"WRITING DOWN IS A WAY OF LETTING GO":
INDIVIDUALS USING WRITING TO RETURN TO "REMEMBERED WELLNESS"


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by
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

"WRITING DOWN IS A WAY OF LETTING GO":

INDIVIDUALS USING WRITING TO RETURN TO "REMEMBERED WELLNESS"

presented by Rebecca C. Dierking,

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.


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Dedication

This dissertation is in memory of Dr. E.L. "Dirk" Dierking.  His life and death inspired much of my own writing as healing and lead me to this topic in research.  He will always be a pivotal influence on my life.

And, of course, this work is dedicated to my mother, Sylvia H. Dierking, who has been my friend, my confidant, and my counselor throughout my doctoral work—and those pesky years previously.  You are always my first call.

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ABSTRACT

This research studies how individuals in a graduate education course, examining the therapeutic uses of language, literature, and media, practiced these theoretical concepts in their own lives.  A critical case study, this work looks at six specific participants to illustrate how they employed the characteristics of "writing as healing" to better understand or heal from a trauma in their past.  In part, the work looks at the participants' attitudes toward writing as healing and how those attitudes affected the individual's overall take-away from the writing; how audience impacted the healing from writing; and  the motivating factors behind each writing piece.  Additionally, the study also looks at the impact for education such writing offers.

Chapter 1: Introduction

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Why I chose this topic

In December 2001, I wrote the following poem:

A Chance Encounter

I spoke with my father today.
It's been years since our last conversation.
"Becky, how is school?  Have the kids taken over yet?"
I smile broadly as my vision blurs.
"No, Dad, not yet.  But, boy, do they have hopes."

A five minute call to wish happy birthday
turns in to an almost hour long chat,
talking of the holidays, family,
and times spent together.
The $20 pizza we just had to have
'cause it was our special, standing, Saturday lunch date
which turned into a $200 pizza
when we high-centered the Buick in a snow drift.
"Mom sure was mad."
"Yeah, but that pizza was just perfect."
It wasn't the pizza that was perfect.

Sprint counts the rushing minutes,
and the call draws to a close.
He tires, regresses,
"Boo, when are you coming home?
We missed you at supper."
I answer—pretend I'm a teen once more.
Then for one more brief moment he reemerges,
"Don't work too hard."
"I won't......Dad?"
Who knows if we'll have this chance again.

> "What, honey?"
> "I love you, Dad."
> "I love you too."
>
> I replace the receiver, sit, and stare at the wall
> for today he turned seventy,
> and for one ephemeral hour, I received the gift:
> no longer a missing link in the memory chain.
> Instead, I mourned even as I rejoiced.
> My father knew me.

As the poem states, my father had just turned seventy, and this was the last

conversation we had together.  Five years before, he had been forced to retire by the

United Methodist Church because of numerous issues, like forgetting meetings and

getting lost in the service; within months he would be "diagnosed" with Alzheimer's

dementia (a true diagnosis of Alzheimer's dementia at that time could only occur with

an autopsy).  Within two years of the phone call described in this poem, Dad died.  The

years of his illness and his quick but steady decline are the singularly most difficult time

span of my life.

At the time of Dad's diagnosis, I was twenty-five and a student at Northwest

Missouri State University, working towards a master's degree and earning teaching

licensure.  My siblings are all at least a decade older and had long since left home to

establish their own lives and families.  Other than one friend whose father had died

when she was in elementary school, none of my friends had lost a parent or been

unfortunate enough to have a parent contract a life-altering illness.    Thus, I felt alone in

my situation.  I could not further burden my family, especially my mother, who were all

experiencing the same degrees of sorrow and were trying themselves to come to terms

with Dad's mournful prognosis. I also could not approach friends for support since they had no frame of reference to help me weather Dad's situation.

So, I turned to writing.  In junior high and again in high school, I had lost friends to death—one to suicide and the other to natural causes.  Both times, writing had been an outlet for me to express my grief and a place to try to find understanding and resolution.  Now, as an adult, I used writing again to vent my rage and misery, to try to comprehend why my father slowly stopped recognizing me over the months of his illness.  Most of the time it helped.  When I shared pieces in my writing group, I found new friends who had sustained this same illness in a grandparent, which helped ease my heart.  Sharing it with my writing group also helped embolden me to share it publicly, in readings in St. Joseph when writing teachers read their compositions on Missouri Western State University's campus.  In these events, I found even further encouragement as audience members shared their stories with me after the events ended.  Also, I found that I could return that assistance, usually offering advice to write about their own unique version of dealing with dementia.

During this time, I earned my degree and certification and began teaching.  Each year I noticed more and more of my students turning in their own "write it out" expressions—in poetry, in narrative essays, in research papers, in journal entries, and more.  One student's poetry book was filled with her descriptions and discussion of her mother's breast cancer; each poem dense with the girl's emotions.  Another boy took his research paper as a place to examine his ADHD, expressing his emotions about having the condition but then going a step further and finding out what could be done

to better help him.  He went to his next doctor's appointment armed with information about holistic and pharmaceutical treatments, impressing his doctor and his mother with his initiative.  I was writing to heal from my trauma—but so were my students.

When I entered the University of Missouri, I was naively unaware that writing as healing was a "valid" topic for research.  However, when I learned that not only was it valid but also that my advisor taught a class examining it, I knew I had to pursue writing as healing for this dissertation.  I wanted to know more about how writing helped others to resolve traumatic situations, and I wanted to know how this writing fit into education.  This dissertation is a start toward fulfilling that bounty of knowledge, but I still have much to learn.

The Problem

The core principle of existentialism espouses: "to live is to suffer; to survive is to find meaning in that suffering."  Suffering, therefore, is unavoidable as long as a person lives.  And, obviously, "suffering" is a relative condition.  One may suffer through a boring lecture or suffer the side-effects of radiation treatment.  Thus, everyone has some sort of trauma, some situation or event, from which they need resolution or healing.  And, further, when people experience trauma, they often become "stuck" in their own linear view of what happened or what the situation is.  As Johnson (1946) says, they become "maladjusted."  That is the problem presented here: these cases have experienced some problem and have become stuck in their thinking on it, needing to have something jar them out of their thinking and open them to new perspectives.

Every person taking this course has troubles: money issues, relationship issues, death, taxes, diabetes, and so on. These forces can negatively impact the person's life. However, how does one survive such situations? The existentialists say that one survives in order to find meaning. Writing as healing is one potential vehicle to find that meaning from suffering. During my father's protracted decline, I often asked the rhetorical question "why?" Why did this have to happen? Why was it happening to my father, to my family, to me? Why? Eventually, I resolved the issue. I realized that since my paternal grandmother also had dementia, a genetic trait exists in the Hall/Dierking lineage that "turns on" the protein build-up in the brain. I also realized that the time spent with Dad after his diagnosis was richer, more appreciated than the time before it. I appreciated the time more and I better "attuned" to him. Plus, my interactions with my family took on new hues: I was more mindful of Mom's needs, I kept in better contact with my siblings, and though they still irritate me on occasion, I work more to bring us together as a family rather than accepting the "status quo."

I believe the six cases presented here, and the countless other individuals who are experiencing some form of trauma in their lives, are asking "why?" and ruminating, becoming stuck, in that contemplation or viewpoint. In Naoto's case, why did his friend develop cancer and die, why couldn't Naoto do more for his friend, get him to better doctors, and ensure that his life was prolonged. In Kent's case, why did he not tell his parents about Finn's drug use, why did he not get help for his brother, why is he still feeling guilty years after everything is over. Nisha, I'm sure, wonders why her sister was taken from her so young, why she could not have a longer, more satisfying life. For his

part, Francis probably asks why he didn't respond better when his girlfriend called home

from college all those decades ago, why he had to experience that heartbreak, and so

on.

The world asks why. Why do bad things happen to good people, to use a book

title from the 1980s. Writing as healing helps the individual perceive the issue, perceive

other perspectives of the issue, and perhaps find the answer to why. For instance,

Francis found that his failed first love enabled him to have a fuller, richer, more lasting

love with his current wife. Kent found that his actions were not unlike those of other

siblings of drug users and that everyone, especially Finn, had a responsibility in what

happened, not just Kent. Naoto found anew his joy in his friendship, a peaceful

resolution to losing his friend, and that Naoto had done all he possibly could to help his

friend.

The Rationale

The philosophy of writing as healing is rooted in the field of counseling, wherein

counselors or therapists often have their clients write about their experiences. This can

be in narrative form or as journaling or in poetic form or in some other mode that the

counselor feels will best suit the situation. Within this document's literature review, I

have referenced several authors (Bolton, 1999, Bracher, 1999, Carroll, 2005, Farber,

2005, Feirstein, 2003, and Wright, 2002) who are currently using some form of "the

writing cure" with their patients in a clinical setting. However, Pennebaker (1997 &

2007) led the charge of studying the effects of this type of writing outside the therapist's

office.  With his quantitative studies of his psychology students at the University of

Texas, he looked at writing about trauma's effects on college students' health.

What Pennebaker found was that writing improved many levels of the students'

health and well-being.  In general, their number of visits to the student health center

dropped dramatically in contrast to their earlier levels and in contrast to the control

group's numbers.  He also noticed that the writing group's grades improved while the

control group's dropped.  In other tests, Pennebaker found that the writing group's

immune functioning increased, making them less apt to grow sick communicative

diseases than their peers who didn't use writing to heal.  Additionally, he noted that

disclosure of events, not necessarily just in writing, aided Vietnam veterans in avoiding

flashbacks, which of course, had self-evident positive benefits on their health and well-

being.  This disclosure also had immediate health benefits, such as heart rate lowered,

blood pressure lowered, and/or sweating stopped/reduced.

After Pennebaker, others took up the research charge, examining writing as

healing's traits (De Salvo, 1999, Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) and what makes writing

therapeutic outside a clinical setting.  And, of course, some looked at how individuals

not currently taking therapy could employ it for personal traumas (Furman, 2004).

Teachers also examined its results in the k-12 classroom (Nugent, 1994, and Antzoulis,

2003) as well as the collegiate classroom (Moran, 2004).  Antzoulis' portrayal of writing

as healing is especially interesting as she was teaching at a school near the World Trade

Center on 9/11 and, in the intervening weeks, used writing to help her students cope

with the effects of that terrorist event.  All these researchers, theorists, and teachers

found that writing whether inside a clinical session or in a classroom or on one's own

has beneficial effects, especially if it comprises certain traits, like linking emotion to

writing, examining the situation presented from multiple perspectives, and so on.

From my own perspective, as enumerated earlier, my students would often

spontaneously and of their own accord using the class's writing assignment to help

them deal with, resolve, or just understand problematic situations in their lives.

Colleagues at every level of education who know this subject is my research interest

have taken to sharing their stories of students' using journal entries, poems, research

papers, or essays to express their emotions about an issue in their lives and to find some

measure of closure or a solution. Even if Dr. Fox had not deliberately chosen to focus

the course around examining the phenomenon "writing as healing," he probably would

have received an example or more of such writing acts.  However, he did base this

course on writing as healing.  "Teaching Therapeutic Language, Literature, and Media"

allowed participants to examine the theory of "writing as healing" and also to practice

it, to learn through reading but also through experience.  The course was both a seminar

and a laboratory.

The Research Questions

This study centered on the examination of how students used writing within a

graduate-level seminar course focusing on the use of various media for therapy.  As

such, the following questions guided my actions:

- What topics do the participants choose to write about?  How does the topic

   and the severity of the trauma it expresses influence the quality of healing

experienced through writing?

- What other writing as healing events have participants experienced?  How does having experience with writing to heal influence the quality of the current writing to heal experience?

- What attitudes do the participants bring to the writing to heal experience— and how do these attitudes influence the outcome of the writing to heal experience?

    o If participants resist writing and its abilities as a healing art, what occurs that moves them beyond that boundary?  What is the motivation—internal, external, or something that the instructor or classmates do?

    o What forms does potential resistance take?

- What effect do other modes of expression play upon writing as healing?

- How does knowing (face-to-face) the audience affect the writer's healing through writing?

- What factors encourage the use of writing to heal?

A Synopsis of the Literature Review

In order to study writing as healing as part of a college course, numerous themes needed to be explored in the literature.  Writing as healing has a dual nature.  It is at once therapy and also a means of communication.  Thus, I first had to examine the dimension of "healing," namely disclosure, images, and general semantics. Then, I looked at writing's components:  rhetoric and voice, narrative, free writing, poetry, and

peer writing groups.  Finally, I also looked at the entire concept, writing as healing: personal/professional examples, trauma, characteristics, and effects.

Disclosure, images, and semantics

Disclosure is a tenuous activity.  The individual who is disclosing information has to first trust the person or people to whom information is revealed. Within that statement is another truth about disclosure: it can happen one-to-one or one person to an entire group.  In the United States and elsewhere, Christians may be familiar with the practice of confession, whereby one person discloses his or her perceived sins to a trusted authority, such as a priest in the Catholic belief system.  However, in the South African practice of Masekitlana, a person reveals his or her iniquity to the entire community or social group.  The dominant feature that keeps people from disclosing, though, is shame, not wanting to reveal their role in an event.

In this course, disclosure occurred not only through writing but also through imagery, predominantly photography but also some drawing. This linking of words and imagery was not by chance, as Lanham (2007) states that the two are indivisible in contemporary communication.  Part of using imagery is picking the medium; as McCluhan (2003) stated, the medium must fit and add meaning to the message conveyed.  Obviously, in using imagery, symbol systems become important to the meaning conveyed as well.

When people form internal images, they do so through their own perspective, which can be different from other perspectives as it is colored by the person's former

experiences as well as their beliefs and biases.  Therefore,  the perceived memory can be vastly different from reality.

