

The Puget Sound Literature Project: Secondary and University Instructors in a Teaching Team

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Forces that Preclude Professional Contact Among Teachers

It has been three years since I followed a series on education that was broadcast by KUOW, our local National Public Radio station, attracting attention to crises in Washington State schools. I tuned my car radio dial to the afternoon talk show as I commuted from my Woodinville High School classroom to my home in Seattle—twenty-five minutes of debriefing time in which I listened to the commentator’s prognosis for the ailing system in which I worked. Not much new nor consoling to a twenty-year veteran, and I would have tuned out the station with my Vivaldi tape had it not been for a topic he introduced that I had long known about but never acknowledged: teachers’ isolation and even alienation from their colleagues. Separated by thin walls, teaching professionals might as well be working in monks’ cells for the sparsity of time we have to share our successes and failures. Through the walls, we hear an occasional blossom of laughter, the soundtrack of a film—something indicating there is another classroom in session next door. I, for one, interpret the noises as coming from a classroom more successful than mine, especially if the sounds are laughing while my students are grumbling. Locked into five classes out of a six-period day, there is precious little time to seek out conversations with neighboring teachers. At the end of the day, it is all we can do to erase chalkboards, perhaps

stop by to wish each other a good evening. It seems merciful to avoid talking about the classes we taught all day, so we discuss the weather or our plans for the weekend. Multiply these silent days by years, and the structure of public schools has constructed buildings of professionals who not only don't share ideas; in their muteness they begin to resent or distrust each other. Dealt the classload that most of us teach, none can feel successful, so we suspect we are not as good as the teacher next-door, and if we develop any bonds at all, they are between ourselves and students whom we see for more hours than we see our colleagues.

What about in-service classes or advanced degrees we take at universities? Certainly we work side by side with other teachers, but we rarely convene as professionals who have authority to shape education. Most district curriculum committees are hierarchical, administrators having determined the district will adopt a program or text that teacher committees have to devise the strategies to implement. Any money for the implementation often goes to a contracted "outside" professional who tells teachers "how to do it." Likewise, university and in-service classes revert the teacher to student status. It's no surprise that many experienced teachers are cynical about their postgraduate education taken at universities, for the courses too often hypothesize about ideal classroom models and are taught by professors who have little recent public school teaching experience. Summer after summer, hopeful teachers return to universities as if climbing to Delphi for the oracle. They return to crowded classrooms with prophecies that don't speak to the 150 students of various abilities and interests whom they teach. There can't be anything wrong with the prophecy—look at the research, the authority with which the professors taught. Teachers wrongly conclude that there must be something wrong with their own abilities.

Writing Project Model and Teachers' Authority in Their Profession

Enter the Puget Sound Literature Program (PSLP). After a decade of successfully involving Pacific Northwest teachers, the Puget Sound Writing Program expanded its offerings to entice alums with additional courses that focus the writing process on specific areas of the curriculum. The Puget Sound Literature Program was born from this expansion. Intended to marry theory and practice in the teaching of literature, the three-week summer workshop teams a university professor with a secondary teacher, an alum from the Puget Sound Writing Program. The implication of the teaming is that the university professor is conversant with literary theory; the secondary teacher attuned to hands-on

activities that make those theories palpable for teachers and students. Although the theory-with-practice assumption holds true, now that I have successfully taught the course for two years with Kate Cummings (associate professor of English at the University of Washington), I have happily discovered additional virtues of the collaboration.

Planning the class with Kate in the winter and spring, I benefited from her suggested readings in literary theory. Public school teachers don't often have the time for or access to current research that surrounds a university instructor. Likewise, I was able to share with Kate the kinds of writing activities, games, and media a secondary teacher would use to translate some of those readings into high school curricula. I felt validated by having a university colleague. Kate received my knowledge of strategies that invite classroom participation.

