for everyone to hear, he says, "I always pay attention."

I open the class as I often do, with a light/friendly remark aimed personally at a student in the hopes of making her/him feel included. Shy Caroline has revealed herself to be an avid fan of the NBA team the Miami Heat, so I turn to her and say, "Hey, did you read about how Dwayne Wade was criticizing the way LeBron played last season in Miami?"

"Naw!" she says.

"Was it Wade?" Jorge chimes in, because he's read about this incident; he reads everything about every sports event out there. "I think it was someone else."

From far down the horseshoe comes Butler's voice out of the cave of his hood: "It wasn't Wade. It was Bosh."

He was paying attention -- as, apparently, he always does. I will let him keep the hood up. It's the way kids dress back in his neighborhood in New Jersey, and it's part of his identity. His writing has been consistent, and while he seldom speaks unless I call on him, he has strong and provocative opinions.

Raised by his mother ("My dad was never in my life, but it didn't matter") he has a strong future ahead of him. I don't want to get in his way.

*

I have shifted the curriculum, heeding the students' suggestion, to include more readings from popular and respected websites, as well as sites that simply assemble content from other sources. This leads to a more engaged classroom, because we get to talk and write about things with which the students are familiar and in which they're interested.

"It's discussion-based, where we talk about current things so it actually means something to us," Jamie tells me in our one-on-one interview. She is forever smiling, a confident "A" student who never misses a class. "I love the class," she says. "I never had a teacher who let us write like this" -- as in, with a familiar voice and using informal language. "I didn't get the concept of just writing what I think before now."

Encouraging students to write their own thoughts as a first step toward facilitating writing as a way of learning seems self-evident, doesn't it? Writing what you feel would seem to be a good way of making writing appealing. After all: before building a house, shouldn't a carpenter feel comfortable -- even eager -- picking up his hammer?

*

The students have taken an anonymous survey issued by the department rating my effectiveness over the first half of the term. My **midterm grade**? On a scale of 1-7, grading various aspects of my pedagogy they have given me a score of a 6.88. This can't be a bad thing. On the other hand, it sort of stops me short: Am I facilitating this learning environment well? Or just in a way that's to their liking?

One thing is evident: Their writing is improving, in many ways. And no student seems to have made as many strides as Eddie. His first "essay," on Gellhorn's Spanish Civil War reporting, ran a full...four sentences. It required little thought to compose.

His second, responding to two lengthy and literate celebrity profiles, ran seven sentences -- but the final line opened my eyes: "We treat celebrities as God, and Hollywood as the new religion," showed a glimpse of creativity.

His third? His response to my prompt about my story that outed the late son of the baseball manager -- "Would you have written this story?" -- represented a step backward: seven sentences, no life.

Now, flash forward a month to his response to Eddie's deconstruction of "Among the Thugs:" full of tidbits of insight, like "Since (Fish n Chips') birth, he's been taught to love the riots and destruction. I guess all but a few would love it from birth to death."

His ending? "I feel bad for the innocent people who want nothing to do with the game, (but) you live by the game, you die by the game: no ifs, ands or buts about it. Ball is life." His final, terse, powerful, even rhythmic observation - three one-syllable words, a terrific sentence -- sealed his argument effectively.

Is he growing comfortable simply from practice and frequency? The *New Yorker's* Adam Gopnik recounts story a conversation between the man teaching him how to drive and Gopnik. The man "How do you learn to write? Gopnik answered, "You sort of get better at it the more you write. You have to just keep writing, and then I promise you it will start to tell easier as you do it" (Gopnik, 2015).

Whenever I say, "Okay, let's write," no one rolls an eye or gives a fake groan. It's a ritual they don't seem to fear now. And even if my high score on their evaluation reflects more their comfort level than their writing growth, I can't help but feel that this is an accomplishment -- but their writing growth is apparent.

Jose, a history major, wrote a first essay that was all of three sentences -- and it was about Gellhorn's reporting from the Spanish Civil War, which should have engaged him. But he began to open up, and like other men, he dove head-first into Among the Thugs, writing is longest essay, and ending with a flourish:

"I don't feel for the fans, but I do understand why they react like this. Soccer, to them, is more than a game. It is a way of life, a means to define who and what they are. When their team loses, it's as if they've been dishonored, and rioting is the only way they feel they can regain their pride."

Anne's growth has manifested itself in an interesting way: in her calligraphy. Her first (very short) essay was written in handwriting that leaned one way, then another, like pine saplings in a wind. Her second, again very sort, featured the same confusing handwriting. Flash forward one month: In her thorough response to *Among the Thugs*, her handwriting is impeccable. It had evolved in small, confident, certain strokes.

Content-wise, Anne was allowing herself to gain critical confidence. She read one of the most celebrated pieces of journalism in this century, "Falling Man," by award-winning Tom Junod, for *Esquire*, in which the author tries to discover the identity of a man captured mid-flight after jumping from the top of the World Trade Center on 9/11 -- a long and emotionally tortured journey that won a National Magazine Award (journalism's Oscars) for feature writing.

In the thousands of words written about Junod's essay in the years since, it's been dissected, critiqued, analyzed and praised. But I'd never heard any critic make the observation that Anne used to conclude her essay: "I believe the author was trying to find some peace in the situation, and this particle might have been the only way he could."

And then, there are the natural writers, like Kyle, who had given up sports to concentrate on his studies. His first few essays were fine, if not particularly thoughtful. His final sentences were invariably arriving in tried-and-true five-paragraph style, summarizing instead of surprising ("Overall these two stories did make valid points while providing a laugh at the artificiality and corruption that is Hollywood.")

Gradually, he began to stretch, as in his conclusion of the *New Yorker* essay about the homeless canoeist: "Who says beggars can't be choosers?"

And then, he hit his stride: His reaction to "Among The Thugs" is excellent, both from length (Four pages!) to figurative language ("The common acceptance of violence within the mob makes it a barrel full of gunpowder"). An historical reference/analogy to teenaged boys fighting for the Union Army showed real effort.

His ending? "I can't see how going ape-shit on innocent people b/c of a football game is right. Blood doesn't fix a loss." This was as good as it got.

(Did a chide him for his use of "b/c" instead of "because?" No. Freewriting in a first draft should let the author's brain dictate the syntax. For using "ape-shit"? Nope: it's colloquial, it's a metaphor, and it's figurative language that works.)

Equally adept from the beginning of the term was Virginia. She arrived fully formed as a writer of style. What she seemed to have gained as time

passed was depth of thought, and when she tackled *Among the Thugs*, her final observation was worthy of a national-magazine scribe.

"Sammy's leadership could've landed him as a CEO of a company. Fish 'n Chips' attitude and acceptance of conflict could've made him a great police officer. But instead, they're standing on the sidelines, laughing, while a man gets thrown into a fruit cart. It's a shame. It's life."

*

One day, to hone their journalistic chops, I ask the class to pair off in twos to interview each other, and then share what they've learned with the rest of us. Their questions are generally routine -- but not Kathy's. I have paired her with Andrew, without knowing they are friends. Her questions include, "Do you like the life you live?" and "If you got a girl pregnant would you drop out of school?" (As well as, "Why are you so obnoxious?")

She's a pistol -- self-assured and confident, composed and ready for this next step in life. I discover, in our one-on-one, that her outside life is in turmoil. She's in danger of losing loans because her mother's former partner, a woman, won't allow Kathy's mom or her brothers or her into their house; the matter is being adjudicated, and the woman and Kathy's mother have mutual restraining orders out against each other.

"Right now we're in a motel," she tells me, "which means that there's a lot of dollar-menu dinners for my brothers and me."

It's all too easy to forget that the person in that classroom may be carrying unseen baggage that I'd do well to take into consideration.

I ask her where her father is.

Dead. Drugs. Crack.

I re-remind myself: assume nothing about someone by the way they look. It's just another chance to mis-label a person....