When people see only their own perspective of events, general semantics researchers, Hayakawa and Hayakawa (1991) say they are using a two-valued orientation, an either-or mindset.  However, the writing in the course was designed to broaden that view to a multi-valued orientation, whereby participants recognized other perceptions of what happened.  When people perceive their world, they create a mental "map" of the situation, but when the person's map doesn't match the actual territory— when they've let their biases or beliefs or something else persuade them to see the situation differently than it really is—they become what Johnson (1946) calls "maladjusted."  It mires one into one way of thinking, perhaps keeping one in a two-valued orientation.  People can contribute to this situation by pushing away strategies that would open reality to their perception and instead employ methods to keep reality at bay.  One of these tactics is the use of abstractions.  When individuals use concrete labels for things, such as "Ford Escape," they see the thing for what it is: a four wheeled SUV with a motor, gears, and so on.  But, if they were to use the more abstract label "car" or the even more abstract label "conveyance," they distance themselves from seeing the thing as the thing. "Conveyance" can be anything from a hang-glider to a steam ship to a unicycle.  It is virtually meaningless.

Another semantic element of writing as healing is Johnson's "law of identity." People tend to forget that the word is not the thing; they synonymize the word with the thing, forgetting that John is more than a teacher but also a parent, a man, a son, etc.

"John" is actually a construct the mind has created, not the person himself.  Often when people equate the word with the thing they also give it a power it truly doesn't hold on its own.  This is when "unspeakable" words are formed. Think of this concept like "Voldemort" in the Harry Potter books; because people equate his power with his name, he becomes "he who must not be named."  Voldemort's power has seemingly become bound with his name.  This can also happen with time, events are frozen in time within our memories and, thus, so are our perceptions of those events—unless we "thaw" them somehow.

All of these element can contribute to another semantic situation:  IFD.  This acronym stands for idealization, frustration, demoralization.  When we have two-valued orientations, for instance, we can idealize a situation, a place, a person.  Let's say, for instance, I idealized my father, saw him as some super hero.  Using the law of identity, Dad equaled super hero.  When he didn't react as I perceived a super hero should, I began to grow frustrated; he wasn't living up to expectations.  Finally, when either more proof of his being human arose or he did something that was so out of super hero character, I grew demoralized.  Then, my two-valued orientation crumbled and could perhaps revert to another two-valued perception, Dad is a cad.  My time-bound impression of events that caused my demoralization freezes, and my map is stuck not matching my territory.  I am maladjusted.

Writing.  Writing is a deliberate act. It is the conscious undertaking to communicate, whether with oneself or with others.  Day-Lewis (cited in Murray, 1982) stated that writers do so not to be understood by others but to themselves understand.

As mentioned earlier, the audience for writing can be oneself or others.  This forms one point on the rhetorical triangle, with the other two being author and purpose. A related element to rhetoric is voice.  Lamott states, "The truth of your experience can only come through in your own voice....You cannot write out of someone else's big dark place; you can only write out of your own" (p. 199).  Applying this to the triangle, it must be the author's voice, the author's purpose, and to a certain extent, the author's audience for the full message to be conveyed.

Often when we are sharing ourselves in writing, we do so using narrative.  It is the oldest method of entertainment and learning and tends to be based in memory—such as autobiography or memoir. The term "narrative" has a certain formality, an implication of certain chronology and elements, like dialogue, anecdotes, imagery, and the like.

Another form of writing used in this course is free writing.  Advocated by Peter Elbow, it is a much more informal use of writing but just as valid as narrative.  Self-explanatory, it is the free flow of writing, usually to a topic, that happens within a determined time frame, usually 10-15 minutes.  One of the few forms of writing that has no judgment attached to it, its practitioners are focused on exploring a topic, on recording whatever is flowing in their heads, and have little fear of failing.  In therapy it is often used but termed "self-expressive" or "free association" writing.  It's this element that links it so well with writing as healing, because it engenders opportunities for individuals to become "unstuck" in their thinking or to uncover previously hidden understandings.

Another mode of writing, poetry, was also used in this course, but as Bolton (1999) states, "Writing poetry is different" (p. 119). For one, it usually looks dramatically different from prose on the page.  It is a distillation of image and feeling to its most concise form on the page.  However, its tight dimensions also give the poet a sense of control, which some researchers believe helps the maladjusted.  Its use of metaphor, imagery, and voice also helps make poetry healing because it at once makes emotions and events tangible but also retains a distancing "safe place" to re-examine events.  However, poetry—and all writing—is not a panacea, otherwise Sylvia Plath and other poets who committed suicide would still be alive.

Peer groups are also an important part of writing because they give the author a different perspective.  They also provide critical feedback that can give the writer a glimpse into his or her audience's thinking.  Communication is a symbiotic process—the writer must send the message, but the author is also dependent upon the audience to receive and process the message in the way he or she intended. Like with disclosure, this implies a measure of trust between author and audience.

Writing as Healing. Part of the problem with "writing as healing" is that the name is a misnomer.  It implies that one must have undergone some great trauma in order to use it effectively.  That is not so.  "Trauma" in itself is also a bit of a misnomer, implying dramatics and catastrophe. Sure, trauma can be those things: surviving a tsunami or enduring a near-fatal illness.  However, trauma can be smaller, more mundane acts, like the daily stress of trying to meet all one's bills.  No matter the magnitude of trauma, each instance shares certain characteristics, like a perceived lack

of control.  Additionally trauma survivors at first recall events in terms of images and

sounds, not in narrative fashion, because their brain stored the event as senses, not

words.  Retention of trauma, not resolving it, can be detrimental to health. In teens it

can negatively affect their neurological development.  It can change personality long-

term, and can manifest physically later in life.  However, verbalizing, like in this course,

can remediate some of those aspects.

Walking through the autobiography or memoir section in a book store or library,

one is likely to find numerous examples of an author using writing to heal.   Professional

novelists, theorists, researchers, and others have used writing to resolve their own

situations.  Isabel Allande is a dramatic example of this occurring. A former journalist

and now a novelist by trade, she turned to memoir when her daughter inexplicably

settled into a coma and eventually died.  Her writing Paula, the account of that time as a

letter to her daughter, exemplifies writing that heals.

Typically writing that heals has certain characteristics.  For instance, it usually

links emotions with the event, providing a form of catharsis. However, theorists and

researchers debate another characteristic: audience.  Some, like Pennebaker (1997 &

2007) state that this writing should be first and foremost for the person him/herself.

However, others, like DeSalvo (1999), argue that it should be shared, that part of the

healing is seeing that one is not alone in experiencing this situation.  Of course, a

supportive environment, if one is sharing pieces of writing as healing, is important.  As

seen with disclosure and peer groups, trust is critical for writing as healing to be

effective.

However, if one practices writing in order to find some resolution to a problem or issue, it may have immediate negative effects. Confronting an emotionally-laden memory or situation will, of course, engender a negative reaction. Nevertheless, sticking with it may provide direct mitigation to the effects of the initial trauma. It is not a magic pill, though. It can reduce or eliminate physical symptoms resulting from trauma-induced stress. Other researchers have found that it aids in regulating emotions and them more flexible. Of course, it widens the perspective of the author, helping him or her become a more fully developed individual. It puts authors "in tune" with themselves and their world in a more realistic way.

The Course

Entitled "Teaching Therapeutic Language, Literature, and Media," the course is a graduate-level seminar populated mainly by master's and doctoral-level students. Meeting once a week for three hours, this course met for sixteen weeks during the winter (spring) session at a major Midwestern university.

Dr Fox, the instructor of the course, based the class on five principles:

- ❑ Using evidence-based and standards-based teaching to also enhance students' wellness.

- ❑ Using a variety of writing prompts and literature to elicit and develop oral and written language to explore major life events.

- ❑ Revising writing as a means of increasing one's control over major life events.

❑ Employing specific elements of general semantics to explore major

life events in rational, grounded ways.

❑ Employing specific rhetorical and semiotic elements (such as

specificity, objectivity, word-choice, metaphor, imagery, humor,

receptivity, audience-awareness, freewriting, metalanguage, graphics

and design, music, and sound) to create messages that promote

wellness.  (syllabus, January 19, 2010)

These principles are seen in nearly every element of the class.  For instance, the second

principle, "Using a variety of writing prompts and literature to elicit and develop oral

and written language to explore major life events," was seen every week of the

semester, as students read pieces of literature, either embedded in theoretical texts or

as stand-alone pieces, as models of the compositions they were asked to create almost

every other week.  Foy's depiction of his son's death and how Foy took it upon himself

to make the boy's coffin elicited from Francis a description of his own son's brush with

medical issues and Francis' role in how those medical issues played out.

Francis' narrative is just one example of the ten individual pieces students wrote

throughout the semester in response to literature they read.  At the end of the

semester, they were required to take these pieces and create a portfolio which included

a collage project, connecting several of the ten pieces together.  Additionally, as

educators themselves, the portfolio was to include students' ideas of how this

topic/process linked to the state standards for k-12 education.  Finally, the portfolio also

included the results of a case study each student conducted using two of the writing

assignments with an individual(s) to see what results were found.

Each week, the class began with a freewriting activity which usually

encompassed 10-15 minutes. Then, students participated in a Socratic seminar focused

on the reading assignment. Depending if an assignment was due that evening or not,

class would either continue with an activity related to the next assignment and a

discussion of that assignment or a time for peer writing groups to meet and discuss their

compositions. The peer writing groups—as well as the comments received from Fox,

myself, and the other participant/observer/researcher—were important as they align

with the course's third principle listed above, "Revising writing as a means of increasing

one's control over major life events." As stated earlier, each action, each requirement,

linked in some fashion to those principles.

The Participants

Twelve graduate students completed the seminar and the study, pursuing either

master's or doctoral degrees. Four students were international students from Asia, and

the others were all from the United States. Half of the students were full-time students

of the university, five of the others were full-time teachers in the public schools, and the

twelfth student was a retired school teacher taking the course out of an interest in the

subject, not for university credit. I have chosen six critical cases to present in this

dissertation: Naoto, Mei-Zhen, Nisha, Kent, Francis, and Robin.

Naoto is in his twenties, from an Asian country, and had only recently begun his

doctoral degree. While he began the course writing about several different topics—his

sister, death, an email he had received from a friend—he eventually settled on discussing his friend who was battling cancer.  Unfortunately, that friend died mid-way through the semester, giving Naoto even more reason to need healing.  His perspective proved interesting since he was the only participant in the study who was in the midst of his trauma; the others focused on event that occurred, if not years prior, at least a year in the past.

The other international student in this study, Mei-Zhen, is also from Asia.  She is in her late-twenties, early thirties, and was in the middle of her doctoral degree.  Her husband, her main support system, also came to the United States to live while she earned her degree.  Mei-Zhen's transition into American life at the university was not a smooth one.  She experienced a high level of stress due to culture shock.  However, her experiences with a professor in her program started to sooth her emotions.  Her writing to heal experiences in this course seemed to add to her sense of ease and belonging, as she chose her culture shock as her topic for the course work.

Originally, Nisha, professed an interest in using writing to resolve her feelings about her sister's death.  However, she never seemed to fully embrace either her issue or the process.  From a visually distinctive minority group and a woman in her late forties, early fifties, Nisha's resistance may have stemmed from many sources:  her being obviously different from everyone else in the class, her cultural background as being from a historically oppressed population in American, or just reticence to confront the issues surrounding her sister's death.  Instead, she wrote on a variety of topics that only ephemerally touched on her sister.

Kent is a Caucasian male, in his late twenties, from a small town in the Midwest. His parents are teachers, well-respected individuals in their bucolic agricultural community. When Kent's brother was arrested for drug possession in high school, it unraveled the entire family's understanding of their "Leave It To Beaver" existence. Kent, for his part, was still experiencing guilt in his role at keeping his brother's drug usage secret from their parents and chose his brother's arrest as his topic throughout the semester.

More senior in age than his fellow students, Francis may have a bigger reservoir of experiences to draw from in his writing. Married for several decades, he is a retired school teacher as well as a former professional musician. Originally from the South, he tends to be a story teller, answering questions in narrative. For his topic, Francis chose to examine his first "real" relationship, his first love from high school. While it took his writing about the events of that relationship and its demise in stages, he eventually confronted the reason of his lingering unease—not necessarily his actions or her actions that caused the end of the relationship but Francis' own mid-life crisis.

Robin, whose pseudonym I've taken from Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, reminds me of his namesake: a cheerful, mischievous, witty sprite. An established educator in his town, he is in his mid-thirties and the father or two small children. While initially reluctant to choose a topic and to "write to heal," he settles in to examine his semester abroad as an undergrad, when several of the foundations of his life crumbled, mainly his belief in Catholicism and his avoidance of alcohol.

Chapter 2:  Literature Review

Disclosure
Images
Semantics
Writing
      Rhetoric and Voice
      Narrative
      Free Writing
      Poetry
      Response & Feedback
      Writing to Heal
            Trauma
            Personal/Professional Examples
            Characteristics
                  emotion and event
                  catharsis
                  audience
                  environment
                  other characteristics
            Effects

"Write, write, or die."
      --H.D.

This study focuses on a graduate English education course that examined,

created, and/or practiced writing as healing, visual/media literature, academic writing,

and the standards associated with teaching English.  The study's goal included exploring

how the course's students used various types of composition to create a level of healing

in their lives.  Most students in education courses intend for the course content to

inform their teaching or other aspects of their professional lives.  However, while the

students may have anticipated learning more about composition (in writing and other

modes) that they could then transition to their own classroom, they also gained a

measure of self-understanding and/or therapy in the process.  Thus, the course

benefited multiple aspects of the students' lives:  professional and personal and maybe

even the grey areas in between.

Topics discussed in Chapter Two include: Disclosure, Images, General Semantics,

and Writing.  As elements of Writing, the following will also be examined:  Rhetoric and

Voice, Narrative, Free Writing, Poetry, Peer Groups, and Writing to Heal.

Disclosure

The focus of this study is written composition and how it can help one heal from

a variety of experiences.  Generally, though, before writing was used to heal, talking was

employed; this is true for many in this course as well—that they have talked about the

issue before writing about it.  Thus, looking at literature related to oral disclosure can

influence how individuals look at written disclosure, particularly when individuals are

resistant to disclosing their experiences.  And, as a caveat, much of how we address

what is written is couched in oral terminology—Pennebaker states, DeSalvo says, and so

on—so this blurring of the line is a somewhat natural process, dating back to when the

second literacy (writing) developed out of the first (orality)  (Ong, 2000).