The same kind of collaboration we experienced created the design of the class. Typically, a member of our class was in at least a fifth year of teaching and had enrolled in our class because of previous involvement with the Puget Sound Writing Project or because of word-of-mouth recommendations that indicated this class was led by "colleagues in the trenches." Our design fit nicely with the philosophy of the Puget Sound Writing Project (recently the Washington State Writing Project). That is, it affirmed that teachers are excellent instructors of teachers and that people learn best when they model or role-play the strategies they propose. What distinguishes our class from one designed after a lecture model is the time offered for metacognition, to debrief with each other about why we select a certain approach to literature.

Articulating Literary Theory

The cornerstone of our class: "Every teacher teaches from a theory of literature, even if that teacher has not consciously admitted it." Our job as instructors is to demonstrate ways we can engage our students with literature and to make teachers aware of existing academic critical schools. Teachers may even be teaching from theories that conflict with what they aspire to teach their students. This misfortune exists when teachers haven't taken time to explicate their own theories or to examine the practices they support in their classrooms, practices that may run counter to their own ideology. A case in point: I am one of hundreds of English teachers whose undergraduate schooling was steeped in New Criticism, where literature was the "well wrought urn," stolen from the social and historical context from which it was created and locked in a museum showcase where we stood outside, noting symbols, ironies, and intentional fallacies. In their high school classrooms, most teachers hope to entice students to a lifelong reading habit for pleasure, information, and insight, yet they may not understand how practices, born from inappropriate theories, may repel the students

from reading. It is a rare reader who delights in finding pathetic fallacies in personification. Also, when writing about literature, a bright student catches on to the motif game and skillfully maneuvers a five-paragraph touchdown without once ever feeling the literature in his hands.

Kate and I selected three schools of criticism to address formally. We wanted not only to show how these are distinct schools but also to demonstrate how they borrow freely from the tenets of each other: Reader Response, Feminism, and Deconstruction. We reproduced articles by Robert Probst (1988), James Marshall (1988), Helene Cixous (1981), J. Hillis Miller (1989), and others. Kate teaches much literature from contemporary culture, leading us to include selections featuring gender and ethnicity. In raising the question of what constitutes literature, we approached a variety of genres: short story, novel, poem, MTV, drama, paintings.

Most of all, the class wrote to learn literature. Just as in recent years teachers have tried to demystify the writing process for our students by having them write about their process of writing, so in our class we asked teachers to write about what informs their teaching of literature. The journal topic of the day: "Why do you teach literature?" It didn't take long to get beyond "It's in the curriculum" to discussions of a personal drive that each of us has to go at *Hamlet* one more time. We shared our writings daily. Some class members told of how they wanted students to revel in literature much as they themselves do, finding a kind of aesthetic garden in a concrete world. Others wanted students to think critically about motive and response, using literature as the vehicle. Many saw literature as a real-world arm into history. After sharing their journal entries in small groups, class members were asked to provide a "School of . . ." name to each teacher's written reflection of why he or she teaches literature. We came up with *Literary Nutritionists*, *Revel-Waders*, *Reconstructionists*, among others. Listing our coined schools on the board beside established schools (*Formalists*, *New Critics*), we acknowledged that our movements were no more nor less bizarre, and we demonstrated that just like established literary critics, we too work from theories that we need time to write out and to examine. Only then can we ask, "Are the questions we ask our students and the activities we connect with their literature ones that will lead them through our theoretical schools?" If not, then one or the other must change.

Design and Syllabus for PSLP

The Puget Sound Literature Project is a three-week summer course, taught mornings from 8:00 to 12:00. Students enroll through the University of Washington Summer Quarter or through the University

Extension depending on whether they wish credits toward a degree, clock hours, or professional advancement. Our first catalog course description read as follows:

A three-week program designed to explore a response approach to teaching literature. We ask: How can teachers help students enjoy and understand challenging literature? What literature should we teach and for what reasons? For teachers of grades 6 through 12.

We limit the class to twenty participants, a maximum classload for a workshop that allows time for each student to present a half-hour unit in the last week as well as to participate fully in the first two weeks of class.