...as I had with Caroline, the easy-going, always-ready-to-smile girl who spoke her mind if called on, but prefers to watch the conversations wearing a whimsical smile.

I'd assumed Caroline was African-American, and while her writing was singularly passionate about most every topic, it was syntactically lagging behind most of her peers. But when I interviewed her one-on-one, she revealed that she was, in fact, Dominican -- and that English was her second language, both spoken and written. For an ESL writer? Her writing was terrific.

And her passion was astounding. I'd asked for a response to the address given by the convocation speaker, Nobel Peace Prize winner Jody Williams, whose anti-war rhetoric stirred and divided the crowd -- as it did the class. No one was as fiery as Caroline:

"Jody Williams was straight up speaking the truth. War is a stupid-ass way to solve problems. The United States puts their noses in shit that isn't for them. Most of the people who run the country are old white men. What do they know about what the citizens are going through?"

Caroline wants to be an advocate for the beleaguered underclass. She's going to be a good one.

*

In my one-on-one interview with Luke, I ask him if his reserved demeanor in class reflects the way he's always acted. Looking away, he says, "I always was... not too...outgoing. But if people talk to me then I won't sit there and not talk. I don't like to go out of my way..."

His voice trails off, and then he gives a small smile: "Maybe my mom raised me wrong...I always liked to be laid back." It's the only hint I'll ever get from Luke that he senses he might be different. Then he looks me in the eye, and says, "When people are too outgoing its kind of annoying. I guess that's not the normal response."

But it is, isn't it? How many times do we get annoyed with people who just talk to hear the sound of their own voice? To simply attract attention? Luke, I figured, had just chosen to filter out the noise. Whatever impulses were driving Luke in his unusual behavior, I felt for the first time that I was beginning to understand them.

I steer the interview toward his passion: running. His events -- the 400 and 800 involve no teamwork, but when I ask him about high school track, he talks effusively about how successful his track team had been in his senior year -- his team. Not him. He has a pride in that team -- but not his Moravian team, not yet; the coach refuses to let him do his own special warm-up.

I will not be intractable with Luke. But I still want to find a way to have him be more of a member of a class that was clearly becoming a unit. I need another key to unlock some more of him. As we walk back out of the building, I say, "Any other things you do for fun?" And my inquiry produces an unexpected result.

"I play a card game. Magic."

Bingo. "Magic: The Gathering" is the ultimate nerd game. My own son played it for years, until he went to a tournament and got knocked out in the first round. He's not competitive. But Luke is.

I ask him if he ever plays in tournaments.

"Sometimes," he says.

"What's your highest finish?"

"I made the final four in one."

By now I can tell that he is half-embarrassed, but half-proud, too.

"Was there money?"

"I made \$6,000 last summer."

!

I ask him if I can tell that to the class.

"Sure," he says.

The next class, I mention to everyone that Luke is a Magic stud...did we have any other Magic players? Nope. Then I pass out Magic cards to everyone, and Luke tells us what all the runes and symbols mean. I can tell that he's uncomfortable being singled out this much...as if he really were a geek, and I was announcing it.

Then I mention the 6 grand. There's a collective "whoa." Eddie, smiling, says "Send some of that my way, dude."

I look at Luke. He is looking at Eddie...and smiling...at a moment that felt like a big breakthrough. Not because my trumpeting of Luke's triumphs might have made him a better learner. No, as if the class likes it that one of our group is a modest, very shy...champion. Which makes our club all the cooler.

But I'm worried about Mary. She is constantly sick. She snuffles, she coughs, she's pale, she looks as if she hasn't slept in weeks. She makes it to class, though, when she can. One day, in order to not be late, she drags herself up two flights of stairs, ahead of me, before I tell her to go back to her dorm and get in bed.

She explains that she likes the class, and doesn't want to miss it. I explain to her that she must get well. Stress is not good for the immune system. I want her -- as I do for the entire class -- to be enjoying these first months in her new home, and try and take a big-picture look at things: to explain, that everything is, in fact, going to work out. That the stresses she is facing now are peanuts.

"Trust me," I say, as I always do, "it's all going to work out."

Do they take in my assurances? **Neuroscience** says that many of them don't -- that these freshmen are wired to be besieged by a degree of anxiety that we, as adults, cannot understand. The teenager's brain is wired to perceive anxiety as something far more psychologically threatening than it really is because of a "quirk of brain development," in the words of clinical psychiatrist Richard Friedman (2014).

Why would a teacher of writing want to be acutely aware of the biological mindset of his cohort of 18-year-olds? Because a college freshmen in a liberal-arts school is facing an intimidating array of intellectual hurdles in the form of STEM and language courses that are being taught by a chalk-talk paradigm, and being assessed by tests calling on rote memorization: a fertile field for high anxiety.

By trying to instill an appreciation and trust of a craft that has, heretofore, been instructed formulaically, and might therefore be seen as yet another cause for concern in those whose grammar might be lax, whose SAT verbal scores were low: anyone who has been told that their "English" aptitude is lacking.

To the facilitator of "writing," then, trying to find a window into the psyche of a student who has never been told that she's a "writer" who might actually love to learn to express herself by writing, knowing the neuroscience is paramount.

The amygdala region of the brain, which processes "fear" and "anxiety," develops earlier than the prefrontal cortex, which enables rational reasoning in the adult. The adolescent, after the certainty of childhood, is entering a developmental-psychological stage where anxiety- and fear-producing stimuli (for example, the fears and anxieties produced by a final exam...) have an undeveloped governor of reasoning to deal with the disorder.

That suicide is the third most significant killer of teenagers behind accidents and homicide suggests that the amplified fear and anxiety play a significant role in a teenager's life. Some are literally scared to death.

In Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Sertraline, or a Combination in Childhood Anxiety, (The New England Journal of Medicine, 2008) Walkup et al. reported that up to twenty percent of children-adolescents suffer from anxiety disorders.

In other words, in my class, at least four of my students were likely experiencing an anxiety disorder before they entered their first year of college: a

stress-filled environment that stokes the fire of those ill-equipped to handle stress. In such an environment, examination to test lessons delivered transmissively could stoke the fires -- and teaching "writing" as a craft with strict structural parameters would only add to the anxieties of those learners who are already hesitant about writing.

As noted by Jennifer Senior, in her examination of adolescence for *New York* magazine, "In adolescence, the brain is...buzzing with more dopamine activity than at any other time in the human life cycle, so everything an adolescent does—everything an adolescent feels—is just a little bit more intense." (Senior, 2013)

To enter into adolescence is to make more than a chronological journey. It is to lose the certainty of childhood. As my precocious 13-year-old friend Agnes wrote in a paper she composed after asking if she could audit by proxy about the Young Adult novel, "When you are little, you have set opinions about everything. Being a teenager is about learning to broaden your mind" (Galvin, 2014). But when the brain is still far from mature, new horizons might seem threatening and ridden with failure opportunities.

Freshman year in college, in particular, is a daunting experience for any adolescent. As a former freshman at Moravian wrote in her poem "Learning to Live," "Freshmen college girls are the most scary and damaged people you'll ever meet." (2008).

Add an anxiety disorder, or any psychic imbalance, and the experience can overwhelm according to a friend of mine who dropped out of Virginia Tech after one

term, because of "depression and anxiety, worsened by the sudden social overdose that is college: (Freeman, 2014).

And speaking of overdosing: To further muddy the waters, add our recent exponential administration of psychostimulants like the phenethylamine Adderall and the methylphenidate Ritalin, whose prescribed use (together) by adolescents increased by 500 percent from 2002 to 2012.

Because of the ADA, I have no access to a student's pharmacological protocol or regimen, but it is likely that some are being prescribed to take stimulants that have been shown to help a student's brain focus, and achieve better scores in tests that call for memorizing facts -- but they also, like adrenalin, mask fear (Friedman, 2014). When an adolescent taking a stimulant faces anxiety, he is defeating it artificially, not developmentally -- which will further hinder his ability to authentically face the outside pressures of college, or the real world.