Georges (in Pennebaker, 2007) defines disclosure as a "symbolic healing:  a

therapy that is based on the ritual use of words and symbols" (p. 12).  But Stiles (in

Pennebaker, 2007) defines it as solely an act of speech, an oral process, adding it is

usually on-record, coded, and set apart.  Stiles also distinguishes between "edification"

and "disclosure":  edification is observably true or false, whereas disclosure is a "reading

of the mind" (p. 74). However, looking at the general denotation of disclosure finds it

involves revealing information, usually about the self, an act potentially making the

discloser vulnerable to his listener.  In this more general definition, no specific medium

is stipulated, which fits this study better.

Disclosure—or "confession" which usually implies some religious connotation, a

reference to sin and atonement—has been used for millennia.  The Stoics used written

disclosure in journals and letters to improve themselves morally and medically (Georges,

in Pennebaker, 2007).  In later generations Christians, from the earliest practitioners to

today's believers, use confession to expose their sins and, like the Stoics, improve their

moral behavior.  In Western civilizations confession has evolved to the more

psychologically used term, "disclosure," whereby people reveal their actions, thoughts,

and beliefs due to stresses and find a measure of relief through catharsis and reflection

(Stiles, in Pennebaker, 2007).  Disclosure, currently, is most closely associated with

Freudian psychology's "talking cure," a verbalization of memories to free oneself from

symptoms and effects of disorders (Bucci, in Pennebaker, 2007).

As Pennebaker (1997) found, disclosure spans geography, time, race, religion,

and many other boundaries.  For instance, the South African practice of Masekitlana

induces the individual to tell a story to his peers about a traumatic experience (Kekae-

Moletsane, 2008).  Likewise, other groups around the globe seek to use disclosure as

either an individual or communal healing experience.  The Ifaluk of Micronesia seek to

expel emotions verbally.  The Kwara'ae and A'ara of the Solomon, Hawaiian, and

Nukulaelae Islands use disclosure as both a corrective and a preventative measure

(Wellenkemp, in Pennebaker, 2007).  Even more interesting, the Ndembu of West Africa

use disclosure not only with the individual but have friends and family of the sick or

traumatized person disclose their experiences, often multiple times (Georges, in Pennebaker, 2007).

However, other cultures do not promote such measures. The Toraja, Balinese, and Javanese of Indonesia as well as the Chinese all seek to live in a state of equanimity, avoiding extreme feeling, some within these cultures developing extensive methods to avoid ruminating on a problem or other cause of distress (Wellenkemp, in Pennebaker, 2007). Obviously, some fluctuations occur in individual members of those societies. And, of course, these examples form only a small sampling of the many cultures and their disclosure practices found globally.

No matter where disclosure happens, certain traits are universal. Typically people disclose to friends and family soon after the occurrence, assuming that the immediate audience is receptive to such revelations and other inhibiting factors, which will be discussed later, are not present (Stiles, in Pennebaker, 2007). This audience, for want of a better term, must hold a certain level of trust for the discloser, as the telling of the experience can irrevocably alter the relationship (Pennebaker, 2007). While relating one's issues to another who is understanding and nonjudgmental can be restful and comforting (Johnson, 1946), long-term, consistent relating to a non-clinical listener can "burn out" the listener (Stiles, in Pennebaker, 2007).

No matter whether the audience is a friend, a family member, or a clinical therapist, certain characteristics are common. As mentioned earlier, a level of trust is implied with any type of disclosure (Pennebaker, 1997). The audience, if not a clinician or a friend/family member, must be considered "safe" by the individual; professions,

such as beauticians, bartenders, prostitutes, and other service professionals, often are subject to customers' disclosures. Part of their appeal is that the person feels that there exists a sort of emancipation from blame because of the relative anonymity of the profession. Other professions also invite disclosure but do so because their description includes an element of listening; these professions include doctors, clerics, alternative healers, teachers, social workers, and, of course, therapists.

As implied earlier, when one discloses, one reveals information to another. As Johnson (1946) states, "In speaking meaningfully one does not just communicate; one communicates something to someone" (p. 51). Perhaps one communicates meaningfully to even oneself. Smagorinsky (2007) believes that Vygotsky agreed with this statement, that even when by oneself, one's thinking is a type of dialogue with another, perhaps a person no longer living. However, Hall (1990) warns that people must never imagine that they are completely mindful of what they reveal to others, even themselves. Even so, Anderson and MacCurdy (2000), like Stiles (in Pennebaker, 2007), find that disclosure is necessary for healing to begin. They quote Laub, "Survivors need to 'tell their story in order to survive...One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life'" (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000). Similarly, DeSalvo (1999) lists "going public" as the final stage of the creative process in using writing to heal, so even if we write only for ourselves, disclosure does encompass sharing in some form— though DeSalvo does not expressly detail how.

So, if disclosure is so necessary to the healing process, why don't more people disclose—other than those, of course, in societies that do not condone disclosure?

Pennebaker (2007) and Berman (2001) cite shame as a main reason.  Johnson (1946) cites other factors:

> It is the evaluative fears that are most prominent in the general run of people. For the most part these center around anxieties concerning self-evaluation, social status, and economic security.  Self-respect, a good reputation, and a sufficiency of the world's good would be placed high in the scale of values of most people. (Johnson, 1946, p. 345)

Bracher (1999) in part agrees, citing that writing teachers and analysts often encounter the same resistances because they spur from the same source:  a desire to protect oneself from another's censure, a fear of having one's ideas or feelings seen as unimportant or boring.  The individual fears the repercussions of communicating certain details (Johnson, 1946).  To open up an individual resistant to disclose, Johnson (1946) advises summarizing the topic of discussion, asking for clarification, and reminding the person that the clinician—or in this case, teacher—may have like problems.

Individuals who are resistant typically create "verbal smoke-screens" (Johnson, 1946, p. 246), "great looping verbal circles, spoken or thought, that revolve around questions which...serve only to generate tension and conflict and the misery that accompanies prolonged confusion" (p. 291).  One might say, resistance elicits doublespeak, language that is misleading, deliberately distorts, confuses, or says nothing (Lutz, 1996).  In other words, in trying not to talk—or write—about one's troubles often makes one talk in circles, abstractly, or in misrepresentations.

Images

While the main focus of this study is writing as healing, other elements of the course contributed to the student's overall experience. With nearly every assignment, some visual composition was included, either in conjunction with the writing or alongside the writing. And, since many in education have expressed, visual media often influence the writing done. As well, the visual component as part of the writing process cannot be overlooked. Thus, I delved into the use of images and multimedia to comprehend the pieces and their effects.

Mark Prensky (cited by Richardson, 2006) identifies two types of individuals in modern society: digital natives and digital immigrants. This study comprised an amalgam of both. Most subjects are digital immigrants, people born before technological advancements who are learning their applications and how to use them, but others bordered on being natives, those born into technology-laden eras, wherein they do not remember a time without current incantations of technology. This state of being is important as their familiarity and openness to technology contributed to their resistance or lack thereof to visually tied assignments.

No matter whether one is immigrant or native, technology—whether in creating or receiving it—insists on interaction from the audience (Richardson, 2006). Lanham (2007) states, "Multimedia prose encourages us to look and listen" (p. 115). Lanham's use of "multimedia prose" can be as all-encompassing as "composition;" as technology grows and develops, both terms start to take on new meanings. Moffett (1992) determined that composition meant "putting together, selecting, and arranging the elements of a medium" (p. 16). Technological compositions, like Ong (2000) found with

writing in association with orality, are tending to take on the terminology of writing: one

composes with images, with sound, with writing, with movement, and so on.  As

Lanham (2007) states, "Words and images are now inextricably intertwined in our

common expressive repertoire" (p. 113).

To start, an individual must determine the medium(s) for the message; this may

include only one medium or multiple media (Lanham, 2007).  However, Moffett (1992)

warns that using one medium to express information developed in another medium is

an inadequate translation because such translations inevitably lose essential meaning in

the retelling.  As McCluhan (2003) determined, the medium helps determine what

information is imparted to an audience.  Part of this message includes the crafter's as

well as the receiver's emotions (Fox, 2001).  As Rosenblatt (1995) found with reading

literature, we bring to a reading—even of multimedia—a reservoir of experiences and

knowledge.  Part of that reservoir includes our emotional resources and, as such, can

impart a healing effect, much like we will discuss with writing.  Murray (2004) states,

"Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write,

compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear

which is inherent in the human situation" (p. 74).  Fox (2001) agrees, finding that

emotions comprise a sizeable part of an individual's processing of media and, thus,

should be acknowledged when addressing media.

Another caveat of media that must be addressed is the meaning gained from

them and how that meaning is transmitted.  Postman (2005) states, "The forms of our

media, including the symbols through which they permit conversation...are rather like

metaphors, working by unobtrusive but powerful implication to enforce their special

definitions of reality" (p. 10). The problem with such unobtrusive insinuations is that

people tend to accept nearly all representational images as factual, and even when we

do not immediately accept their validity, they usually pass quickly, not allowing for

critical reflection (Fox, 2001). This can be especially true of media such as television,

movies, and their analogous software incarnations like MovieMaker, Photostory, and

the like. For this reason (and others), Postman (2005) states, "The clearest way to see

through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation" (p. 8)—including the media

tools of conversation.

Specifically, photography was the most commonly used media—other than

writing—in this study. Participants in the course were not taking photographs explicitly

for use in the class but were using already captured images. Distinct from writing,

photography does not convey a specific piece of information about the world (Postman,

2005). In fact, with photography, there may not be one specific denotation to derive

(Hovanec & Freund, 1994). However, like writing, a photograph's meaning does rely on

its content, tone, and point of view; the latter is important because it determines what

is included and omitted, guiding in some part the impression of the viewer. Thus, the

manipulations and any changes in context—such as juxtaposing the picture by other

photos or even words—adds another layer of complexity to the meaning.

In creating an internal image, the mind draws upon previously recorded

perceptions to construct the image, thus the person essentially 'perceives' the object

again (Baer, Hoffmann, & Sheikh, in Sheikh, 2003). By using photography, capturing an

event in still frame as is realistically possible  currently, the individual is better able to

accurately construct what occurred and to not only view it directly but manipulate and

refashion it.  By reforming it through resizing, juxtaposition against other images,

alteration, and other treatments, students were thought to be able to gain a broader

context of the event and their role in it (Fox, personal communication, May 9, 2011).

Baer, Hoffmann, and Sheikh (in Sheikh, 2003), found that images offer a distinctive

interpretation of the amalgam of cues that a person uses to construct meaning,

including "perception, motivation, subjective meanings, and realistic abstract thought"

(p. 152). Because most of these are subjective, often the understanding of what

happened can be greatly different from what actually occurred.  By confronting

individuals with the raw, concrete picture, as in a photograph, some new understanding

can take place. Yet, by subjecting that concrete image to various operations, individuals

can begin to see the "actual consequences" instead of their imagined ones (Baer,

Hoffmann, & Sheikh, in Sheikh, 2003).   This difference between "real" and "perceived"

is the difference between a territory and its map, as will be discussed in the next

section.

General Semantics

Whether using words in speech or in writing, semantics plays a large part in

communication.  Semantics, the meanings underscoring the words people use and the

meanings people intend, can extend far beyond the actual word(s) used.  Thus, an

examination of semantics appears imperative in the study of writing to heal.  The words

and meanings the subjects use can indicate in large measure the thoughts and feelings

of the individual, and perhaps the measure of healing achieved.  As Smagorinsky (1998) noted in reference to using a specific protocol, "Words are the most significant cultural artifacts through which to study and understand cognition, embodying both the individual's personal development and the aggregate meaning of a group's cultural development" (p. 163).

One of the basic tenets of semantics is valued orientation. Semantic theorists and researchers reference this theory within their works, and it applies most strongly to writing as healing.  Hayakawa and Hayakawa (1991) detail two orientations: a two-valued orientation and a multi-valued orientation.  Two-valued orientation is an either-or mindset, an us-and-them viewpoint.  However, a multi-valued orientation sees the various gradations, nuances in a situation.  Whereas two-valued is black and white in nature, multi-valued not only sees shades of grey but also sees black within the white and vice versa. Johnson (1946) states, "Our language, as used, tends to be two-valued at best, seldom more than three-valued.  That is to say we deal largely in terms of black and white, good and bad, beautiful and ugly.  Our language, in other words, tends to assume an either-or form" (p. 116).  Since perception rests at the heart of how one copes with trauma and because writing to heal helps augment that perception, how subjects orient themselves to their issue is paramount in understanding what occurs within the writing experience.  As Russell (1997) found, generating multi-valued perceptions within an all-encompassing context of a person's life helps one deal with pain. In other words, people often place themselves in a two-valued system—"I was bad, it was my fault," etc.—instead of seeing the multiple values at work—peer and

societal influences and values, the individual's state at the time of the happening,

events happening previously that influenced this specific occurrence and behavior, and

so on.

Another semantic theory that relates to perception is the idea of personal maps

and the territory they describe. Metaphorically, individuals create maps of their

experiences, marking reference points to aid them in coping with future similar

instances (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1991). These maps are the constructs of the territory

each person has experienced: valleys may be low points, mountainous ranges may be

obstacles within a life, and so on. Johnson (1946) states, however, "when the 'map'

does not match the 'territory,' disorientation in some degree is the inevitable result

unless the 'map' is revised" (p. 257). In other words, if the individual has perceived

incorrectly or deliberately mislead himself in an attempt to protect his mind or

emotions, then the person must amend his map so that it more accurately reflects the

territory or else suffer what Johnson calls "maladjustment." What people perceive as

parts of their territory—and map accordingly—may not replicate the authentic territory

traveled. Part of this concern between conflicts in map (perception of event) and

territory (reality) involves rigidity in thinking and use of language. Johnson (1946)

states, "Individuals are like societies in this regard; when their language habits become

too thoroughly fixed to permit effective evaluation of changed and changing

circumstances, they tend to exhibit more or less grave nervous and 'mental' disorders"

(p. 257). Russell (1997), in his examining his own disorienting issues agrees: "When a

singular event becomes the primary focus of attention, perspective does not match the

observable world very well" (p. 362).  Thus, this inflexibility of thinking, this focus solely

on a troubling event makes one mired at one point in a static map, leading potentially to

Johnson's "maladjustment."