Kate Cummings and I met periodically beginning in February to introduce ourselves, our preferences in literature, our notions about what would benefit teachers in working with literature. We agreed that most secondary teachers taught literary analysis à la New Criticism and could handle concepts of metaphor and genre. Others frequently used biographical-historical approaches, such as teaching *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the context of mid-nineteenth-century America. Therefore, we decided to select other theories of literature to feature up close the first two weeks. We chose Reader Response, Feminism, and Deconstruction for a number of reasons. We chose the first because it lends itself nicely to student involvement, recognizing that young people are experts first about their own experience. Reader Response criticism invites those connections. Feminism and Deconstruction we chose because Kate teaches with authority on both schools, and after all, that is what this collaboration is meant to do, feature our distinct authority. Also these schools often use similar vehicles in doing what they do with literature. We hoped to demonstrate that schools of thought are interdependent. After our second spring meeting, I left Kate's office with an article by Cixous (1981), tucked under my arm. Here I became the student again, for although I had heard of Feminism and Deconstruction, I could not explain their theories. I found Derrida beyond my intellectual reach. But the virtue of collaboration allowed me to be student as well as teacher, and as someone fairly representative of the people who would enroll in our class, I could ask the questions and structure activities that would clarify new trends in criticism.

The first day we spent building a sense of community in the class by structuring activities that required people to work in pairs and groups, to interview each other, to ask questions about interests and concerns. We gave students blank escutcheons with six segments that we asked them to fill in for their partners after interviewing. For each of the segments we had questions such as (1) a favorite book, (2) a time when you felt successful teaching, or (3) something you recall from childhood more from family stories than from actual memory.

Weaving in and out between the personal and teaching self, literature and literary perception, one person in the pair explained the answers for each of the six segments while the partner with crayon and pencil drew in that section a scene or symbol that typified the event. At the bottom of the coat of arms was a three-part motto ribbon that interviewers filled in with three appropriate words that summed up the way they read their partners. Following the interviewing and filling of the escutcheon, each pair introduced each other to the rest of the class, referring back to selected parts of the escutcheon. As the noon hour approached, the class was in possession of narrative and common literary, personal, and professional experiences that sealed a commonality and yet opened up concerns that we were anxious to discuss. We posted the colorful escutcheons for the remainder of the course.

Journals, learning logs, dialectic notebooks (or whatever one wishes to call them) began with the first day and continued in our thinking and sharing about the course. The first night, when Kate and I assigned the initial readings from Probst (1988) and Marshall (1988), we explained the dialectic journal. Dividing two pages into a total of four columns, the teachers took notes in the first column as they read from the selections. Notes included quotations or issues in the reading with which they agreed, disagreed, or were puzzled. In the column to the right, they took brief notes indicating why they had focused on certain sections: a specific question, a related experience, a “what if” speculation. The next day in class, the teachers exchanged notebooks and turned to the third column. Reading a partner’s citations and consequent comments, the new reader could add to the dialogue in column three by providing answers, reshaping the question, or relating common experiences. Next the notebooks were returned and the original writer, reviewing all three columns, made conclusions, speculations, or observations in the fourth column that were somewhat shaped by involving another person in their thinking about the readings.

The dialectic journal proved an excellent writing across the curriculum (WAC) activity for our students, not only in helping to focus on provocative issues in the readings but also in establishing an intellectual dialogue with the peers in the class—the kind of dialogue one would like to have when reading, but reading as a silent activity often limits inner dialogue. Reading with an open journal for quoting and questioning captures the fresh insight that comes from a first exposure to a text. Then sharing the next day those questions with others who have read the same materials, the reader has a record of first impressions and a community of responders. As a matter of fact, all our journal writing established a community of thinkers as well as an audience for some talented writers, whether that writing was done in the dialectic notebook or in reflective journal entries.