The dramatic increase in serotonin inhibitors presents a worrisome trend, and not only because of reported connections between methylphenidate and suicidal ideation (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2014); it also suggests that medications are being used to substitute for a more organic remediation: helping the student cope with a hyper-stimulated, multi-tasking society not by reining their thoughts in chemically but actually talking to them and helping them through the cognitive-developmental stages in a natural and organic fashion.

*

I'm a survivor of this world. My journey has been notably rocky, from an adolescence fraught with high anxiety. Like any teenager, I was frantically searching for an identity, for acceptance, for a way to endure peer bullying. And I succeeded -- eventually. If our high school years are, in fact, the years that forge out lifelong identity (Senior, 2013), I never outgrew them; as my career progressed, I increasingly embraced them. I was able to retain "plasticity" -- and now find myself more open to new ways of thinking, to change, more than ever before. Now, with the rapids behind me, happily adrift in calm waters, I have some perspective.

As the students tell me of their lives in the interviews, one theme continuously emerges: how much they still think of themselves as the people they were in high school. They speak of best friends, of rituals at their school. They often wear shorts and sweatshirts emblazoned with their high school's team name. Anxiety at this strange new world is palpable.

I have no way of knowing whether my own perspective, shared often, can lessen their anxieties, but I do sense a bond in the class, and I believe that bond stems, in part, from the comfort they find in the classroom. If I can help assuage students' anxieties -- over peer acceptance, over self-esteem, over grades, over parental pressure -- by standing before them and saying, "See? I was a slightly above-average writer, and I not only survived, but made an actual living by writing!" perhaps they'll see the craft, and the pressure to master it, in a different light. Perhaps, too, they'll shed some of the anxiety that is gnawing at them daily.

*

Diana is a solid student who likes writing, school and life -- and often appears anxious. Her writing has been strong from the first day, and she tells me that she enjoys our system of writing in a notebook: "I don't like using the laptop at all. I like writing by hand," says Diana, in our interview. "Then, my phone has never been glued to my head like most people."

We've gotten along well from the first class, and I suspect that my obvious appreciation of every American who works for a living (in my birth year, American labor unions were at their historic peak) has helped us form a bond.

Her dad owns a concrete company, but she didn't find out that her father was adopted -- and that her grandmother was not, in fact, her grandmother -- until her father's "drunken brother told me when I was thirteen," she says, with a laugh that's only partly humorous. Her mother? "Went to Vo-Tech to learn flower design and had her own shop 'til she sold it."

She half-laughs again. "She's a hard-ass. She assumes she knows what she's doing no matter what she does."

When I ask Diana what her house is like, she says. "The D---- compound? It's a house to hang out in. Dirt bikes, four-wheelers, twenty cars. It's a place for me and my friends."

It's a house where, I strongly sense, Diana, as the eldest of five siblings, has had to shoulder a great deal of responsibility. This, I think, is one of the reasons that her writing is so thoughtful. She has had to grow old before her

time, and sometimes seems wistful. I have increasingly made it a point of asking for her opinion on our readings, not only because her opinions are strong, but to make her feel included.

I also read aloud from her essays -- as I continue to do with the rest of the students.

(Postscript: the following spring, her mother will text the rest of the family to tell them that she's leaving, whereupon Diana is now the de facto mother for her four younger siblings.)

A pattern has emerged in the interviews: many come from broken homes, and while in some cases they have adjusted well, for others it's a source of difficulty. Anne tells me, "Dad? Hasn't been in my life that much. I don't even know his name...I get a few phone calls every two to three years. The last time I spoke to him was the day before I was coming here. He said, 'I'm getting you a car,' and I said, 'Right. That's going to make up for every birthday you missed.'"

For a young African-American woman to be carrying the burden of an absent father is something we may take for granted...but how often do we take the time to see through the eyes of the child who still simmers with resentment at the abandonment? We tend to think that young woman raised without a father will be strong and successful, somehow imagining that the psychological wound will fuel her ambition.

But sometimes that wound doesn't heal. Knowing of her state of mind will help me find a good approach toward gaining her respect and trust. She

does not contribute to the conversation in class, nor do I ask her to anymore. I sense that she misses her home and her mother, a few hundred miles away in Connecticut.

The one-on-one interviews continue to indicate that the students are enjoying the class' informal give-and-take. "An unconventional classroom is always better than a conventional one," Diana tells me. "It encourages you to think."

But most importantly, the interviews provide me with insights into each personality, into the nature of the each lens through which the student is seeing his/her world -- insight that can enhance my instructional style with each particular student. Every learning style is unique to the individual, and each individual's learning style is, in some way, influenced by their upbringing, home situation, social situation and personal belief system.

As I discover more facets of a student's life, I discover more ways to put them on a path to their own ways of achieving as writers -- whether literal composers of written texts, or "writers" in a more figurative, expansive definition of the word: "communicators."

It's long been a cliché (and most clichés are based in truth) among professional writers that writing is a necessary "therapy;" by expressing through words, we are constantly examining our thought processes, our psychological situations, our relationship to our subjects, to our world.

For students with home home-life issues, social issues, emotional issues and self-esteem issues, the ability to write well, to write naturally, can be a

valuable means of expression that can smooth rough waters. For teachers of writing, then, knowledge of what's going on beneath the surface of each student, through personal interviews, can only facilitate the process of instruction with each student and his/her learning style.

*

As we often do, we open a class with a sports discussion: of a horrific event from our neighborhood. A high school football team's season has been cancelled because of a bullying incident in which some of the players sexually assaulted another student. This leads to a discussion of whether bullying is a predominantly male phenomenon. After all: the thugs in Bryson's "Among the Thugs" were all men.

Virginia laughs at my naivete. "Girls are worse," she says. "They might not stick a finger up your butt, but they'll tell you they hate your shirt, and the effect'll be the same."

My reflection: a classroom where the best writer in the class feels free to use such language is a comfortable place. But more significantly, my second reflection: Any instructor of first-year students must be mindful of another significant source of anxiety in the students' lives: the bullying epidemic that has resulted in more than a dozen adolescent suicides in the last five years.

One day, walking from the library, I overhear a student saying into his phone, "Great. Just another thing for me to stress about."

Tension, anxiety and stress seem to be everyday components of this college cohort; finding them a comfort zone becomes even more paramount.

*

When we had reached a point when one month remained until research papers were due, I'd begun a class-by-class campaign to take the pressure off. Each class I'd taken a few minutes to re-iterate: do not be freaked by this paper. I'd virtually plead with them to simply see it as another writing exercise, with some research thrown in.

But my pep talks hadn't seemed to be working. As a group, with a few weeks to go, they're worried. "This paper," says Brittany, one of the best students, "is going to throw me under the bus." (At least it was a good use of figurative language.)

*

It's time to issue the anonymous surveys about their semester's experience, to find out how much our experiences have helped these first-year students find a comfort zone in the craft. The anonymity, I expect, will allow them to be franker than they are when I ask them about the class in our one-on-one interviews.

But after I return to the class to collect the blue books, I see that all of them have put their names on their books. Perhaps some didn't listen, and some wanted their names attached to their answers. All their written work until now had had their names attached, so maybe they assumed they'd put their names to this assessment. Then I realize: I know all of their handwriting by now anyway. In addition: some of the syntax reads as if they thought that this survey was going to go to the English Department. If it's now a flawed survey, it's still

instructive...and the final anonymous survey administered by the English Department will provide a good comparison.

I have given them eight questions to answer about the class. There were no negative comments in any of the answers (other than one student's observations that he didn't want to read "celebrity journalism").