Part of this map's duties is to assist with self-understanding.  Sullivan (in Hall,

1990) theorizes that every person forms within his psyche an "ideal self" which is

endorsed and other versions of the self that are less appealing.  These versions of self

and the person's overall understanding of the true self rise out of the map the person

has made—the contacts within one's environment: corporal, social, and personal (Lakoff

& Johnson, 2003).  Lakoff and Johnson (2003) found, "Self-understanding requires

unending negotiations and renegotiations of the meaning of your experiences to

yourself…It involves the constant construction of new coherences in your life,

coherences that give new meaning to old experiences" (p. 233).  These connections are

at the center of self-knowledge (Johnston, 2004).  Johnston states, "The more

connections, the more flexibly something can be accessed" (p. 46).  Applying this to the

idea of the map, continual interactions—not closing oneself off, but seeing and

experiencing anew and continually connecting new to the old, making neuronal

associations—can help one remain flexible in thinking, adding additional locations on

the map.  Writing about one's issue is a sort of re-experiencing of the happening, a re-

thinking of the event.  This idea falls into line with Vygotsky's (1989) ideas of thought

and language:

Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them.

Every thought tends to connect something with something else, to establish a

relation between things.  Every thought moves, grows and develops, fulfils a

function, solves a problem.  This flow of thought occurs as an inner movement

through a series of planes. (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 218)

So, by writing, by thinking in words, the person is moving metaphorically through a

series of planes—or one might say the person moves through a map, re-examining if the

map is accurate and amending it as the territory proves alteration necessary.  Writing—

words—helps the individual become "unstuck" within the map created—metaphorical

traction in the muddiness of life.

Another layer of general semantics study is the use of abstractions.  Hayakawa

and Hayakawa (1991) proposed that abstracting involved multiple steps, like a ladder.

At the ladder's base were the most concrete labels, for instance "Bessie."  As one moves

up the ladder the labels become more general, such as cow, livestock, farm asset,

wealth, and so on.  Lakoff and Johnson (2003) add that we conceptualize abstract

concepts in terms of the concrete (nonphysical to physical), the less defined in terms of

the more defined.  As people move up the ladder of abstraction, they leave out

characteristics.  This is pertinent to healing because if writers do not see the specifics of

a thing (event, person, etc.), they do not deal with the issues involving it.  If people don't

see the full specifics, they continue to see only the subjective perspective of the thing,

the elements that cause the quandary.  Moffett (1992) synthesizes the use of

abstraction with mapping (discussed earlier), stating, "Abstracting is mentally mapping

reality…Abstraction is tension between the two processes [analysis and synthesis].  It

binds mind to world" (p. 11). While Moffett's use of abstraction here is not the same as

that used by Hayakawa and Hayakawa, when people use abstractions, they do so as part

of their mapping strategy; the use of abstractions, no matter level of concrete label

"Bessie" or the more abstract "wealth," each use creates a different "topography" on

the individual's map of reality. Johnson (1946) gives clues to recognizing the levels of

abstraction, stating, "Low-level abstracting [is] seen in language that is monotonously

descriptive…Higher-orders of abstraction…is characterized especially by vagueness,

ambiguity, even utter meaninglessness" (p. 270 & 272).

While Hayakawa and Hayakawa (1991) discern that most people move along the

ladder of abstraction within their daily conversations, Johnson (1946) finds that people

in quandaries often use those higher-order abstractions because of their

meaninglessness, obviously not on purpose but rather as an unconscious and perhaps

inadequate method of coping. He states, "The language of maladjustment is most

clearly characterized by great looping verbal circles, spoken or thought, that revolve

around questions which, failing to direct and organize observation, serve only to

generate tension and conflict and misery" (p. 291). In other words, people in

quandaries tend to choose the upper echelon of abstractions in an unconscious bid to

create a form of doublespeak (Lutz, 1996), an obfuscation of the truth either from

themselves or from others—perhaps even from both themselves and others. Allen (in

Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) categorizes this usage of language differently. He equates

it with either full speech or empty speech. Full speech creates meaning, while empty

sidesteps it.

Sometimes this lack of clarity comes in the very labels or names affixed to things or events. MacCurdy (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) states, "Memories are often hidden by the labels which students give to their experiences...Labels are not actual experience but are often stereotypical categorizations of the experience" (p. 171). Though Johnston (2004) speaks of labels and naming in terms of school children and critical literacy, his thoughts on naming are also valuable to writing as healing: "Ultimately, children must notice how naming is done, who is named in which ways, and who gets to do the naming" (Johnston, 2004, p. 19). His statement applies to those using writing to heal. Like with self-understanding, authors must recognize why they have named things, events, or people in such a way and how the naming occurred. Why has the author named himself "bad" or "the outsider" in that two-valued orientation mentioned earlier? In reconciling questions such as that, the author then not only understands himself better but also the events that led to that determination of "bad" or "outsider."

Another major issue with labels is what Johnson (1946) termed the "law of identity." Citing Aristotle, Johnson defines the law of identity as speaking or writing about a noun is the same as the label being the thing. Hayakawa and Hayakawa (1991) stated it more simply, "The word is not the thing" (p. 17). In other words, and to use previously discussed topics, the map is not the territory, the symbol is not the noun symbolized. Labels are constructs, not the actual things being constructed. For example, when we say, "Joseph is a mailman," while being a mailman is one element of Joseph's identity, it is not the sole representation. Even to say, "Joseph is Joseph," is not always

accurate.  Joseph is a construct that the speaker has in mind, not the actual person.  To

put it another way, when I speak of my sister Jennie, I speak of my representation of

her, which is altogether different from the construct my other sister has formed of her,

the construct our mother has formed of her, the construct her husband, son, and friends

have formed of her, even my construction of her 5, 10, or 20 years ago, and, of course,

of her in actuality.  When we use labels, we affix our construct of the thing—"bad,"

"good," "outsider," and so on.

Words do hold a sort of "magic" for some people.  Hayakawa and Hayakawa

state, "There come to be 'fearful words,' ' unspeakable words'—words taking on the

characteristics of what they stand for" (p. 98).  They add that these words have no

power until a person imbues them with such power.  Even though the word is a symbol

of a thing, not the thing itself (the word is not the thing), these symbols can help

mediate the suffering caused by the actual thing.  Johnson (in Anderson & MacCurdy,

2000) states, "Bruner asserts that for students to learn they must only inhabit a certain

kind of environment…an environment that makes available certain symbols by which

the students can signal to themselves what they have achieved or what they intend to

achieve" (p. 103).  Likewise, Holt and McGady (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) state

that in working with wounded students they "worked with the symbols of woundedness

but not the wounds, with the meaning of pain but not with the pain" (p. 61).  This

distinction is important because, though the thing and the word are connected, in

writing about difficult experiences one works with the symbols of the experience, not

the experience itself.  Though writing about it can help with the person's handling of the

aftermath, writing cannot change what occurred, it can only change the perception of what occurred, altering the semantic map.

Additionally, Johnson (1946) also discusses another problematic issue relative to writing as healing. Using its acronyms IFD, Johnson characterizes some maladjustment as a process of idealization, leading to frustration, and resulting in demoralization. In this, when the idealized concept of things is not realized, people become frustrated. Eventually, as "reality" further intrudes and the ideal is still no longer achieved, people become demoralized. This theory ties in with the Hayakawa's (1991) concept of "is of identity," mentioned earlier. If people label a thing as an idealized version of itself, let's say calling a thing "mother" is used at its most idealized, when the labeler begins to discern less than ideal qualities in "mother," not seeing that the word is not the thing, not having a certain flexibility of association to "mother," then the labeler becomes frustrated and may try to force "mother" to fit the idealized version. When this doesn't happen, because after all the word is not the thing, demoralization sets in, which is when Johnson terms the labeler "maladjusted."

One further semantic theory that applies to writing as healing is the concept of time-binding. Anderson & MacCurdy (2000) state:

> Traumatic events, because they do not occur within the parameters of 'normal reality, do not fit into the structure and flow of time. Instead, they are imprisoned within the psyche as discrete moments, frozen, isolated from normal memories. Because they are not connected to the normal, linear flow of time-bound memory, these moments emerge into consciousness at any point,

bringing the force of the traumatic event with them. (Anderson & MacCurdy,

2000, p. 6)

Thus, trauma doesn't follow a course within the flow of time for the individual but is

instead static and, hence, set apart, emphasizing its presence, to a certain extent. These

moments, time-bound, are thus "frozen" and thus the perceptions of them are equally

"frozen." Like with labels immobilizing perception, time-binding arrests any shift in

perception.  What "is" remains in that "is" state until something causes a modification in

status—writing as healing's role.  Of course, time binding can have positive

connotations, affixing in one's memory a joyful time or event, but for this research, I am

focusing on its negative effects which writing can assist with.

Additionally, trauma can upset what a person believes is certain, unassailable.

Payne (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) state of sexual violence, "Signifiers and signified

constantly shift" (p. 151).  What previously was certain—like a father's love or that

adults are protectors—can become damaged due to trauma.  The world is a scary place

because the "known" is now uncertain.  And in a world full of uncertainty, the body and

mind stay in a state of stress, tensed for another shift, another instance of the certain

becoming in doubt.

Conversely, writing as healing, in its truest sense, does time-bind the event,

creating an artifact of not only the event but also the person's feelings connected to

that event.  Time-binding an event creates a "means of enabling one person to benefit

from the knowledge of other persons, of enabling each new generation to bind into its

own time, so to speak, the wisdom of times past, and so of avoiding the blunders and of

extending the achievements of previous generations" (Johnson, 1946, p. 162).  In other words, by writing about the experience, the author creates a bridge with contemporaries and people in the future who have experienced similar traumas.  This sharing across space and time can benefit the writer to some extent if the work is shared and readers offer support.  But, it also can benefit the reader as a sort of bibliotherapy; readers of such works see that they are not alone in this experience and may learn tools or strategies for surmounting their issue.  As we shall see later in the section on writing as healing, this ability to time-bind, to create an artifact, can be beneficial not only for the person because it becomes a "thing" that can be set aside for a while as well as becoming an aide for others—either at present or in the future— experiencing like events.

Writing

Multiple conceptions of writing exist, perhaps as many conceptions as there are writers.  Historically, writing was first detailed as icons, cuneiform and hieroglyphic pictures used to record facts and events of great note.  Then, as man developed more elaborate civilizations, his writing too developed, using symbolic representations.  During the middle ages, writing was considered as the same thing as penmanship, as monks copied elaborate illuminated texts by hand. The aesthetic of the letters themselves were equated with writing (Mason, 1920).  Eventually, the concept of writing evolved into a system of outlining, a way to organize thought but with few of the parameters of rhetoric seen later.  Of course, the elements of rhetoric, as applied to speaking ultimately were applied to writing (Ong, 2000).  Subsequently, writing

developed further into a one-draft format without the element of process seen

currently—an expedient to convey information.   Later, theorists, like Vygotsky (1989)

considered writing as a way for individuals to construct meaning and to share that

meaning with others.  It is this last evolution that is being discussed here:  the use of

writing to construct understanding of self and world.

Goldberg (2007) says, "Writing is the act of reaching across the abyss of isolation

to share and reflect" (p. xxi).   According to Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen

(1975), "Writing is a deliberate act; one has to make up one's mind to do it.  The

decision may be forced on one, but then one still has to agree to be forced, or to refuse"

(p. 22).  One may speak somewhat involuntarily, but writing is purposeful, measured,

planned.  Murray (1982) agrees with this conception, adding that writing is not only an

intellectual act but a kinetic one, full of immediate activity, of the initial act and any

responses.  Emig (1977) concurs, stating that writing is the most efficient learning

method as it involves the hand, eye, and brain working together to learn.  But, it is also

an act of the brain, of thinking (Murray, 2004).  As Zinsser (2006) says, "Writing is

thinking on paper" (p. 147).  And in this thinking, it fully engages the brain, inciting both

hemispheres to work jointly (Emig, 1977).  It's a synthesis (Britton et al, 1975), a

connection of past, present and future (Emig, 1977).  In writing, the author applies the

results of a chain of interlocking choices, built from the well of experiences he brings to

the page (Britton et al, 1975).  As Berkenkotter (in Perl, 1994) noted:

The writer's protocols shed new light on the great and small decisions and

revisions that form planning.  These decisions and revisions form an elaborate

network of steps as the writer moves back and forth between planning, drafting,

editing, and reviewing. (p. 139)

Thus writing involves all that has gone before in the writer's life, the immediate choices

the writer makes while composing and revising, and all that the writer projects the

future will entail. It includes the setting in which writers craft each piece, the society in

which they live and the society with whom they share their writing and receive

feedback, and, of course the subject of the writing itself.

However, this writing experience also alters the writer. It shapes relationships

and, better yet, configures our manners of viewing our environment and our place in

that environment, the neural processes that organize our senses (Johnston, 2004). And

through writing the author reveals a bit of himself to others, surely, but also to himself

(Murray, 1982). Ledo Ivo, a Hispanic writer, states, "'I increasingly feel that my writing

creates me. I am the invention of my own words'" (quoted by Murray, in Perl, 1994, p.

211). Stafford (in Perl, 1994) adds, "A writer is not so much someone who has

something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new

things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them" (p. 231). Writing

doesn't necessarily create new things—ideas, emotions, etc—though it can; instead, it

reveals what was already present and makes it newly discernable to the reader—and

maybe the writer.

But what does he reveal to himself in writing that he cannot find in other ways?