The dialectic journal activity is one that teachers could use with their students, particularly when dealing with dense, difficult materials such as poems or Shakespearean plays. In our first readings, neither the Probst nor Marshall articles was too obscure; both call for the mind of the reader in a reader response approach to literature. What makes the Marshall essay so pristine for introducing our class is that its research is based on cogent observation of typical high school classes most of us have taught. These are classes where the teacher has all the answers and stages what are called class discussions to involve students in critical reading, but what are in fact quiz sections to see if students can guess the “one correct reading” the teacher possesses. Marshall’s article goes on to show how that teacher-centered class contributes to students writing slick five-paragraph essays in which they are distanced and unthinking about literature. By virtually detonating the symbol-hopping, guess-the-theme game on the first two days of class, Kate and I were ready to point down different roads to teaching literature.

We hoped to address two issues in the class: literary theory and the literary canon. In choosing the selections to model Reader Response, Feminism, and Deconstruction, the latter two were most difficult to isolate. Many of the most readable feminist essays used reader response and deconstruction for their purposes; several crossed from issues of gender to ethnicity. As our class evolved, we began to think of deconstructing literature as the act of featuring what in the text keeps us from reading a certain point of view—that is, finding and holding up to scrutiny the minor voices in a text that the main voice of the text has subdued with the power of cultural-social stereotype. By enlarging the small picture in a text, one begins to acknowledge the premise from which the larger text is built. With that recognition, a reader is less a passive receiver of cultural expectations and more a participant in understanding.

For the literature with which to practice our theories we relied on fairy tales, selections teachers already use in their classes, and selections they might consider for their schools. (One of the course goals is to expand the current school canon.) Fairy tales are superb vehicles for deconstruction and feminist readings. We selected *Snow White* and *Hansel and Gretel* for both purposes. Students retold *Snow White* from the queen’s point of view, exposing the fault of a society in which good fortune moves to a pubescent girl because she is young and pretty, although she has not enough common sense to avoid falling for the same thinly disguised ruse three consecutive times when offered gifts by an itinerant old woman. Even blessed with youth, the female does not determine her fate, but is swept into fortune when she is a lovely corpse, possessed by a kiss from a prince who hasn’t heard one word from her and probably doesn’t wish to, as long as Snow White is

young, pretty, and silent. We had fun with these stories and many teachers have reported back that deconstructing works that their students thought they knew has opened up critical sensibilities to works that typically intimidate students: the official canon of our curriculum.

In applying feminist theory to fairy tales, we found Angela Carter's "The Company of Wolves," a revised telling of *Little Red Riding Hood*, from *The Bloody Chamber* (1981) enjoyable for our teachers. With this story we played "frame stop," asking our readers to stop at a climactic point, and to continue to write their own conclusions. The story, an obvious tongue-in-cheek feminist version with an assertive Little Red, led our students to finish the story with ironic twists and worried wolves, thus showing how a reading can either ride on cultural stereotypes or manipulate them in such a way that the informed reader can play along. When writing into literature as if stopping the frame and continuing the narrative on one's own, the writer perceives how an author establishes a tone that the reader implicitly accepts as the ongoing convention—an interesting way to learn about the impact of tone and point of view. Had Angela Carter's tone been less blatantly satirical, our readers might have finished off the tale with the version they knew from their childhoods. Not so. The author's tone implicitly suggested there would be another way to write the myth.

Other selections we introduced for working theory into practice included some pairings of traditional works in high school canons with ones not so well known: Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* with Brent Staples's *Black Men and Public Spaces*, also Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants* with Viramontes's "Birthday" from *Moths*. After reading the first two, we wrote in our journals any association we had with the stories. Both selections dealing with African-Americans showed their protagonists facing discrimination. Our students wrote about times they suffered or observed discrimination. Most often, the men in our class related to Staples as a misunderstood man. The women chose to write about Angelou's adolescent self. In other words, in our brief, unofficial study, we found that our readers as often identified with characters through gender as through race. Such observations led to discussions about what our current canon offers for both genders, and opportunities the canon gives for students to respond as empathizing readers.

What is Literature?