In response to, "How does this classroom atmosphere differ from other English classes you have taken?" the prevalent sentiment here was an appreciation of our free discourse: "Allows you to speak your mind freely." We are allowed to not only write freely but we get to speak our minds as well." "Actually get to speak my mind." "Everyone is able to say how they feel."

In response to, "In what ways does this make the experience better? Worse?", a common theme here was a sense that the classroom had been a welcoming place for deer-in-the-headlights freshmen.

"It lets us become acclimated to college easier." "Showing what college should be like: relaxed while doing work at the same time." "This class makes my experience better because freshman year you're usually shy but I feel I found my voice because of this class."

In response to, "Does the atmosphere of this classroom make it easier to learn the lessons?" one theme emerged about the physical configuration -- "You can always see the face of the person talking. This allows you to get a more personal connection with the people in the class." "Being in a circle makes it less stressful. Everybody is more proactive. It's easier to pay attention." -- while another mentioned the effect on "learning:" "Richmond wants to teach

information that we want to learn." "It is more about learning." "You're learning how to write better, and that's the point."

In response to, "How does this teacher's way of teaching differ from your other teachers this semester?", a common theme involved the give-and-take byplay of the class dynamic: "Instead of drilling information in your head, he lets the information out there and you can reach it if you want." "He doesn't force his views down your throat." "He lets us...teach the class and ourselves." "Other teachers talk down to you and not `with you,' like Mr. Richmond does. This has helped me voice my opinions more than I used to."

One response took a more holistic approach: "My teacher's way of teaching is dynamic. He is the first and only teacher I've ever had that I know cares for my well-being and the well-being of this class. His heart is in this 100 percent. It's nice to see someone care so much for our future."

In response to, "What might you have learned in this classroom that you might not have in others?", the theme of being at home in a classroom was evident, epitomized by, "I've learned to be comfortable in the class environment. This still is helping me in my other classes too because I find myself more willing to participate."

(The reply, "I learned to find my voice," inferred that this student had a taken a significant step in the writing continuum.)

In response to, "Would you voluntarily sign up for another English class with this teacher?", the answers were all in the affirmative.

In response to the question, "Has this class changed your attitude about/approach to/thinking about your own writing? How?" The answers strongly indicated that my goal of trying to demystify the craft seemed to have found some traction.

"I used to hate writing because I thought it was so boring to have to sit down and write something. But for this class I can write endlessly." "I didn't like writing before, but now I love to write." "I always saw writing as the biggest nuisance and thought teachers did it on the most boring subjects to annoy people. But this class has changed my view and made it better and made me realize that if you write on some things one likes it makes it more fun." "Now I try and pay attention to make sure I completely finish a thought so the readers isn't left with a question." "I've learned that writing is actually fun." "I feel like I'm actually learning how to write better by writing."

*

The final in-class duty is to ask them to write a paragraph about what grade I should give them. This revealed some unanticipated data, as some made comments in the bluebook I handed out -- all positive.

Of course, since they've made these comments while pleading their case for a good grade, well, perhaps a grain of salt is called for!

*

As the last class ends, the mysterious Butler, face ever-half-buried by the hoodie, walks past me, eyes straight ahead, not looking at me, but saying, "Been a pleasure." And then he is gone.

*

The result of the research papers? Something I hadn't expected. **Failure.** Taken at large, the research was barely adequate, and the writing was...not. It was often stilted, and often the syntax was awry.

Take Virginia: the born writer, capable of writing, off the top of her head in class, "America thrives on democracy. The idea of equality is like music to the masses' ears."

How could the first paragraph of the same student's paper on New York Yankee shortstop Derek Jeter include this descriptive sentence: "A crowd of so called enemies to the Yankee organization stand to their feet at and cheer for him though they know that their beloved Orioles just lost all hope of possible chances in the playoffs." She hadn't written such a confusing sentence in the entire term.

Other papers represented a dismaying lack of effort. They students had largely taken the research part of the assignment seriously, and learned citation skills. But their composition was disappointing.

This disappointing result was all on me. In continually stressing that they shouldn't stress, they either took me too much to heart, and didn't stress at all, or my constant harping on how they shouldn't stress made them stress all the more. Either way, the papers were not good.

I tried to tell myself that the results were, in some ways, encouraging in terms of my own philosophies about writing. Handwriting produces more evocative language and deeper thoughts, more figurative language and more

emotion. I considered having next fall's class assemble all of the material, then come to class and write in class, by hand. If nothing else, grammar, syntax and spelling would be better.

The results also reinforced my certainty that writing for structure -- an abstract, a thesis, a story, citations -- is counterintuitive to what writing should be -- not free-writing, but not shackled writing, either.

But these were excuses. The truth was that I had failed them. Even if knowing how to write a research paper might be an exercise that many of them will never need to know, I had been entrusted with teaching them well enough to produce a sound paper.

Next autumn, I will have my First Year Seminar students do their research out of class...and the writing in class -- where I now know they are likely to be comfortable.

Conclusion/Next Steps

While I was gratified to see that at term's end my score of 6.87 on an anonymous survey was virtually the same as the 6.88 on the midterm assessment, I did not come away from the semester thinking that I had achieved, in the classroom, any extraordinary success. In fact, as an action-researcher, those scores were frustrating.

Amid the sea of sevens, the only two sixes were in "preparation" and "challenging." In truth, I had expected much lower scores in those criteria from many students. The near-perfect score suggested, in a way, that my pedagogy was so effective that my entire cohort so enjoyed coming to class that they might not have been diligent in accurately reporting on how well I had taught them the craft of writing.

On the other hand, I am reminded of the old adage, "Possession is 90 percent of the law," and how it might have translated into the first-year seminar's experience: Getting them into class, with wide-open brains, may have been far more important than whether or not my semester was rigorous enough.

To that end, when I teach a First Year Seminar this coming autumn, I will, on reflection, change some of the methodology. From the beginning, I will not introduce the research-paper requirement as some sort of aberration to the skill of writing; I will stress its integral role in the realm of the craft.

I will assign some writing assignments to be done on electronic devices, to see if handwriting is more effective.

But at the end of the day, as I went back over their essays in their portfolios, I was satisfied of one thing: to a young woman and young man, through an inquiring process on all sides, they grew to be better writers. More accurately: they grew to be writers.

In the next first-year writing seminar, I will design a more relevant curriculum. I will prepare the groundwork for their research papers more methodically.

But I will continue to stress that writing is a natural means of expression, and hopefully, in so doing, I'll instill an appreciation of a craft at which, in one form or another, they all can excel. It's not realistic to think that all of the students will develop what Virginia called a "passion" for writing, but it's more than realistic to be able to find ways, through demystifying the process, to make writing an integral part of all of their learning from here on in.

Findings

Experience in education

If one voice guided this study, it was that of John Dewey, whose insistence (eight decades ago!) that there is an inextricable link between what we learn and what we experience formed the philosophic basis for the study.

Backed by that belief, I tried, at every step of the semester of this study, to intertwine the students' daily life experiences with their ongoing journey toward writing achievement in the classroom. By trying to break down the barrier between "classroom" and "real world," I hoped to make the craft of writing more personally relevant for each student, and thus, hopefully, less of a "chore." (When a student says to me, "I always saw writing as the biggest nuisance and thought teachers did it on the most boring subjects to annoy people," it's pretty clear that her past writing experiences haven't been the most enlightening.)

In addition, in line with Dewey's belief that "...to know the meaning of empiricism we need to understand what 'experience' is (1936)," I strove to acquire empirical data that were meaningful: both in-class observation data that reflected "empirical" results and out-of-class data that would reflect their growth (if any) as communicators who could confidently express ideas.

In addition, I was mindful of Dewey's belief that "experience" is ongoing, linked both to the past and to the future. To observe a student's level of achievement at a single moment, devoid of past and future context, tells us

nothing. To see it as part of an ongoing experiential continuum is to gain a more thorough understanding of "achievement."