First, Zinsser (2006) states that writers are the guardians of memories. In those

memories reside keys to how one developed into the person he or she is today. Lanham

(2007) expresses this best, "Writing clarifies, strengthens, and energizes the self, renders individuality rich, full, and social" (p. 129). He adds later, "It is not only what we think we discover in writing, but what we are and can construct ourselves to be" (Lanham, 2007, p. 129). Thus, writing illuminates to the writer who we once were, who we are, and who we might become. When we write, especially for ourselves, we employ a forceful search engine (Zinsser, 2006), often to find solutions to one's own problems (Flower & Hayes in Emig et al, 1994; Murray, 2004; Zinsser, 2006). In addition to finding meaning or solutions, writing stills the chaos, celebrates and documents events, and tries to comprehend the world (Murray, 2004). Overall, though, writing is a way to find meaning (Elbow & Clarke, 1987; Murray, 1982 & 2004; Zinsser, 2006). As Day-Lewis (cited in Murray, 1982) stated, "We do not write in order to be understood, we write in order to understand" (p. 4). Murray (1982), of course, concurs, finding that it is in the act of writing that he fully understands what he knows: "At the beginning of the composing process there is only blank paper. At the end of the composing process there is a piece of writing which has detached itself from the writer and found its own meaning" (Murray, 1982, p. 17). As we will see later in the section devoted to writing as healing, this detachment and meaning-making is important to the healing process.

But first, writing starts with perception (Murray, 1982). Through writing, the author changes and makes discoveries (Murray, 1982 & 2004), which in turn, influence his writing. As Murray (2004) says, we fear writing because it is essential, it is "intimately involved with who you are" (p. 204). But while writing can illuminate, it can

also relieve.  Previously, I stated that writing aids perception, but it also brings

perspective:

> When you write things down—as long as you don't write them down with too
>
> much commitment—you are able to see them in perspective.  It is as though
>
> holding onto that thought or perceptions were a burden for your mind.  Writing
>
> is a setting down of that burden and it lets the mind take a rest from it.  Now the
>
> mind can better see what is limited about it and take up a new thought or
>
> perception. (Elbow, 1973, p. 46)

Perhaps this perspective is linked to the problem solving ability described earlier in

relation to writing.  Hoffman cites The Maimie Papers, clarifying how a writer sees

things: "...in writing down each thing, it sort of clears the mind each day and leaves it

free for a new set of perplexities" (Hoffman, 1987, p. 466).  As we'll see later, writing to

heal is a freeing or clearing element (Elbow, 1973; Siegel, 2007).  But Elbow finds that

writing in general, not just writing to heal, frees the writer: "There is garbage in your

head; if you don't let it out onto paper, it really will infect everything else up there.

Garbage in your head poisons you.  Garbage on paper can safely be put in the

wastepaper basket" (1973, p. 8).

> Zinsser (2006) agrees with Elbow, but he takes writing's power one step further:
>
> There are many good reasons for writing that have nothing to do with being
>
> published.  Writing is a powerful search mechanism, and one of its satisfactions
>
> is to come to terms with your life narrative.  Another is to work through some of

life's hardest knocks—loss, grief, illness, addiction, disappointment, failure—and

to find understanding and solace. (Zinsser, 2006, p. 283).

While writing helps the individual, it also helps project that self into the world—even if

only limitedly.  Lanham (2007) states, "We are doing more in writing, any writing, than

transmitting neutral messages. We want to convey our feelings about what we say, our

attitude toward human relationships we are establishing" (p. 129).  But Elbow and

Clarke (1987) value the personal benefit of writing just for oneself first, what they call

the "private dimension" of writing.  When authors write for themselves, they ignore the

influence of society and its impact on them and their writing.  Instead the writing is free

from the pressures of expectation of others and stays true to the authenticity of the

writer.

Britton et al (1975) found that most writing with a "private dimension" was

expressive in nature. These researchers found that such writing held a pivotal position in

students' learning as it mimicked the conversations the students witnessed at home.

Expressive writing has either the writer as audience or an imagined, friendly audience,

generally.  Britton et al (1975) state, "A writer who envisages his reader as someone

with whom he is on intimate terms must surely have very favourable conditions for

using the process of writing as a means of exploration and discovery" (p. 82).  Faigley (in

Emig et al, 1994), found that expressive writing is distinct for its veracity, spontaneity,

and uniqueness.  Thus, if Faigley and Britton et al are correct, trusting one's audience

leads one to be more open and honest in one's expressive writing, a key point for any

writing as healing.

While writing can use many different genres and encompasses all aspects of writing, this study focuses on the aspects and genres used by students in one university graduate course: rhetoric and voice, narrative, free writing, and poetry. The last category was not used widely by all students, but one case did use poetry for nearly every writing—including her narratives and free writing. As such—and due to my own experiences using poetry as a preferred writing to heal genre—it necessitated its own category.

Rhetoric and Voice. While rhetoric has existed as a subject for millennia, its definition has altered as new forms of communication arose. Originally, classical rhetoric dealt solely with orality, but with the widespread learning of writing, rhetoric's definition took on a more universal, multi-modal denotation (Lindemann, 2001). Contemporary theorist Kenneth Burke (in Lindemann, 2001) defines rhetoric as "all of the 'symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols'" (p. 53). With this characterization, rhetoric implies a sender and receiver, for our purposes here a writer and a reader. And, of course, rhetoric includes purpose, fulfilling the rhetorical triangle (author, reader, purpose) (Lindemann, 2001). However, Lindemann (2001) provides a broader and more detailed explanation of rhetoric as a constantly developing, socially agreed upon process that uses language to affect perceptions or behaviors, to illustrate a point, to convey one's sense of self, or to emphasize a work's aesthetic worth. This conception of rhetoric fits writing as healing better because sometimes when authors use writing to heal, they write for the self, not for others—ignoring a leg of the rhetorical triangle. Though other theorists believe that

rhetoric is not just expressing information but persuading others (Moffett, 1992),

Lindemann's more all-encompassing description aligns with writing as healing, which

does not intend to sway others but only to understand oneself and one's experiences.

This is not to say that writing as healing cannot be shared with others, but that

foremost, writers write for themselves; their purpose is generally greater understanding

of self and events.  Often, though, additional healing can occur when writers share their

accounts, completing the rhetorical triangle.

Interwoven with rhetoric is the voice of the speaker/author.  Gilligan (1994)

states that voice reveals the nucleus of the self.  However, Fulwiler (1994) puts voice

into a writing perspective, calling voice "some indentifying tone or timbre that makes us

conscious of the author's presence, that lets us hear the person behind the sentences"

(p. 157).  Gilligan (1994) adds, "...a powerful psychological instrument and channel,

connecting inner and outer worlds...voice is a new key for understanding the

psychological, social, and cultural order—a litmus test of relationships and a measure of

psychological health" (Gilligan, 1994, p. 178).   This social aspect of voice is important, as

Fulwiler (1994) and Gere (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) believe that one determines

voice only in comparison with other authors.  Yet, Fulwiler (1994) also admits that for

social constructivists, the community of the author also helps to determine the author's

voice, as one's society affects how one develops and the well of experience one retains.

While Fulwiler and Gilligan, much like the classical rhetoricians, consider voice in

relation to others, Elbow and Clarke (1987) see voice as belonging only to the writer:

"Even though we often develop our voice by finally 'speaking up' to an audience or

'speaking out' to others...we often do not really develop a strong, authentic voice in our writing till we find important occasions for ignoring audience" (Elbow & Clarke, 1987, p. 26). So, while a reader may need examples of other authors' works to determine the voice of a particular author, the writer need only find a topic independent of audience to find his/her voice emerging. Yet others disagree.

Murray (2004) stated, "Writing is a private act with a public intent" (p. 187), indicating that writing is not done in isolation. Audience is important, even if the audience is the writer. Equally important is that third leg of the triangle: purpose. Why is the author writing? What purpose is being fulfilled? Flower and Hayes (in Emig et al., 1994) state, "Even though a teacher gives 20 students the same assignment, the writers themselves create the problem they solve" (p. 65). Internalizing the problem, writing with purpose helps bring writers' thoughts to paper. And so does trust. Rose (in Emig et al., 1994) states that too many rules, too many parameters placed upon a writer can block the writing and thereby block the writer's voice from emerging. Implied within this is that writers must also trust their audience—in many students' cases, their teacher and maybe some of their classmates—to not only understand but to also respect their viewpoint. As Murray (1982) states, "Writers' feelings control the environment in which the mind functions" (p. 169). If writers feel that their writing will not be accepted and respected—and by extension the writers aren't accepted and respected—then the writers and their voices will be stifled, muted, constrained.

Gilligan (1994) believes, "To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person" (p. 178). But how does one find voice, other than to compare an

author's works against those of other writers?  Fulwiler (1994) suggests looking at the

elements of voice.  For instance, it is usually distinguished as tone.  Fulwiler (1994) finds

voice—especially his own—to be more common in transactional language than

expressive, where transactional language is that used to convey meaning to another

(public writing) and expressive is that used solely for the self, such as that in diaries.  He

states that the voice of public writing seems more distinct in transactional writing than it

does in his private instances. However, Hoffman (1987) cites genres that are more

conducive to expressive language, such as letters, diaries, and testimonies, as best able

to introduce voice.  Linklater (in Gilligan, 1994) states, "You can hear the difference

between a voice that is an open channel—connected physically with breath and sound,

psychologically with feelings and thoughts, and culturally with a rich resource of

language—and a voice that is impeded or blocked" (p. 177).  Gilligan (1994) cites this as

one element important to relationships, the voice we use, even the voice we use in

writing.  A "dead" or "mechanical" voice is less likely to create a bond between author

and reader, whereas a "resonant"  or "human" voice is more likely to craft a

relationship—perhaps even when that audience is the self.  As Lamott (1995) says, "The

truth of your experience can only come through in your own voice....You cannot write

out of someone else's big dark place; you can only write out of your own" (p. 199).

Voice, then, must be authentic and alive; to be powerful, voice must be one's own—just

as the story or narrative  one tells is one's own.

     Narrative. Narrative universally entertains.  It is the oldest and most engaging

entertainment because all people—no matter race, creed, religion, etc.—want to hear a

story (Zinsser, 2006). Common elements of narratives include purpose, chronology, point of view, and selection of events. Most narratives also include dialogue and anecdotes. As Kennedy, Kennedy, and Aaron (2003) state, "Every good story has a purpose" (p. 75). Usually stories are told to convey this purpose, whether to inform, define, persuade, or some other reason. A purposeless story only irritates the audience—as Kennedy, Kennedy and Aaron (2003) cite the ramblings of toddlers annoying their parents with their purposeless stories. This purpose is generally achieved through chronological organization, telling the events in the order they happen. However, sometimes use of flashbacks (inserting an anecdote that happened before the current segment of the narrative) or non-chronological elements can be used effectively to convey purpose. Customarily, formal narratives begin in medias res ("in the midst of things") in order for the story to capture audience attention immediately. Another element of narrative that can help with gaining audience attention is the point of view. While narratives can be written in third person, where the author/narrator is a spectator to events, typically narratives are written in first person, where the author/narrator is the speaker. Kennedy, Kennedy, and Aaron (2003) state that first person narratives are, as a rule, subjective, yet third person customarily are objective, though the author's perspective as a spectator may color events and create a more subjective rendering on occasion. Some of this subjectivity shows in what the author chooses to include. Obviously, a point-by-point retelling of events would be tedious and would repel any reader, so the selection of events is critical to narrative. What the author chooses to include is influenced by the purpose the author is trying to convey, a

wish to retain reader attention, and a call for brevity.  Kennedy, Kennedy, and Aaron (2003) suggest that authors keep purpose and audience in mind when writing narratives and selecting events to include, such as with any anecdotes.  These "short, entertaining account of a single incident…add color and specifics…and they often help support an argument by giving it the flesh and blood of real life" (Kennedy, Kennedy, & Aaron, 2003, p. 74).  Anecdotes are used to convey a point or to provide additional attention to specific details. Like anecdotes, dialogue can also add detail and interest.  As Kennedy, Kennedy, and Aaron (2003) state, "Reported speech, in quotation marks, is invaluable for revealing characters' feelings" (p. 79), no matter whether the narrative is factual or fictional.

In its first usages, narrative not only told stories but taught its listeners. Narratives are powerful learning tools (Johnston, 2004).  In fact, Allen (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000), citing Buford, states that we need narratives:

Stories, Buford writes, "protect us from chaos, and maybe that's what we, unblinkered at the end of the twentieth century, find ourselves craving." Buford goes on: "Implicit in the extraordinary revival of storytelling is the possibility that we need stories—that they are a fundamental unit of knowledge, the foundation of memory, essential to the way we make sense of our lives…We have returned to narratives—in many fields of knowledge—because it is impossible to live without them." (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 279)

Pennebaker (2007), considering narrative as a healing tool, agrees, stating that narratives give structure to a person's experience—an important element of writing's

healing potential.  They help individuals compose the story of their lives (Siegel, 2007).

But, Siegel (2007) warns, "Our life story is not the whole story of who we are" (p. 311).

Memoirs, a type of narrative, focus on specific sections of a life, not the entire

life, as autobiographies do (Zinsser, 2006).  They take for granted that an entire life

occurred and omit a majority of it.  The power of memoir is in the extreme,

concentrated moment being retold.  It's the ability to create truth from a distilled

memory (Zinsser 2006).   Siegel (2007), looking at narrative from a neurological

standpoint, found that narrative is not just a story, not just a distilled memory, but "a

deep, bodily and emotional process of sorting through the muck in which we've been

stuck" (p. 308), a "witnessing self" (p. 309).  Thus, in telling one's story—in writing a

narrative—we examine ourselves and our experiences closely and use that examination

to free ourselves from the quagmire engendered.  It was for this reason that Fox

included non-chronological narratives as assignments, in attempt to "unstick" the

individual (personal communication, May 9, 2011).  Memories, especially those of

trauma, are stuck as if in concrete; breaking chronology is one way to free the self from

a "rut" in thinking (Fox, personal communication, May 9, 2011).