Not a day went by when teachers did not read aloud from journals to the class or in small groups. The practice circulated ideas and confirmed the use of our own writing as literature. When inspired with a writing activity, the journals took on a literary life that entertained writers and

readers. Too often teachers spend all their energies creating topics on which their students write, but do not write themselves. Writing and listening to each other's works nurtured our vision of teachers as creative professionals. Our own writing is literature as is film, art, and video. So in thinking of "What is literature?" in the class, Kate and I sought opportunities to use our own writing and visual texts, texts that also required "reading." A scholar in the literature of AIDS, Kate included film clips from both dramatic and documentary depictions of the AIDS crisis. Following our preliminary work deconstructing fairy tales, our students easily "read" the cultural biases and fears operating within apparently "objective" treatments of the issue.

Allan Kollar, an art historian, presented an hour of art slides with which we connected the visual and literary treatment in masterpieces. Several poets have been inspired by van Gogh's *Starry Night* and paintings by Brueghel. Working from poem to canvas and back inspired critical discussions of point of view and reader response. That session ended with our students writing their own poems about paintings by Munch, Homer, and Dali. Inevitably, to select what one writes about a painting excludes what one sees but will not include in the literary text. One adds personal experience to the visual in order to narrate and create metaphor. The art-writing connection introduced a kind of microcosm of the literary act.

Finally, we used our small consultant budget to invite a local poet to read and discuss her own work. High school students often ask their teachers, "Well, what did the writer really mean?" We respond with educated guesses or confess that without the writer with us we can never know for sure. Unfortunately many teachers do not have among their acquaintances published writers. Our guest poet added dimension to the search for meaning when she confirmed the fluid meaning of her own work.

Bridges from the University to the School Classroom

Here I add that our poet presented at one of our two potluck dinners during the three-week course. Although our workshop provided ample time for contact, it was structured time. The potlucks allowed informal sharing of what was going on in our own classes or our own school districts, public and private; the dialogue our thin-thick walls preclude during the school year.

Our curriculum for PSLP contains two more formal bridges from course to classroom: a review of some literature to add to the teachers' canon and a lesson or unit plan that launches literary theory into practice. We did not specify that the literature be of any particular genre, nor that it be print or film. After discussing the kinds of

literature we teach in our schools, we found an appalling similarity in texts: *Huckleberry Finn*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Julius Caesar*. Yet all the teachers said they were starved for new texts that would work with their students and rejuvenate their own interests. What kept them from adopting new works? Caution about appropriate subject matter or style for their grade levels and a reverence for a fixed curriculum that needed anything new to be tied in with the traditional. When at the end of our first two weeks we allowed class time to bring in a short, written review of suggestions for the canon, the teachers surrounded each other in the way one does at any good browsing bookstore. By then they were well acquainted and respectful of their classmates, eager to hear suggestions. Since we phrased the assignment to bring a suggestion for what might be included, not what one has actually taught, teachers stretched their wish lists somewhat and wrote convincing proposals for materials they perhaps had not had the opportunity to test run. We asked that the additions to the canon be written, although orally presented, so each teacher left with a nicely annotated bibliography, one that not only reviewed the new text but also imagined the way it would be incorporated in the classroom. The writing served the teacher suggesting the material as much as the students hearing the suggestions, for in writing out how they could actually integrate a new text, teachers had to envision themselves teaching the works. Teachers brought poems, essays, films, and novels. Pat Hegarty, teacher at Shorewood High School, recommended Redmond O'Hanlon's *Into the Heart of Borneo*:

Redmond O'Hanlon is part Monty Python, part Charles Darwin, a dash of David Attenborough, with perhaps a modest sprinkling of lakeland poet tossed in for purposes of gentler digestion. His narrative captures the natural beauty, majesty, violence, and comedy of life in a totally foreign, utterly non-Western environment.

In nineteen eighty-three, Redmond O'Hanlon—writer, natural historian, Oxford fellow—accompanied by his friend and poet/journalist James Fenton, undertook an expedition into the heart of the Borneo rain forest **just for the hell of it!** Ostensibly in search of the famed white rhinoceros of Borneo . . . our two latter day explorers set out, poetry books and field guides in hand, to see what's to be seen. They are rewarded with misadventure, danger, and a general fungal, awe-inspiring rain forest vacation.