To that end, I was able to observe students' progress in a number of "writing" categories" in diachronic portfolios, and analyze their work not only in terms of whether their writing had improved technically, but in terms of whether they were becoming more comfortable with the act of "writing" -- which their survey suggested they were.

In particular, Kathy seemed to have taken as much from the class as anyone. Kathy's home life was a daily challenge. Off campus, her mother's former partner would not allow her mother into the house to get necessary documents for Kathy's loans to take effect. On campus, as a freshman she couldn't get a parking pass, and so had to park her car in a garage and race to her after-school job at the end of a math class.

But one month into the class -- during which time her writing was thoughtful, but not exceptional -- when I asked students to interview fellow students, Kathy's questions of her partner showed a remarkable scope and depth of writerly understanding.

Among her questions of her interviewee: "If you were to change one thing about yourself?" "Do you like the life you live?" "Do you like inappropriate or intellectual jokes?" The inquiry showed that Kathy had embraced the idea of writing-as-discourse, and whether she knew it or not, her questions revealed a talent in the language arts...as a writer.

By the semester's end she had found her footing (re: the bond of the pack of hooligans in "Among the Thugs:" "Obviously, it's going to make someone happy if you all have the same wants"), and had come to clearly enjoy, for the first time (by her own admission), the act of writing.

On a more literal/literate level, re: "experience," the most effective writings of the semester were the class's responses to that same powerful essay by Bill Buford, "Among the Thugs." Virtually every student dove into the assignment. Why? On reflection, two conclusions emerged. First, Buford's writing is accessible straightforward and devoid of literary tricksterdom. He tells stories in a voice that is likely to reach any audience.

That reading also led to a relevant finding: the cohort of this first-year seminar was very sports-conscious. A vast majority had an abiding interest in sports, and so the notion of hooligans rioting after a soccer match represented the kind of "experience" to which all could relate -- whether it was Theresa writing, "The thrill of yelling back and forth with the opposing fans is sometimes better than the actual game," or Butler's assertion that, "It's just like when you're out with a bunch of your friends, you feel invincible, like nothing or nobody can stop you."

The takeaway for my instruction of the next writing class? That to prime a student's writing pump, searching out areas of commonality between the writing and the student-- such as sports -- is likely to produce stronger, more passionate writing.

Finally, Buford's clear, compelling prose taught me that reading and analyzing a story told clearly, and not stylistically, is more likely to influence their growth as writers.

Classroom atmosphere: A Zone of Learning

Les Vygotsky's belief that, contrary to the philosophy that underpins traditional instructional models, development does not precede learning, but that the two are mutually inclusive, served this first-year seminar well.

The students' ability to learn what the craft of writing entails, in a way that went beyond previous (and imposing) definitions, went hand in hand with their evolution as a unified cohort sharing ideas about events in their lives that mattered to them all.

When Jamie said to me one day, "We all get along. When we see each other out of class, we say 'Hi' to each other," it confirmed what we all sensed: that we had created an atmosphere where all were developing as people as they simultaneously were able to learn.

Vygotsky hypothesized that a learner's stage of development had to be such that that student was at a cognitive stage which would allow learning to take place; if a student is not cognitively developed enough to take in the "learning," she/he will not achieve.

I tried to take his theory a step further, by seeing that if the group developed as a whole, every day, writing as a group to learn as a group, its level of learning capability could grow also. If they came to see our class as a single

entity, team, or even consciousness, they could all scaffold each others' development more effectively.

The classroom configuration created a literal zone where everyone was facing everyone else, and discourse flowed in the sort of give and take that occurs in a group setting, with the chairs configured into the horseshoe: "It makes it easier because you can always see the face of the person talking," Jamie wrote. "This allows you to get a more personal connection with the people in the class. It also allows you to have conversations with others in an easier way."

But in a more figurative sense, we had created a zone that actually enhanced learning achievement by developing as humans. When Kathy wrote in her survey, in response to what she might have learned in our classroom that she might not have in other classrooms, "It has become more apparent to me that the world is full of differing ideas and beliefs," this was a clear sign that she was maturing as a human being -- while maturing as a writer.

Vygotsky was convinced, as am I, that the process of learning allows the development of the individual to occur in a different fashion than if the student was developing in a vacuum.

Similarly, an atmosphere of learning devoid of "development" in a cultural sense is not likely to promote true learning.

Did the students develop as they learned in a more significant fashion than if the instruction had been one-way, of the chalk-talk variety, and had focused on the mechanics of writing organized essays? The data are

inconclusive. Did they thrive intellectually in a place where real-life development occurred in a learning environment? Yes.

The Situational Classroom

One of the most important mainstays of the philosophy of this study was Paolo Freire's belief that traditional pedagogies advocating a one-way transmission of facts, theories and information ineffectually sow their lessons on fallow ground.

The "learning" mind's most fertile ground, Freire argues, is one where the instructor recognizes that each student is in her/his own "situationality," and that they are "challenged by it to act upon it" -- in effect, each student then acting as an action researcher.

"Human beings *are* because they *are* in a situation. And they *will be more* the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence, but critically act upon it." (Freire, 1970).

With Freire's ideas in mind -- both his belief that the "banker" analogy of pedagogy wherein depositing "knowledge" is flawed, and his "situational" paradigm -- I embarked on the semester determined to gain as much knowledge of each student's "situation" as I could, the better to find a common learning ground for all of us.

That search for each student's unique place in the world involved lengthy personal interviews (some of which lasted, with the student's prompting, more than an hour). The knowledge gained in the interviews was useful not only

in allowing me to get a sense of a student's "situation," but in allowing me, in subsequent classes, to make references to some of each student's points of pride in their outside lives as a way to bolster self-confidence and peer respect.

For example: in a discussion of Gellhorn's Spanish Civil War reporting, and Kevin Powers' "The Yellow Birds," I was able to ask students who had families in the military to help the rest of us understand a military mindset. Knowing that Jorge's father was a lifer in the United States Air Force, I was able to tap his pride in his dad to real effect in our discussions of war.

In another way, knowledge of the students' "situation" worked in helping Luke become part of our class family. Having discovered in his interview that our track and field star valued the success of the team over his own individual running achievements, I was able to instill in him a sense that he was part of our own team.

When Kathy wrote, "Instead of drilling information in your head, he lets the information out there and you can reach it if you want," she implied that our process had not involved a "forced" instruction, and that we had found a place where the information I was putting out into our "zone" had been designed/customized so as to be accessible to their own situations -- and to mine.

The comfortable classroom

"As a new group meets or an existing group gathers under new circumstances, many will be asking, 'Who will I be in this group? Will I belong?' If the system influence is strong, they may wonder if they are free to

choose their identity or whether it will be imposed. The challenge here is to help people feel free, comfortable and able to contribute, while at the same time providing a sense of challenge and stimulation. This can be particularly challenging where some people bring experiences of being disempowered (Wicks & Reason, 2009)."

Various answers to surveys, and obvious attitudes about the class ("there's nothing I love more than sleeping, but the choice [to instead come to class] was a no-brainer") suggested that this first-year seminar had a comfort level that allowed the students to freely contribute. One student even used the word "comfortable" in describing our classroom.

As the semester went on, more and more students were comfortable in contributing -- Luke most dramatically. Increasingly feeling at ease in contributing to the discussion, his comfort level was apparent to all of us.

In addition, that level of comfort allowed me to interact with the students in a way that did not threaten them; at the end of the day, they knew we were all on the same page via a via writing achievement. Similarly, the students were comfortable enough to speak out, to debate, to engage in discourse with each other which I believe -- again, no hard data supports this -- helped them be more comfortable with the voice of their writing.

Comfortable language

The result of a comfortable environment meant that another level of "comfort" could come into play: students who were comfortable with the casual, everyday language I encouraged them to use in their writing -- because casual, everyday language is often richer, figuratively, than the more formal styles.