The term "narrative" implies a certain level of formality to relating a story, which

"storytelling" does not.  And, as has been found throughout the ages, people need to

tell their stories—especially when they need to heal from trauma or some other hurtful

event.  For instance, teachers often receive unsolicited writing as healing narratives.

MacCurdy (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) states, "Some students will write these

stories in our classes whether we ask them to or not, as many first-year writing

instructors have discovered" (p. 158).  Payne (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) found

that her students wrote about their experiences with sexual abuse "regardless of the

kinds of assignments required" (p. 120).  The inner self wants to heal and will grasp any

occasion to make that healing possible—even a simple school assignment.  Goldberg

(2007) agrees:

> Whatever is hidden or secretive will look for a way out.  You'll write about a
>
> grilled cheese sandwich and bubbling up in the middle of the cheese will be
>
> incest, deception, and adultery.  Claiming it, exploring it will free you.  It doesn't
>
> always mean you have to make it public.  You can make choices.  When they are
>
> at your back, concealed, they can only haunt you.  (Goldberg, 2007, p. 34)

MacCurdy (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) sees that the best method of

documenting one's experience in words is through concrete images, like seen in poetry

and in actually using photographs and other concrete images to spur writing or as part

of writing.  Bucci (in Pennebaker, 2007), who influenced MacCurdy, states:

> Such concrete and specific images constitute the type of material for which the
>
> referential connections are most active, and which are likely to activate
>
> referential connections in the listener.  Images and their concatenations in
>
> episodes constitute the essential symbolic contents of the emotion schemas.  In
>
> episodic form, the emotion schemas can be "told." In that sense, the telling of a
>
> story is precisely the expression of an emotion schema, or parts of a schema, in
>
> verbal form. (p. 104)

In other words, healing comes by taking the raw material of memories (images and sounds and other sensory details) and synthesizing them into an episode or story. The verbalization of events with the linking of emotion and event works to help the individual—something school children realize perhaps unconsciously when they use their assignments to write to heal instead.

The order in which we assimilate the feelings with the events is important too. One must begin by retrieving the sensory detail, then link it to the event that produced that detail, then synthesize the sensory detail into a story that will illuminate the experience for the author and his audience (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000). The processing of the event in such a way will then influence our future attempts to understand experience. Nye (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) saw this with HIV/AIDS patients: "Writing about thoughts and feelings associated with difficult events forces people to synthesize many overwhelming memories. Translating a memory into language thus may alter one's perspective" (p. 395). Warnock concisely reiterates this semiotic relationship between author and writing: "I, and most people I know, live rough-draft lives. We write our lives, and our lives rewrite us" (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 34). Much like Boal's (1985) Theatre of the Oppressed, where actors and what he calls spect-actors perform a scene repeatedly and try out new ways to overcome oppression, Warnock sees writing as a way to try out new ideas symbolically with the aim of making better choices because the authors have an armory of possible solutions at their disposal.

Writing is different from speaking.  It forces writers to focus, to slow thinking

down, to organize their thoughts (Pennebaker, 1997).  Eventually, writing lets people

detach from their emotions and see from different perspectives.  Echoing earlier

comments, DeSalvo (1999) states, "Writing changes our perspective of events—in

writing we continually rewrite our lives" (p. 146).  It provides emotional distance, which

in many ways mimics the mourning sequence.  Not only does writing slow down

thinking, but it also preserves the experience, makes the memory an artifact (Nye in

Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000).  Nye (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) states, "Language

in all three cases (healing, resolving, working through) becomes a tool for assimilating

experiences" (p. 394).  This resonates with what Edson (2008) theorizes, namely that

writing makes the intangible (feelings, memories) tangible, and better yet, writing is

something that can be set aside, left behind, or picked up and carried.  Likewise, if it is

made tangible, it can also be manipulated, reframed, re-interpreted and perhaps even

minimized by placing it into a larger context. By refashioning the intangible into a

tangible and then altering it in any of these methods, seeing it as one part of a much

larger whole, writers begin to see more than their subjective, two-valued perception

and instead begin to view it more objectively, from a distance.  If writing can make an

issue something that can be set aside or, to some measure, abandoned, this setting

aside unburdens the individual, a form of catharsis.

Free Writing. Of all the terms used in this study, "free writing" may be the least

known outside of academia.  Belanoff, Elbow, and Fontaine (1991) relate that a

definition of free writing consists of what free writing is not:  not necessarily shared, not

bound by grammar or mechanics, not obligated to be comprehensible even to its author, not necessarily comprised of just one topic, and not expected to be of high quality.  In other words, this type of writing is free of most all constraints that regulate other modes.  In fact, the only "rule" with free writing is that the author continually writes for a set period of time.  However, Belanoff, Elbow, and Fontaine (1991) also recognize that free writing has morphed into various adaptations:  focused (one topic), public (shared), and focused, public (both shared and on one topic).  The beauty in free writing, though, is in "its being the only form of writing in which there is not judgment or failure" (Belanoff, Elbow, & Fontaine, 1991, p. xiv), this condition being necessary for writing as healing to be effective.

This quality of the process attracts many teachers and other professionals.  As Elbow (1973) found, free writing unburdens the writer by providing an opportunity to write without halting, without the anxiety of grammar, mechanics, purpose, even comprehension.  He states, "[Free writing] is like writing something and putting it in a bottle in the sea" (Elbow, 1973, p. 3).  As we've seen earlier, it eliminates the garbage in the mind.  In fact, Macrorie (in Belanoff, Elbow, & Fontaine, 1991) found that free writing not only eliminates garbage but is in itself a mine: "Often when we dig in it, we find surprise, and a voice.  Then we can revise it:  sort the dross down from the gold, arrange those chunks of gold in different order" (p. 188).  It's a starting point in many cases—but can be an entity in itself.

Peter Elbow (in Belanoff, Elbow, & Fontaine, 1991), arguably the godfather of free writing, calls the genre an "unfocused exploring" (p. 194), that writers sit down and

wander without boundaries or burdens through their thoughts. He finds that the

benefits of free writing are not in its products but in the process itself. And perhaps this

quality is reason so many teachers use it—that students can explore their reactions to

reading, their thoughts on a particular subject or question, and illuminate not only their

own knowledge but reveal their own links to subject matter. Elbow (in Belanoff, Elbow,

& Fontaine, 1991) found that his own free writing included metadiscourse, an analytic

evaluation of what he was thinking/writing during the free writing within the free write.

Lannin (2007) found that free writing exhibited elements of expressive language, thus,

linking it to inner voice. In free writing, writers hold conversations with themselves and,

at the same time, can evaluate the level or quality of that conversation.

Additionally, teachers use free writing to improve other elements within the

classroom. For example, Lannin (2007) found that student fluency in writing improved

from use of free writing in the classroom and that students produced more meaningful

flow experiences and better focus. She equated these advantages to the students' well-

being in that their increased understandings of subject-matter within free writes gave

them a better sense of control and less a feeling of chaos within their minds and lives.

Elbow (in Belanoff, Elbow, & Fontaine, 1991) found this stilling of chaos and gaining of

awareness in his own use of free writing: "By letting myself rave, I helped myself catch a

glimpse I hadn't had before of the crucial pattern in my inner life" (p. 191). While

elsewhere Elbow states that free writing helps him become unstuck in his life, whether

it be personal or professional, this statement shows that it also helps him open up a new

dimension—not just become "unstuck" but find a new path.

In non-education circles, free writing takes on other names, forms, and uses. In psychology, it's called "self-expressive" writing as well as "free association" writing. Pennebaker (in Belanoff, Elbow, & Fontaine, 1991) differentiates free writing from self-expressive writing, in the sciences, in that self-expression specifically focuses on the writer's deeply held emotions and the traumas that produced those emotions. Farber (2005) distinguishes free association writing from the others in its purpose: originally to allow for self-analysis. This practice developed in connection to Freud's free association (talk) analysis. The health and educational benefits of self-expressive writing are enumerated within the writing as healing section. However, Pennebaker (in Belanoff, Elbow, & Fontaine, 1991) cites specific benefits registered from a number of studies he conducted. Namely, self-expressive writing decreases mental and emotional distress, diminishes inhibition (which as we will see later improves overall health), increases orderliness of thought, and increases integration of material into personal experiences.

However, it is free writing's tie with fluency that is so important to writing as healing. Free writing requires people to "immerse themselves in their ideas and tune out distractions...to suspend negative criticism, inhibiting self-consciousness, and editing activities while generating ideas" (Mullin, in Belanoff, Elbow, & Fontaine, 1991). Free writing asks people to sit down with a writing implement (pen & paper or computer) and "blurt" whatever comes to mind concerning a certain subject—uncensored, without pause, continuous. During that process, many find previously hidden understandings and new appreciation for the subject, but most also develop an increased ability to write with flow. Considering that writing as healing solicits writing on topics that are

uncomfortable at the least, the need for flow is critical.  Writing without censorship, without self-judgment helps authors release their emotions and thoughts concerning the incident.  The more fluent the writing, the better able writers are to discern previously ignored or unseen dimensions.  They become "unstuck" not only in their writing life but in their hearts and minds as well.

      Poetry. As Bolton (1999) states, "Writing poetry is different" (p. 119).  I might add that when writing poetry in order to heal, it is also controversial.  As Kaufman and Sexton (2006) ask, if writing poetry can help those with problems, then why are so many poets suffering from some mental issues, if not suicidal (Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and so on)?  However, before delving into poetry's controversy, a review of poetry's qualities is necessary.

      Obviously, poetry can look much different from prose when viewed on the page and sound equally dissimilar to the ear.  However, poetry differs from prose in much more complex ways.  Perhaps the density of poetry resides in its perception.  The Chinese, for instance, created the character for "poem" from characters meaning "word" and "temple," symbolizing the poem as a sacred house where language resides (Carroll, 2005). But poetry's complexity may also rest in its qualities.  Bolton (1999) states, "Poetry is an exploration of the deepest and most intimate experiences, thoughts, feelings, ideas:  distilled, pared to succinctness, and made music to the ear by lyricism" (p. 118).  It provides a medium for the author's consciousness to be made present (Wooldridge, 1997). It provides a form and a vehicle for expression.  As discussed later, writing provides a receptacle for feeling, a container (Edson, 2008).

Quoting the great Irish poet, Wooldridge (1997) agrees with this idea of poem as container, "Yeats said that a finished poem 'made a noise like the click of the lid on a perfectly made box,' implying that a poem is a box or vessel with a definite shape" (p. 157).  It captures the poet's feelings, experiences, memories and makes them portable, not only for himself but to be given to others.  Wooldridge (1997) stated, "Writing poems using images can create an experience allowing others to feel what we feel.  Perhaps more important, poems can put us in touch with our own often buried or unexpected feelings" (p. 25). Heard (1999) agrees: "Poetry has the power to change us, by helping us sift through the layers of our lives in search of our own truths and our own poems" (p. 118).

Poetry is written at first solely for the writer's benefit, making one confront oneself on any matter of subjects.  Bolton (1999) states, "Few poets will tell you they habitually write to publish.  They will say they write because they have to:  the words come compulsively and have to be written and rewritten until what is hovering in the mind is on the page as clearly as possible" (p. 122).  It offers the writer a tool to clarify ideas and comprehension, a steadying hand at gaining control (Bolton, 1999).  Bolton states that poetry is especially appropriate for depressed and anxiety-ridden people, as well as those facing incurable diseases, as the control and understanding offer a soothing balm.  Feirstein (2003) concurs, finding that poetry offers a "safe place to reexperience [sic] emotions" through crafting a bridge that not only links the author to his experience metaphorically but also creates a needed space, enabling the person to rest and recover from the issue at hand.  Carroll (2005) also agrees, seeing that

articulation of what has happened often alleviates suffering.  However, he also finds

that some traumas are too devastating and rob the person of words, citing an account

of trauma victims being "dumbstruck." As we will see later, taking the images associated

with trauma and transforming them to language is part of the healing process.

Carroll (2005) sees poetry as particularly effective for this process, saying, "It

gets into us and plays through our psycho/neuro/immune-sensory selves" (p. 162).  In

other words, it links our outer experiences with our internal thinking, chemical-directed

self, helping us understand and absorb the issue.  Furman (2004) also sees poetry's

benefits on bio-medical conditions (like dementia), not just those of the psyche: "Such

uses of the poetry, the arts, and the humanities are congruent with the biopsychological

approach to conceptualizing and treating illnesses" (p. 164).  He equates this use of

poetry as a vehicle to mine the individual's stores of personal power, reserves, and

resiliency through removing psychological or emotional obstacles, splitting healing into

a process of smaller steps, and teaching self-care strategies to combat present and

future issues.

Part of what makes great poetry is what makes poetry healing:  its use of

imagery, metaphor, and voice.  Bolton (1999) states, "Poetry uses image to explicate

and convey complex emotional and mental happenings" (p. 128).  By using image, the

intangible becomes tangible, something with form and substance, as stated earlier—not

only is this quality reason for using poetry but for using actual images, like photos and

drawings, as well.  But, Furman (2004) finds something more.  Poetry is lasting.  Furman

(2004) states, "An evocative and vivid image can linger in the mind long after words

have been read" (p. 163).  Further, it time-binds the experience.  Not only does poetry

create indelible images in the mind, but the written word lasts indefinitely on the page,

is capable of being shared with others of one's own time and into the future, and links

one with other authors, even oneself at past and future stages (Feirstein, 2003).  Hall (in

Heard, 1999) stated, "Poetry enacts our losses so that we can share the notion that we

all lose—and hold each other's hands" (p. 20). Like other forms of writing, poetry starts

with the individual but can help others through knowing they are not alone, they are

part of a shared experience.