This should become a part of the canon because it is a book that celebrates experience. O'Hanlon and Fenton are ideal—balding, bespectacled, and often reluctant, they struggle through their adventures, constantly adapting and growing. This spirit is one we need to see more of in the canon. Unstuffy, at times both lewd and profane, profound and beautifully poetic, *Into the Heart of Borneo* is a book that speaks to opportunity and challenge and growth and possibility—and FUN!

It is, of course, also a bridge to a multicultural canon. This book, and others like it, opens up all kinds of possible applications in the study of culture and cultural differences. Because of this, I'd like to use it with ninth-grade students. At Shorewood our freshmen study the geography of the world in social studies. I'd like to challenge and expand their map drawing with this type of literature—the literature of the traveller. This genre, a revitalized industry, takes readers out of the classroom, beyond our walls, and over the hills and far away. I can't picture an age group more open to this type of challenge than those in the ninth grade.

The final four days of PSLP, the class members each had a half hour to present a “Bridge,” a projected unit for their classrooms that used the notions we introduced in our summer workshop. Our class outline describes the Bridge this way:

A Bridge is presented orally in the last few days of class with copies made available for classmates. The Bridge is a proposed unit of study* that has evolved from the activities of this class. (Presentation time of 30 minutes.)

1. Start with an explicit pedagogical theory in approaching literature.
2. Direct the unit in the context of the theory.
3. What are the specific goals of this unit?
4. By which activities will you achieve your goals? Select some portion of the activities that you may role-play with the members of this class.
5. List any sources used in the design of your Bridge.

* A unit of study could be anything from one class period to a term.

This culminating assignment extends from the Writing Project's belief that teachers have valuable knowledge to share with their peers, given a structure and theory from which they can be expressed. Ending with the Bridges demonstrated for us what the teachers carried from our class and how they rendered this learning in terms of the students they would teach. Most of the presentations used several activities we had used in class to engage our teachers with the theories we taught: activities where students took physical stances in the room according to whether they sided with heroes or villains, writing activities where each student became an “expert” by writing from a card with one question about a motif that would later show up in the literature they would study, or viewing experiences where art slides launched points of view. The Bridges demonstrated our students' comfort with new terms such as deconstruction. What pleased me was the variety of innovations teachers played around with: units centered around teaching not a specific work so much as a theme or idea. These included units on

masks, roles of women, and political sensibility. Where teachers wrote about specific works they had taught for several years, the class had inspired the teacher to try a unique approach. Helen Frost, teacher of a tenth-grade Honors class at Woodinville High School introduced her Bridge:

In the preface of *The Odyssey* (Penguin), W. H. D. Rouse explains that the story “enchants every man, lettered and unlettered, and every boy who hears it.” *Man the Voyager*, another *Odyssey* reader, introduces the major hero adventure with “a son searches for his father, . . . a wife dreams of her husband.” The language used to introduce this story points to a problem for classroom reading and teaching: *The Odyssey* conspicuously portrays the male as the hero who undertakes the perilous journey, while the females, many of them powerful in evil, destructive ways, play the role of the monster and impede his journey. A conventional reading of the various myths in the story ignores the female journey, whatever it may be, in favor of the myths of “woman as temptress/seductress/witch.” Despite the distorted, narrow portrayal of a woman in *The Odyssey*, there exists, using deconstructive techniques, the possibility of a fuller reading of a woman’s journey in terms of the text, future texts, and the reader’s life.

Helen’s Bridge paired *The Odyssey* and *Circe* by Eudora Welty with the notion of the male and female hero in a journey as discussed between Bill Moyer and Joseph Campbell in the video “The Power of Myth.”

Maggie King Everett designed “Bridging Value Systems” for her eighth-grade language arts class. She begins her philosophical focus:

A large part of my job as a language arts instructor is to help students to see how language shapes and focuses our lives; to examine what is done in terms of what is said. I’d like very much to do a series of readings focusing on the question of what it means to “Do the Right Thing.” Taking Spike Lee’s film as a cue, I want students to read texts of various genres (including visual and musical “texts”) and look at how language leads us to see things from differing points of views.