For example, when Eddie wrote, "In other parts of the world, especially in European countries, soccer is a big deal," he knew that I wouldn't have suggested he use more formal language ("soccer is of paramount importance"). "Big deal" is more than colloquial; it's a metaphor. The use of figurative language, the students discovered, is actually part of their everyday verbal repertoire.

"Very often people are unaware of the full significance of...metaphors, which usually have come to be taken for granted," Gee wrote in "An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method (1999)." and many of the seminar's writers proved him correct. In his discussion of the downfalls of Lindsay Lohan and Britney Spears, Butler observed, "...the world just sat and watched." When Brittany wrote that she was worried that the research paper was going to "throw her under a bus," her state of mind was clear, and more vivid than if she'd said, "I'm worried."

In addition, I believed that their literary comfort zone should encompass abbreviations or symbols ("b/c" for "because," "+" for "and") if that was their

most comfortable means of getting a point across, because in a lab where writing is meant to promote/coincide with learning, the more easily they expressed themselves, the more developed they would become cognitively.

As they wrote by hand, if their brains were outpacing their pens, and they were anxious to get their thoughts on paper, then their writing, no matter what the symbols (as long as they were comprehensible), the task was being accomplished. And the ease with which most of the students were writing by semester's end suggested that a great deal of "learning" had occurred.

The Caring Classroom

From the first day of the semester I hoped to make it clear that not only would I take the contexts of their individual lives into consideration, I would also bring whatever resources I could alleviate problems in their lives -- not out of any effort to appear to be altruistic. This stance was simply a reflection of where I'd arrived in my life: in a place where, having spent decades getting to know people in all walks of life, and learning how to effectively "network," I simply enjoyed doing what I could -- in this case, trying to help a student get a parking pass so she could get to work on time after her last class, or guiding a student through the process of getting a press pass at a hockey game, it was second nature.

If Eddie had compiled five traffic tickets, this would become fodder for classroom discussion: an example of our family working things out, and convincing Eddie to get it together -- because we cared, and he'd earned our

respect to the degree that he would listen. (In fact, it was Eddie who brought his tickets up, knowing, I think, that the class would help him get it together, driving-wise. And he got no more tickets!)

Wisdom

In his study life experiences and wisdom, Thao Le's finding in 2008 that "challenging and stressful life events ...increase differentiation through accommodative changes, resulting in greater tolerance...less projection tendencies and self-centeredness" -- suggested that four decades of life in a competitive (and cut-throat, ego-driven) marketplace writing for (love and) profit might have provided a second-career teacher with a valuable tool: Wisdom.

It's an impossible attribute to quantify. But could it be qualifiable?

There's no question that my own life struggles and my ultimate (relative) success as a writer who earned a living with words presented an example of some sort of "wisdom," if only because, as an experienced writer and experienced liver of life, I was there to tell a story with an optimistic and uplifting ending.

I doubt that any of the students would attribute "wisdom" to the instructor with whom they spent an autumn semester in a comfortable classroom -- as well they shouldn't. But I do believe that, knowing of my life experiences, they came to appreciate my instruction of the craft of writing in part because, in part, I'd learned some lessons.

Writing is, at its core, nothing but means of expression about life. If nothing else, the writers of this first-year seminar came to see that the two were inextricably joined.

They knew they were alive. Perhaps now, at the semester's end, to some degree, they knew they could write.

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Appendices

Appendix A

2013-2014 HUMAN SUBJECTS INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD (HSIRB) PROPOSAL FORM

This form must be completed for any research activity involving human participants. All researchers should review the Moravian College Human Subjects Research Policy found at <p:\hsirb\MoravianCollegeHSIRBPolicy.doc> before designing and submitting their proposals.

When you have provided all of the information required in the proposal form below, please follow the submission instructions below. ***Please be aware that incomplete proposals will be returned to the proposer until they are complete.*** Failure to submit all documentation will delay the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) review of your research proposal.

Proposal Review Timetable: Please note that during the standard academic year when the committee meets regularly, it typically takes a minimum of two weeks (14 days) for the committee to review and respond to completed proposals. Most proposals require some modifications before we grant full approval and the revision process typically adds an additional week to the review process.

Submit all of the following:

1. This completed Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) Proposal Form. Please make sure all required information is complete. We encourage completion of this proposal form as a Word document.
2. A copy of your Informed Consent form and/or other evidence of Informed Consent to voluntary participation [See HSIRB proposed Policy #MC.116 & MC.117. The policy statement can be viewed at <Public/hsirb/>.] You can also find helpful informed consent guidelines at <public/hsirb/>.
3. A copy of all of your instruments (surveys, tests, etc.). If you are showing pictures or videos, a copy of these need to be submitted as well. You may provide links if the material will be accessible online.

Submit *electronic copies* of complete proposals to:

hsirb@moravian.edu

You have the option of either combining the various documents in one file or submitting separate files as email attachments, but please make sure that the file name clearly indicates the section of the overall proposal package and/or the author. So, for example, please call your document something along the lines of "oconnell.proposal.docx" and "oconnell.informedconsent.docx." As indicated above, the preferred format for all materials is Word (doc/docx). We understand that some materials may only be available in other formats, but please make every effort to convert files to Word. At the end of the approval process, we will collect **electronic signatures** from proposers and their faculty sponsors (if applicable).

Questions: contact

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3. Mailing address: Post Office Box 958 Millerton NY 12546	4. Phone: 860 573 5649
5. E-mail address: richmondp@moravian.edu; peter12546@gmail.com	
6. This is a (please check): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission of a rejected Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/> Request for modification	7. Research Start/End Dates: Make sure you clearly define the start and end dates. Format as month, day, year. Start: August 25, 2014 End: December 5, 2014
7. Title of Proposal: "The Guy Who Came in from the Cold"	
8. Faculty Advisor: Charlotte Rabe Zales Ed. D	

Part II: PROPOSAL TYPE

1. This research involves **ONLY** the use of **educational tests** (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude or achievement).

Yes
 No

2. This research collects interviews or surveys **ONLY** of **elected or appointed public officials** or candidates for such.

Yes
 No

3. This research involves **ONLY** observations of **public behavior**.

Yes
 No

4. This research involves **ONLY** existing data, documents, records or specimens.

Yes
 No

5. List the **research funding sources**, if any

None

6. The results of this research will be published.

Yes
 No
 Uncertain

If you marked “yes” or “uncertain”, please provide a brief description of the possible forum of publication (for example, peer-reviewed journal, conference presentation, etc.)

Description of publication forum:

M. Ed document online and on college library

In this next section, you will provide extensive details about the research project. Please make sure that your explanations/descriptions are clearly written and grammatically correct so that the committee can accurately follow and assess your proposal.

Part III. DETAILS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1. In this section, you have the option of either addressing each of the following subheadings individually or together (since there may be some overlap) in

your proposal narrative. If providing a narrative, please make sure that each of the following topics is clearly identified in the narrative.

a. Objectives: "What will be the observed and reported experiences when someone with lifelong journalism experience adopts the instruction of the language arts as a second career"?

b. Design: Action Research

C. Procedures: Data gathering methods will include 1) Personal observation and field logs, both in and outside of the classroom, in the role of both instructor and academic advisor; 2) Artifacts, comprising written classroom assignments and classroom assignments; 3) One personal on-one-one interview; 4) One anonymous survey

a. Outline procedures/steps to reduce risks to subjects:

All students will be assigned pseudonyms

2. This research involves the following GROUP(S) vulnerable to risk. Check all that apply.

- Subjects under the age of 18
- Prisoners
- Pregnant women
- People with mental, cognitive, intellectual, or physical disabilities
- Volunteer sample so vulnerable group membership may be unknown

Research Design Note: If you are asking for **volunteer participants**, you will not necessarily know whether or not your participants are under 18, pregnant and/or disabled. In fact, your volunteers may themselves not know whether they fall into one of these categories. Therefore, if you are asking for volunteer participants, you need to think carefully about whether or not your research project could adversely affect someone in any of these categories, and if so, how you might try to either screen out these individuals and/or design the project so that the risk to these individuals is minimized.