Poetry also keys into natural human tendencies: "The mind/brain has a natural

propensity to use metaphors and dramatic techniques for self-healing after trauma"

(Feirstein, 2003, p. 255).  Metaphors are used throughout poetry to convey feelings, but

they also provide a healing dimension.  Furman (2004) states, "Often, the impact of a

metaphor is more powerful and succinct than if one were merely to describe the

dynamics of an experience or a relationship" (p. 163).  The use of metaphor helps the

writer to address complex and nearly uncontrollable emotions and events, and because

metaphors are typically succinct, they are memorable and easily retrieved (Furman,

2004).  Metaphors can also work as a "bridge" in that the person learns about the

unknown or unspeakable through the known, which of course, leads to writing that

heals (Fox, personal communication, May 2, 2011)

While voice is a component of all writing, and has been discussed elsewhere, it is

also a critical component of poetry.  As Heard (1995), says, "Writing is made of voices"

(p. xi).  Caroll agrees, "Modern poetry is based on voices" (p. 161).  In fact, voice in a

written work is a representation of the author.  The cadence, word choice, tone, symbolism, and all else that sculpt voice also contribute to creating the impression of the writer in the reader.   Heard (1995) states, "When we begin to speak in the language that is ours and tell our own stories and truths, we are surprised that this too is poetry" (p. 9).  And it is in moments of strife that we often want to hear another voice, a connection to what makes us human (Carroll, 2005).  Poetry can provide that voice.

However, Heard (1999) states that silence is also poetic, "It is both the words—the voices on the page—as well as the silence between words that poets work with when we write poetry" (p. 84).  Yet, it is the words—the sounds—that are remembered.  Those sounds are individualistic to a people, to a person.  Wooldridge states, "We all have an individual rhythm in our breathing, our heartbeat, our walk, talk and even in our thoughts that's expressed in our poems.  Even modern poems written in free verse have a rhythm and a pace" (p. 165).

So, if poetry is all that great, why aren't all poets living easily, in a zen-like calm in the world?  Kaufman and Sexton (2006) asked this same question, finding in others' research that artists are the most likely of all professions to have mental illnesses, and of those, writers experience mental illness the most and typically die at younger ages.  Even worse, poets have the highest rates of suicide, mental ailments, and death than all others (Kaufman & Sexton, 2006).  What these researchers found is that poetry in itself is not a panacea but must include one key component:  narrative (Kaufman & Sexton, 2006)—though even this is not foolproof, as some poets who write narrative poetry still

commit suicide; physiological factors, such as mental illness, as well as other dimensions still press upon each individual and influence actions.    Through narrative poetry, poetry that adheres to common conventions associated with the poetic form but instead of describing a place or thing recounts the story of an event, the author is able to make meaning and desensitize himself to the emotions related to an event through repeated writings and revisions.  Additionally, narrative poetry is longer than most other forms and thus gives the author room to shift perspective (Kaufman & Sexton, 2006). Narrative poetry, Kaufman and Sexton also found, organizes memory, making it more facile to store and recall.  As was seen in the earlier discussion of narrative, narrative poetry is an organization of self scribed onto the page.  Goldberg (1986) warns, however, that the author is not the poem:

> Sometimes when I read poems at a reading to strangers, I realize they think those poems are me.  They are not me, even if I speak in the "I" person.  They were my thoughts and my hand and the space and the emotions at that time of writing.  Watch yourself.  Every minute we change.  It is a great opportunity.  At any point, we can step out of our frozen selves and our ideas and begin fresh. That is how writing is.  Instead of freezing us, it frees us." (Goldberg, 1986, p. 32).

Response and Feedback. In most adaptations of writing workshop, peer conferencing, sometimes called peer revisions groups, is one piece of the process.  That holds true for the class examined here.  Most peer conferences include either a writer reading the piece aloud while others listen and follow along reading their own duplicate of the piece, followed by a short time in which the reader(s) provide critical feedback,

both positive and negative in nature.  In many instances peer conferences, whether in a one-to-one or a group dynamic, can be problematic.  Blasingame and Bushman (2005) find that in order for peer conferences, no matter size of group, to be effective, the students in the groups must have the ability to critique another's work and give constructive feedback.  This feedback must not only be expressed to the author but must be distinct and couched in a manner the writer will understand.  Barnes (1992) found interaction crucial to groups' success: "The success of a group appears to depend in part upon what might be called the level of interaction, that is, the extent to which members of the group are genuinely working together, trying to communicate or understand" (p. 39).  Romano (1987), likewise, finds that peer groups will work at many different levels:  some competently, a few enthusiastically, others poorly, and many differentiations between.  For this reason, when creating groups, he looks at individual personalities, the class's overall dynamics, and then relies on his own best feelings toward the group creation.  Likewise, he states that these groups cause him the most disquiet because he is tendering a measure of control to these students and because he has set high goals for the groups' response.

Fulwiler (in Bazerman & Russell, 1994) agrees that peer review groups are often a sore spot for teaching, citing that among content area teachers, trust is a major concern:

> Peer review only works for me when I trust both the process and the students enough to work them hard, that is, when I return to the process more than two or three times during the term in the same groups of four or five.  Used less than

that, students simply do not have the time to develop trust in each other or to

develop that critical, skeptical eye so important to good revision. (p. 56)

But Romano (1987) also sees peer groups as positive expressions of trust, despite

teacher unease, in that students will often be more candid with each other, risk more

when among peers than when addressing the teacher. However, trust is the key

component to making peer groups work. Blasingame and Bushman (2005) cite trust as

critical: "Students will be more open to feedback about their writing if the writing

workshop atmosphere and operation have built trust among the members, especially

the members of the writing/conferencing groups" (p. 55). Atwell (1998) candidly

concurs: "Peer conferences won't work unless writers trust that their peers won't shoot

them down" (p. 75). She adds that part of that responsibility falls upon the teacher to

set the tone for purposeful responses, not only in mini-lessons but also in the general

attitude throughout the class time.

Students gain tremendously from these interactions. An unspoken but implicit

outcome of these group dynamics—if done well—is positive socialization. True for

adults as well as students of any age, a well-structured, constructive critique group can

teach writers not only how to be contributing members to an authorial group but also

how to be valuable members of society—if the peer group is a microcosm of the larger

society. Additionally, positive peer group interaction builds confidence in the individual.

Burke (2008) sees these groups as arbiters of belief: "Students listen to each other if

given a chance; they appreciate being taken seriously, having the teacher recognize that

they have something to say" (p 305). Obviously, teachers use peer groups to boost

student writing abilities. Romano (1987) finds that reading their writings to their peers encourages students to hear the sounds and cadence of their writing; they begin to perceive their own voice in writing. And, he adds, "The talk is too important" (p. 70). Why? Barnes (1992) found in a study that students talking in a group interpreted differently than when they worked by themselves. This is also true of the revision process; writers will evaluate their own writing differently because of the influence, either implied or obvious, of others in their group.

Writing to Heal. What is writing to heal? Called "therapeutic writing," "transformational writing," "self-evaluative" or "reflective writing" by others, I chose to use the more generic "writing to heal" because it is at once the most inclusive. Healing can mean most anything: understanding, physical curative, mental relief, and so on. Therapeutic writing, however, sounds like it comes from a clinical setting, which is not always the case with writing to heal. Transformational writing implies that, obviously, a transformation occurs, but what if no transformation happens—what if a minute shift in perspective is all that is achieved—is it still transformational? I am leery to say so. And the last two, self-evaluative and reflective writing, can be done without any change occurring in thought, feeling, or whatever else—though the process itself in these two titles or types of writing can prove beneficial.

Many people have never considered the act of writing as having potentially therapeutic qualities. Even professional authors sometimes do not recognize writing as a viable healing tool. Educators, especially those in language arts and related content areas, acknowledge that writing helps students learn, but they often overlook its

psychological and emotive benefits. And, as a relatively new field of study, writing as healing as of yet has no established lexicon, no agreed upon basic qualities, and only an increasing usage nationally and internationally. So, in order to fully examine this concept, I will address personal/professional published examples, the nature of trauma in relation to this therapy, writing as healing's characteristics, and its effects.

Trauma. Before discussing Writing as Healing's characteristics, a general understanding of the conditions that spark it must be examined. The concept "Writing as Healing" at first suggests the notion that some form of trauma must have occurred for "healing" to be needed, which in many instances is the case. However, the necessity for healing can result from virtually anything, depending on the individual. For instance, one might need to recover from the death of a loved one, a truly fundamental trauma, or from bullying, an insidious form of daily upsets, or from the elemental insecurities of maturing, of finding one's true identity, of understanding who one is within the macrocosm of society. Moffett (in Berthoff, Daniell, Campbell, Swearingen, & Moffett, 1994) states, "Students need badly to use writing to do their own moral inventory. You don't have to be alcoholic or in some other crisis. Just being young and growing—or even just taking part in this world—gives you enough reason to want to assess what you are up to and what you are" (p. 259). Siegel (2007) concurs, citing neurological reasons for adolescents potentially needing healing. In adolescence, the brain reorganizes, eliminating unused neurons. This process can be worsened by stress and can create susceptibility as weak areas become more obvious, possibly creating inconsistencies in empathy, perception, and emotional equanimity (Siegel, 2007).

Thus, in what circumstances does writing as healing particularly work? What kind of emotional disturbance or state of being generates it? Pennebaker (2007) found that roughly half of people manage trauma well. However, some traumas are more lasting in the consciousness, even for those who manage stressors acceptably. Holocaust survivors, for instance, while leading productive and fulfilling lives, still found that a measure of healing from their experiences during the genocide could be accomplished because the anguish of trauma often recedes in phases (Pennebaker, 2007). One common characteristic of trauma survivors is lack of control. Anderson and MacCurdy (2000) state, "As trauma survivors, we share one very important characteristic: We feel powerless, taken over by alien experiences we could not anticipate and did not choose. Healing depends upon gaining control over that which has engulfed us" (p. 5).

But it is difficult to gain control when emotions are involved because usually emotions engage the whole body. Recollections of trauma are semiotic (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000). The person has a physical reaction even when not consciously informed that the memory is causing such reaction. MacCurdy (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) states that this happens because traumatic memories are housed in the amygdala which stores the images and assigns emotional power. She adds that during a trauma the body releases chemicals that boost the retention and quality of the memory. MacCurdy states, "We cannot recall a difficult memory without also re-experiencing the emotional charge it produces" (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 193).

Notice that MacCurdy stated memories are stored as images—which is why verbalizing them and using actual images is so imperative.  She says, "These images are hard to verbalize because they are locked into a part of the brain that is pre-verbal [the amygdala]" (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 162). She adds that victims of trauma typically recount their experiences at first in terms of images and sounds, not linear narratives, because their memories are stored as senses, not words.  Johnson (1946) proposed this idea decades before MacCurdy, stating that "maladjusted people" are disturbed because they cannot state their problem(s) clearly.  DeSalvo (1999) also agrees, citing some mental illnesses are often caused because a person can't verbalize the event and the suffering it caused.  Further, Johnson (1946) equates these individual's quandaries to verbal cocoons in which they encase themselves as a kind of buffer to everything around them, a cocoon they may never leave.  To Johnson's way of thinking, they would have to state their problem succinctly enough that the process of recovery could be surmised from within the statement.  Johnson sees the healing begin with being able to identify, confront, and then express, verbalize the problem.   The trouble, among many, with this state of being is that people under stress—either immediate or remembered—revert to a lower level of thinking (Pennebaker, 1997).

Another issue with unresolved trauma or stress in one's life is the toll it exacts on the body.  Siegel (2007) explains the genesis of this link of emotion and its effect on the body. When developing in the womb, the brain forms from what eventually become skin cells—thus linking inner and outer self: the brain being the innermost self because it houses both emotion and thought and the skin being the outermost, living element of

the self, the part we most readily reveal to others. Knowing this first stage of human development makes Pennebaker's and other scientists' findings of health issues resulting from emotional states appear logical. For instance, Foehr (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) found that fear, a heightened state of emotion, can generate pessimistic outlooks, health issues, and lesser efficiency. She states that one can see fear's negative effects in irrational behavior, sabotage, and "cut-throat politics" (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 338).

Likewise, Pennebaker (2007) found that "both subjective experienced emotion and the bases of emotional expressiveness are tied to health and illness" (p. 6). Pennebaker (1997) also found that those with non-verbalized trauma experience and unresolved issues had higher rates of illness and doctors visits, including lesser immune functioning, sleep disorders, elevated levels of depression, stress markers (like high blood pressure), and allergies. Likewise, illnesses suffered later in life can be as a direct result of repressed emotions from an earlier life conflict (Pennebaker, 1997). Mental and emotional conflicts can be seen physically manifested later. Pennebaker (1997) saw this in people who have been sexually abused or in people repressing emotion/memory of events. The former often developed reproductive ailments while the latter sometimes developed migraine headaches. This semiotic reaction occurs because suppression is an active process that wears down the body; one must actively suppress those traumas which take energy away from the body, inhibiting mindful thinking, and generating "stupid" thinking (Pennebaker 1997), what Johnson (1946) termed "maladjusted people."

So, knowing that verbalizing one's emotions might help, why do so many people not express themselves, not relieve their burden? Most people reserve their emotions because of inhibitions (Pennebaker, 1997 & 2007). Pennebaker (1997) states, "The problem is that overly inhibited individuals thrive on predictability in an often unpredictable world. When faced with an emotionally wrenching trauma, it is often essential to remain flexible, to talk to others, and to acknowledge powerful moods" (p. 144). When inhibited individuals meet with such unpredictable events, they may try to change the environment to suit their respective personality, rather than trying to be flexible. (Pennebaker, 1997). As Pennebaker (1997) states, "People aren't passive. We are active engineers in our environment" (p. 149). But, changing one's environment can be difficult, if not impossible. Thus, the physical manifestations begin to appear.

Some individuals are innately inhibited (Pennebaker, 1997). However, people also keep secrets (inhibit) to avoid disapproval from society (Pennebaker, 2007). Wegner & Lane (in Pennebaker, 2007) found four types of secrets: offenses, which evolve from illegal or unaccepted activities perpetrated on another person; worries, which generate from events performed on one by another; sorrows, which include elements of failure, guarding one's ego or esteem in the community; and sins, which develop from an individualistic moral not being met.