Maggie’s texts included:

- *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck
- *Rashomon* by Ryunosuke Akutagawa
- *If Ya Wanna Dance, You Gotta Pay the Band* by Stanley Gray
- *Thank you M’am* by Langston Hughes
- *Newsweek* article about Oliver North & Irangate
- *Enemy of the People* by Henrik Ibsen
- *Spare Parts* by Bruce Springsteen

The culminating Bridges helped me see how the first two weeks of writing activities served our students when it came time to design their own projects. Because we had written our way into articulating our own literary theories, the students felt prepared to articulate their own theories at the beginning of the Bridges, without feeling constrained to phrase their theories in established schools of criticism. Our coined theories had become household phrases in our classroom, so we had come to call each other “Revel-waders” or “Literary Nutritionists.” Each Bridge opened with a version of those self-examinations that students had written in their journals the previous weeks.

Secondly, all Bridges included some writing-one’s-way-into-literature activities through which the students led us in their presentations. For instance, Helen gave each of us a card with a separate question on which we would become the expert by being the only person in class to write a solution or explanation of that question. My question was “What do you write to your spouse back home when you’re delayed several weeks on your business trip and you want to affirm your spouse’s loyalty to you?” I happily wrote away on my letter, thinking of my own husband. Helen had compiled a set of different questions for each student, introducing *The Odyssey* by making us feel as if we were a published expert on the epic before we had begun to study it. Sharing aloud our topics and our responses to them, we were all eager to know what exciting literary work might lie ahead of us. I had introduced a similar “expert card” approach to *Hamlet* earlier in the course. By making writing central in our instruction in literary theory, Kate and I inspired our students to employ writing in the lessons they designed to engage their own students with literature.

Evaluation

One Saturday the following January our class members met once again for a reunion to talk about how we crossed those Bridges from our summer school PSLP experience and our real-world classes. Some teachers had not yet taught their units, waiting for the appropriate place in the curriculum, available texts, and so on, but most had tried their Bridges as written. Undoubtedly, the best part of the reunion day was the chance to reunite with colleagues with whom we had written and exchanged ideas that summer. It is that room-without-walls collaboration that revitalizes our teaching. Just as we had explored in the idealism of summer, this group felt secure enough to confess what real-world circumstances they returned to that fall that might have curtailed a one hundred percent success of their applied learning. We were still applying, still adapting. The advantage of this workshop

as opposed to a traditional summer class is that our adapting occurred in a community of understanding peers.

Writing together in the summer, especially when the writing is daily, exploratory, and shared, seals the community. Often teachers talk eagerly about their profession, and we did a lot of valuable talking. However, our writing cemented things. Initially, we wrote alone, allowing each one to get a complete thought expressed without being interrupted, as so often happens in discussions. But immediately after or the following day, we shared our writing, either reading aloud, passing our journal to someone else, or writing addenda to ideas started by each other. We learned to appreciate each other for our distinct written voices, which, by the way, are not necessarily the echo of our spoken voices. Within a couple of days, we knew who were the surprising, often gifted writers, and we came to encourage them to read aloud, much as we turn to gifted orators to share a few words. Finally, we took home with us our own written journals, copies of each Bridge presented, and a collection of new works to add to the canon. Back in our separate classrooms that fall, we turned to that collection as we slowly changed the ways in which we taught literature.

On behalf of the collaboration between high school and university instructor I will say that I am professionally renewed by those three weeks tacked on to my school year. I don't wish to return to school for a Ph.D., but I still want to learn what is new in English. Having to design a course for my peers, I have to articulate for them and for myself some premises that need shaking out in the fresh air every few years. Finally, the collaboration allows me to teach a different age group without leaving my area of specialty altogether. What ideal students teachers are. They come to class ready to learn, they work diligently to apply what I share, their presence dissolves the walls that separate me from colleagues between September and June.

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