2a. If you checked any or all of the groups identified above, explain why you need to use the group and the methods you will use to minimize risk. If your research design proposes no special risks to these vulnerable individuals even if they happen to be included in your sample, please state why:

3. This research might affect people with special vulnerabilities (for example, pregnant women, people with allergies, people taking some medications, people with cognitive impairments such as ADHD, etc.)

Research Design Note: Think carefully here again about whether or not your research design could negatively affect people with special vulnerabilities. For example, does your research design require so much concentration and/or computation that it might result in considerable stress for someone with a cognitive impairment? Are people completing your instrument in solitude or in a group setting? Might comparative performance result in excessive stress?

Yes
 No

If you checked “Yes”, explain the methods you will use to minimize risk to these people.

4. Describe your subject pool including:
 - a. the intended number of subjects
 - b. subject characteristics/demographics

Approximately 20 college freshmen, men and women

5. Describe in detail the methods you will use to recruit your subjects.

They will be the students in my normal teaching classroom

6. This research involves **deception** of subjects.

Yes
 No

If you checked “Yes”, describe the nature of the deception and your debriefing procedure. You will need to provide the debriefing statement with the full proposal submission. Even if the debriefing will be done orally, you need to submit the text of the verbal statement that will be read to participants.

7. Explain by whom and how the subjects will be informed of the purposes of this research project. *(Remember to provide a copy of the informed consent form with this proposal form.)*

I will inform the students at the beginning of the term that they are the subjects of my action research thesis. I will explain that, having read my letter of consent, they will be able to withdraw at any time but that they will still be a part of my research.

8. This research collects information, which (check all that apply)

- deals with **sensitive aspects** from the participant's point of view.
- identifies the subject by **name** or **number codes**.
- might place the subject at **risk of liability** if made public.
- might place the subject's **financial standing or employability** at risk if made public.

Research Design Note: Think carefully about whether or not your research deals with topics that may be sensitive from the participant's point of view. Sometimes it is not obvious to the researcher that the subject of their research may be a sensitive topic for others.

If you checked any or all of the categories above, explain the methods you will use to

- a. safeguard the data you collect (you need to describe this safeguarding procedure in detail, including but not limited to a description of how the data will be protected (for example, in a locked cabinet), whom will have access to the data, and how and when the data will be destroyed)
- b. inform subjects of available support services (If your participants are drawn from the Moravian College community, please provide contact information for the Counseling Center, Campus Safety and the Health Center—contact information available on the HSIRB website. For participants drawn from other communities, please provide the comparable support service information.)
- c. minimize the risk of identification of subjects.

All data will be confidential, seen only by the researcher. All data will be stored in a locked classroom. Thereafter, the data will be kept locked for five years in a locked container, then destroyed.

The subjects will be informed of available support services: The Health Center, the Counseling Center and the Office of Campus Safety and Police

Appendix B

HSIRB Letter

July 6, 2014

Dear Mr. Peter Richmond,

Upon receiving your final revisions, the Moravian College

HSIRB has completed its review of your proposal titled "Coming in from the Cold," and we are granting you full approval.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into topics other than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be. Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation, awaiting HSIRB approval of the changes.

Sincerely,

Sarah K. Johnson, Chair
Moravian College
7013

Human Institutional Review Board

6250 Main St. Bethlehem, PA

Email: skjohnson@moravian.edu

for hsirb@moravian.edu

Appendix C
Informed Consent Letter

Dear _____

As you know, while serving as your instructor I am also enrolled in Moravian College's master's degree program in pursuit of a Master of Arts in Teaching. Having worked as a journalist most of my life, with occasional stints at teaching, I'm hoping to earn the degree in order to both increase my qualifications and refine my craft, in order to better prepare me to teach at either a late-secondary or college level. Central to Moravian's program is teacher action research, in which teachers investigate an area for improvement in their practice.

For my teacher action research study, I will be investigating the effects of a journalist and author returning to teach at the age of 60, in order to ascertain whether an instructor with real-life experience in an "inquiry" field, coming back into the academic department based on a "teaching as inquiry" model, might be a more effective teacher than one who has never had such experience. It's my belief that a professional journalist who has made a living asking questions of his subjects and is turning to teaching as part of his later life activities, will have an innate advantage in an academic atmosphere which fosters inquiry.

As part of my research, over the course of the fall 2014 semester in LINC 101, section O, I will be using various research tools. These will include "artifacts" such as students' papers and quizzes, as well as surveys, observation of the students which I will write in a journal, and one-on-one interview transcripts. In essence, I propose to use my observations of my students as research material for my thesis. The "risk" to participants will be no greater than that experienced in normal classroom life.

There will be no consequences should a student choose to withdraw at any time, nor would the withdrawal have any effect on the students' assessment or standing in the class. Therefore, I ask your permission to draw upon our mutual experiences for my data. Students' names will not appear in the thesis. Instead, each student participant will be assigned a pseudonym. All notes and research materials will be kept in a secure location.

Should any part of my study lead to any physical or psychological injury during or after the research, the three campus resources to contact are

- 1) The Health Center; 250 Laurel Street; Bethlehem. PA 18018 (610) 861 1567
- 2) The Counseling Center; 1301 Main Street; Bethlehem, PA 18018 (610) 861

1510

3) The Office of Campus Safety and Police; 119 W. Greenwich Street;
Bethlehem, PA 18018 (610) 861 1421 (610) 861 1465

My faculty sponsor for this research study is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be reached by phone at 610 861 1482 or by email at shoshj@moravian.edu If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to contact me at richmondp@moravian.edu or peter12546@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Peter Richmond

I attest that I am a student of the instructor conducting this research study, that I have read and understand this consent form, and that I received a copy.

I agree to participate _____

I do not agree to participate _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Survey

- 1) How does this classroom atmosphere differ from other English classes you have taken?
- 2) In what ways does this make the experience better? Worse?
- 3) Does the atmosphere of this classroom make it easier to learn the lessons?
- 4) How does this teacher's way of teaching differ from your other teachers this semester?
- 5) What might you have learned in this classroom that you might not have in others?
- 6) Would you voluntarily sign up for another English class with this teacher?
- 7) Has this class changed your attitude about/approach to/thinking about your own writing? How?
- 8) If you'd been teaching this course, what would you have done differently?

Appendix E
LINC 101 O Syllabus



1742
MORAVIAN COLLEGE
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

LINC 101 O
Fall 2014
Journalism 101

This course will focus on the skills required for creating non-fiction narrative journalism, with an emphasis on long-form stories. We will examine the essential tools needed for accurate and engaging narrative storytelling, from reporting to researching to interviewing to sourcing to writing.

Goals

- * Students will be able to write analytic essays on various examples of journalism
- * Students will be able to research a topic for a final paper that will demonstrate skills in both journalism and academic paper-writing.
- * Students will be able to write a research paper that will be both academic and journalistic
- * Students will be able to freely debate and discuss current topics in class, backing up their assertions with intellectual rigor.
- * Students will be able to find sites on the internet which will cater to their interests in current events.

Assignments

There will be several assignments. We will read works of journalism out of class, and you will be asked to write about them in class. There will be infrequent out of classroom writing assignments. Each student will produce a multi-modal review of a feature story from a national magazine. This will entail

a "report" on the story done by any mode but the written word (song, poem, artwork, etc. We will discuss). There will be a midterm exam: a take-home essay based on the first half of the term: What makes for a good non-fiction story? The final exam will be an original reported article about a subject for which the writer has some passion. (We will discuss.)

Regular grammar reviews -- readings in the Yagoda book -- will be assigned. They are not indicated on this syllabus. They'll be used as brush-ups when necessary.

Assignments are due as indicated below. Please note that unless a mutually agreeable revised due date is negotiated with the instructor, any late assignment will lose percentage points for each calendar day it is late, and any assignment not submitted within two weeks of the due date will receive a "0." It is within the instructor's purview to apply qualitative judgment in determining grades for an assignment or for a course.

Grading guidelines

Grades will be determined by mutual decision between instructor and students, based on attendance, effort, class participation, completion of assignments and overall effort.

Attendance...

...is crucial. If you must miss a session, please e-mail at richmondp@moravian.edu to explain. When an absence is unavoidable, a written response to the assigned readings must be submitted on or before the next regularly scheduled session. A missing or incomplete written response to readings following an absence will reduce the final grade. More than two class absences or a pattern of late arrivals to class may, at the discretion of the instructor, result in a failing grade for the seminar.

Academic honesty...

...Is Essential. In other words, all work that you submit must be your own. Be certain to cite the sources that you used, and take care to avoid plagiarism, which the *Moravian College Student Handbook* defines as "the use, deliberate or not, of any outside source without proper acknowledgement. Academic dishonesty will result in a zero for the assignment and notification of the Academic Dean, in accordance with Moravian College policy.

On top of which: You don't need to use other peoples' stuff!

Course Schedule

While every effort will be made to follow the schedule indicated below, the syllabus is subject to change as the instructor deems necessary to help students meet the objectives of the course. In other words, sometimes we'll be winging it, as the instructor and students see fit.

Accommodations

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability must contact Ms. Elaine Mara, assistant director of academic support services for academic and disability support, at the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling [610-861-1401](tel:610-861-1401). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

Groups 1-3

For purpose of the multi-modal reports and the final paper, the class will be divided into three sections, alphabetically.

*

Texts:

"The Yellow Birds: A Novel," Kevin Powers

**"The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism,"
Kevin Kerrane, Ben Yagoda, eds.**

How to Not Write Bad, Ben Yagoda

http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/08/humanizing-academic-citation/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en

*

8/26:

In Class:

Opening nuts and bolts. Intros.

Why learning journalism is like learning how to be in a society.

What role has journalism played in your life? If any?

What are your thoughts about the media?

Finding the story

Where to look. Matching the story with the writer's sensibility (music? religion? Art? sports? outdoors? Elements to look for. Expanding the writer's radar. Choosing subjects/topics that resonate on a larger scale and speak to a larger issue.

8/28:

Due in class:

Multi-media example: [http://voicethread.com/?#q.b69839.i359105 ...](http://voicethread.com/?#q.b69839.i359105...)

Martha Gellhorn: The Third Winter

In Class:

Writing: compare to Yellow Birds

Early Background Reporting

How to surround the facts and thus surround your topic. Everything ever written. Any DVDs or YouTube Phone, print, web, courthouse, anywhere and everywhere. The groundwork, before the real reporting begins.

9/2 Due in class:

The Tragedy of Britney Spears

<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/the-tragedy-of-britney-spears-rolling-stones-2008-cover-story-20110329>

and

Here's What Happens When You Cast Lindsay Lohan in Your Movie

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/13/magazine/here-is-what-happens-when-you-cast-lindsay-lohan-in-your-movie.html?pagewanted=all>

In Class:

Writing

Are celebrity profiles "journalism"?

Why do we care?

Sources

How to find them, how to cultivate them; how to use them. Who's important?

What documents count? Who to trust? How do you approach the key sources?

How can you gain the trust of your source? Which obscure source will turn out to unlock the power of your tale?

9/4

Due in class:

Peter Richmond: Tangled Up in Blue

<http://thestacks.deadspin.com/the-brief-life-and-complicated-death-of-tommy-lasordas-485999366>

In Class:

<http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/journalism-education/251048/the-pyramid-of-journalism-competence-what-journalists-need-to-know/#.U3FVxgClgoY.twitter>

Beginning Reporting

What to do once you're finally in the world of your subject/topic: strategies, resources, following your instincts and your reporter's radar. Painting the picture, finding the context, exploring and mining the setting. Interviewing the principals.

9/9

Due in class:

Preface of "The Art of Fact"

In class:

Discuss Reading

Storytelling

How to tell a story – plot flow, detail. What makes a story riveting? How can you make a detail bring a character to life? What elements of the tale make it jump off the page? What are the three acts of the drama? And most importantly: how do you write it? In what style?

9/11

Due in class:

The Falling Man

http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN

In class:

Skype with author

9/16

Due in Class:

First Writing Assignment:

"500 words on something you've noticed on campus."

In Class:

Discuss Essays

9/18

Due in Class:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/06/magazine/george-saunders-just-wrote-the-best-book-youll-read-this-year.html?pagewanted=all>

In class:

Writing...Discuss Reading

9/23

Due in class:

John McPhee: Pine Barrens

In class

Discuss Reading

Voice

Esquire attitude vs. *The New Yorker's* omniscience. Junod vs. McPhee.
The role of the writer's point of view. First person vs. third person. Quotes vs. narration.

How does the writer's stance enhance the story? How much of the writer's perspective should inform the narrative? How to establish a point of view without interfering with the telling of the tale.

9/25

Due in class:

Tom Wolfe: The Girl of the Year

In Class:

Write a riffy essay about riffy writing.

The edit

Knowing how to rein in the story. What elements are speed-bumps in your tale? Where have you inserted irrelevant scene/detail? How can you pare your story down so that every word counts, and propels your story?

9/30

Due in class

Bill Buford: Among the Thugs

In class

Writing: Mob rules

10/2

Due in Class:

Justin Heckert: Lost in the Wav

In Class:

Discuss Reading

Finding The Story Arc

How to connect the dots from a to z without having to worship at the shrine of chronology; where to stick in info that makes your topic more universal without interrupting the narrative

10/7

Due in class:

Chris Dittrich: Tonight on Dateline This Man Will Die
<http://www.esquire.com/features/predator0907>

In class:

Discuss Reading

Morality

What are our obligations as journalists? As citizens? Where do we find that boundary? When do we cross it?

10/9

Due in Class:

Peter Richmond: Bill Murray
<http://deadspin.com/5986709/the-sports-fan-what-i-learned-from-three-days-of-watching-baseball-with-bill-murray>

In class:

Writing.

You

What role do you play in your piece? What've we learned about voice.

10/14

NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

10/16

Due in class:

Nothing.

In class:

Writing: 500 words: The strangest thing that happened on break

10/21

Due in class:

Joan Didion The Los Angeles Notebook

Prose vs. Pomposity

How to make your writing lucid without hitting us over the head with it.

10/23

Due in Class:

Max Potter: The Vineyard assassin

<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2011/05/vineyard-poisoning-201105>

In class:

Skype with author

10/28

Due in class:

Multi-media book reports Group 1

In class:

Reports

10/30

Due In class:

Multi-media report, Group 1

In Class

Reports

11/4

Due in class:

Multi-media book reports, Group 2

In class

Reports

11/6

Due in Class:

Topic for final story

In class

Discuss topics, Group 1

11/11

Due in Class:

From Homicide, Davis Simons

In class

Writing: On a crime in your life.

Crime: Why does it compel us?

11/13

Due in Class:

"The Food Fighter," Nick Paumgarten, The New Yorker.

In class

Writing

11/18

Due in class

From Dispatches, Michel Herr

In class

Multi-modal book reports Group 3

11/20

Due in class:

Irish Women Coming of Age, Rosemary Mahoney.

In class:

Discuss topics Group Two

11/25

Due in class

The Wall Street Journal feature of the day before

In class:

Discuss topics Group 3

12/2

Due in class

"Spoiled Rotten," Elizabeth Kolbert

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/07/02/spoiled-rotten?currentPage=all>

In class

Discuss: How true does this ring?

12/4

Take home final: Your story...due 12/18