Secret-keeping is a paradoxical behavior, because, while in attempting to inhibit the secret thought or idea, the suppression keeps that secret ever more immediate in the consciousness. Wegner & Lane (in Pennebaker, 2007) explain this process: when consciousness' monitor notices the secret is being considered, it tosses it to the

consciousness' operator who then tries to suppress it.  Eventually this back and forth

game lowers resistance and renders the secret "hyperaccessible" to the conscious mind

(p. 32).  The very act of attempted suppression, thus, makes the intruding thought even

more present in the mind.  Like Pennebaker's findings with other populations, Wegner

& Lane (in Pennebaker, 2007) found that secrecy can exacerbate issues or lead to

psychopathological behavior, like persons with eating issues compound the problem

into a disorder (bulimia, obesity, and/or anorexia) in part because of the secrecy factor.

        In fact, even once the secret is revealed, it may remain in the consciousness for a

while, simply due to the conditioning the mind has received to obsess over it

(Pennebaker, 2007).  But, once the person acknowledges that a health issue has arisen,

the health issue can decrease or disappear, because focusing on the cause of the

problem helps get rid of the psychological issue, and recognition of it helps the person

feel in control and thus increases the level of thinking (Pennebaker, 1997).  Confronting

issues helps people overcome their problems; it reduces the effect of inhibition and

forces rethinking of events (Pennebaker, 1997).  So, if one uses writing to confront

issues and rethink events, what does that look like?

        Personal/professional examples.While this document is the distillation of

research, its subject is both personal and powerful.  The research findings discussed in

later chapters are refinements of individual students' personal experience with using

writing to heal.  So, to begin a review of literature surrounding the use of writing as a

healing technique, the discussion must first address other—perhaps more well known—

personal examples of writing to heal.  Instances abound in mainstream literature of

individuals using writing to heal from a variety of issues.  Louise DeSalvo (1999) cites

three instances of well known authors using writing to heal:  Mary Shelley turned to

writing because she had no other outlet, Charlotte Perkins Gilman believed not writing

caused depression, and Djuna Barnes saw writing as a form of restitution/justice.

Similarly, professional novelists, like Isabel Allende, and writers of educational practices,

like Susan Zimmerman, have written memoirs detailing and modeling how writing has

helped them cope with the serious illness and the deaths of their daughters.

The arguably most well known examples of writing as healing are those accounts

written by survivors of the Holocaust in the 1940s.  Books, such as Elie Wiesel's Night

and Gerta Weissmann Klein's All But My Life, are first person accounts of the atrocities

perpetrated by the Nazis upon Jews, homosexuals, mentally ill, political dissenters, and

many more.  In his preface to Marion Wiesel's translation of his book, Elie Wiesel (2006)

never answers whether he wrote the book to keep from going mad, as a form of writing

to heal.  Instead, he says, not of himself but of a third person "survivor":

> For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for
> the dead and the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past
> that belongs to our collective memory.  To forget would be not only dangerous
> but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.
> (Wiesel, 2006, p. xv, emphasis in original)

While Wiesel never reveals what emotional or mental benefits to himself writing this

book brought, he chooses to share that his intent was to help the world, the people on

it (past, present, and future). Surely, the writing and the sharing aided him. I can only hope.

Other authors choose more personal, less historical, subjects for their writing to heal experiences. Allende's (1994) book, Paula, is a letter written to her daughter, Paula, while she lay in a catatonic state. In it, Allende tells Paula about writing her first novel, The House Made of Spirits: "Writing is a long process of introspection; it is a voyage toward the darkest caverns of consciousness, a long, slow meditation. I write feeling my way in silence and along the way discover particles of truth" (p. 9). She adds later, "I think that perhaps if I give form to this devastation I shall be able to help you, and myself, and that the meticulous exercise of writing can be our salvation" (p. 9). While Paula eventually died from her condition, she lives on as a spirit in the woods surrounding Allende's house and within the pages of the book that aided her mother in reaching closure.

Likewise, Susan Zimmerman (2002) discusses in Writing to Heal the Soul: Transforming Grief and Loss through Writing how she used writing to cope with her daughter Katherine's debilitating illness. Through writing, she was able to find a measure of peace in dealing with the daily sadness of watching a beloved child never reach the summits Zimmerman had hoped for Katherine. She states, "The act of writing brings a structure and order to the chaos of grief. It taps into the healing power of your own unconscious. By giving voice to fears, anger, and despair, by letting go of old dreams and hopes, our self-healing powers come into play" (p. 18). She equates this method of healing to swimming parallel to shore: sometimes in order to make progress,

one must coast back to a certain point and try again, using different strokes or taking a different direction. While she uses various genres of writing, she focuses most on poetry. She compares poetry to breathing, saying, "It fills us. It has a rhythm and a spareness. Its compactness offers no padding. It is closer to the heart than other writing. Poetry gives us a way to capture an image, a moment, a feeling, a memory" (p. 91).

Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge knows poetry's qualities well. She is known among writing instructors for her book, PoemCrazy, in which she shares poetry writing ideas and ways to generate writing about self. However, in FoolsGold (2007), she describes her mental health battles and how writing and art helped her heal. She states, "My feelings shift when I write about something…Writing makes me more present, more fully there, observing closely, and at the same time, one step removed" (p. 196). She states that sorting writing into chapters is key to her writing as healing experience: "Chapters make things manageable, with a distinct beginning and ending. I can open them and I can close them" (p. 195). In FoolsGold, Wooldridge also shares her observations of workshops she has done with children and how writing has helped them. For instance, she led a series of poetry workshops in a juvenile detention facility near her home. A neo-Nazi gang leader embraced the form and was eagerly awaiting her every day with new poems he'd written, like the one in which he depicts himself as an angel visiting his younger self and voicing his concerns about his choices. Wooldridge, who is Jewish, was astounded at his eagerness to share with her: "His desire to express himself and be heard seems greater than dogma or duty" (p. 93).

Another professional writer who grappled with his own writing as healing, as well as with that of his students, was Donald Murray (2004). Of writing as healing, he found that it is both of the brain and of the soul, linking the two together. He states of his own experience:

> Writing is my way of achieving moments of sanity or understanding. I come from a background that was filled with sin, guilt, and threats of Hell and damnation. I was brought up with a grandmother who was paralyzed when I was young, and it was my job when I woke up early in the morning to see if she was still alive. I was a sickly, only child in a world filled with the threat of disease and death, punishment and retribution, and much of my writing is a psychological necessity. (Murray, 2004, p. 11)

He used reading and writing as way to grapple with the drawn-out death of his brother-in-law to cancer and relates how he saw his students use writing to ease their own pain, how it creates the needed distance for the writer to heal (Murray, 1982). In talking to his class (and the book's readership) about writing's power, he states:

> I tell them that they do not have to write of these things. I tell them they should write of such matters if it bothers them. They tell me it feels good, and then look guilty. I tell them I know. It helps, somehow, to put words on paper. I tell them it gives me distance, in a way, it makes what cannot be believed, a fact. I tell them I cannot understand why it feels good to write of such terrible things, but I confess it does feel good that [sic] is my way of achieving a kind of sanity. (Murray, 1982, p. 46)

The beautiful thing about writing as healing is that it is so multi-faceted.  It is at once

deeply personal yet it can be shared and, in that way, help to heal another.  And, its

sharing isn't limited to reading another's healing words.

On September 11, 2001, Vasiliki Antzoulis (2003) was a student teacher at

Stuyvesant High School, mere blocks from the Twin Towers.  During the immediate

aftermath of the terrorist attack, Stuyvesant became a triage center for the emergency

responders, and Antzoulis and her students were moved to a school in one of the New

York City boroughs.  However, Antzoulis realized that in the wake of these events, her

students did not need the carefully crafted short story unit she had fashioned before the

planes hit the towers; they needed something to help them internalize and deal

emotionally and mentally with the aftermath.  Additionally, no matter what she chose

to do, she had no materials to use—no books, no teachers' guides, nothing.  She turned

to reading and writing literature.  Her students wrote poetry, adding a stanza to "A

Poison Tree" or writing their own Song of Experience.  Through this writing, they

"channeled their fears, grief, anger, and confusion…to begin the healing process and

gain a new appreciation for the reading and writing of poetry" (p. 49).  Antzoulis was

able to meet curricular goals while providing a measure of healing through the study of

poetry.  As DeSalvo (1999) states of authors who use writing to heal, "They also write to

help heal a culture that, if it is to become moral, ethical, and spiritual, must recognize

what these writers have observed, experienced, and witnessed.  All are writing to right a

human wrong" (p. 216).

Similar to Antzoulis, Molly Hurley Moran (2004) took writing to heal into her classroom. Moran's idea began in her own use of writing to heal from her sister's disappearance and believed—and later corroborated—death. In a desire to continue such therapeutic writing yet worried that her university's tenure committee would not approve of such a curriculum choice, she revised her composition course to include more personal writing. She states, "The idea that I could channel my pain into a narrative comforted me in a way I found hard to explain...writing a story about a personal tragedy connects one with others who have gone through a similar trauma and thereby universalizes it" (p. 94). And, by bringing this writing dimension to her classroom, she found that her students experienced similar effects. Referencing quantitative data, Moran found fifty-six percent of her students indicated in a survey, administered at the beginning of the semester and again at the end, an improved attitude toward writing. Also, her average grade rose from an eighty percent to an eighty-six. Finally, Moran saw a marked improvement in confidence and pride in the written word when nearly all her students contributed pieces to the class anthology. Previously, only students receiving A's on their papers submitted essays. Moran states, "They wanted to publish their essays not because they'd received A's on them (they didn't know any of their grades at this point) but because they had written about things that truly mattered to them" (p. 109). While Antzoulis's students healed from a catastrophic event, unprecedented on American soil, Moran's students healed from the less severe but just as real negative associations with writing.

But writing in the classroom can have dramatic effects on a child's life and assist his teacher in better understanding his particular situation. Virlie Nugent's (1994) case study detailed how Juan, a student in her elementary special education classroom, was helped by writing about his experiences. Juan had been molested by an uncle for several years. When the family learned what was occurring, they sided with the uncle against the boy, ignoring Juan and separating him from others. This behavior extended into the classroom when Juan self-segregated, sitting apart from others. However, upon reading his first writing assignment in which he was supposed to detail his activities after school ends each day and in which he describes being isolated from his family and looking into a mirror to make sure he was still there, Nugent became worried about Juan's mental health. Working with the school counselor, she continued to give writing assignments that promoted expressive and self-revelatory/reflective writing. Eventually, Juan started interacting with others in the class and sharing more of himself with the teacher and others. By the end of the school year, Nugent and the counselor were no longer fearing Juan would commit suicide. As Nugent says, "We were lucky with Juan—lucky that he found an outlet for his pain in writing and in poetry, lucky that the counselor and myself recognized, in time, what was happening with this student, and lucky that Juan was a fighter" (p. 43).

Laura Milner (2005), like these teachers just mentioned, also uses writing as a healing device in her classes, in fact teaching a "Writing as Healing" course specifically. However, for her dissertation she chose to focus on the former students from her freshman composition courses who had experienced the loss of at least one parent

before entering college. She found that these students in particular—as well as other

students who had experienced life-altering traumas—seemed compelled to write and

share verbally in class their identities as orphans, almost as a way to be recognized, as a

forceful expression of identity. Though the first year of college, most students

experience some disconnection with parents and a desire to solidify their own identities,

her participants seemed to use writing as a way of crafting their own identities without

the familial stories the other students had to ground their concepts of self. She states,

they are attempting to "reconstitute and re-envision their lives" (Milner, 2005, p. 178).

Plus, Milner saw the writing as a way for the student to reestablish a connection to that

deceased parent.

Louise DeSalvo (1999) has also seen writing to heal's empowering effects within

her own life and in other's experiences. She says it is like yeast, "alive and growing and

changing" (p. 8). However, her work goes beyond the personal experience and the

witnessing of it in others; she also studied its characteristics, the environment that

spawns it, and its effects. In this action, she joins other researchers like Pennebaker,

Anderson, and MacCurdy. These characteristics will be discussed later.

Characteristics. Writing as healing is as individualistic as the persons who use it.

Although researchers agree on many characteristics, some characteristics are debatable.

Linking emotion and event. Though elements of healing can be found in the

writing of many genres and can have just as many characteristics, one trait that is found

in nearly every piece of writing as healing is the linking of emotion to the events

(DeSalvo, 1999; Pennebaker, 1997). Through reflection, writers recall what happened

and revisit the emotions of those events. In reflection, the insula and prefrontal areas of the brain are sparked, especially on the right hemisphere of the brain (Siegel, 2007). The accessing of these areas can ignite greater empathy and self-observation in the individual (Siegel, 2007). Making the original connection leads to deeper and richer types and levels of links within the individual:

> "...a memory of an emotional episode can be seen as an information network that includes units representing emotional stimuli, somatic or visceral responses, and related semantic (interpretive) knowledge...Because of the implicit connectivity, the other representations in the structure are also automatically engaged, and as the circuit is associative, any of the units might initiate or subsequently contribute to this process." (Lane, in Pennebaker, 2007, p. 102)

Thus, writing about emotions while relating the events that cause those feelings may originally be a synthesis of the experience, but like a web, its reaches extend far beyond the original point of contact. By touching this one spot on the web of his life, the author may see implications for other spots linked to it through a network of lines.

In addition to neurological effects, writing about trauma by providing the reader a vicarious experience, making the events and the feelings "real," also enhances the author's writing abilities, such as connecting with the audience. MacCurdy (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) states, "The methods which produce good writing are the very ones that facilitate healing: iconic image rather than voice-over narrative is the core of both processes" (p. 159). This is why many teachers begin the writing process in students with an image, either having students draw or bring an image, like a photograph, to

school.  Beginning with the concrete representation sparks memory as well as helps to solidify facets of the event that were not originally perceived or remembered.  Bucci (in Pennebaker, 2007) sees a link with the reader as an important step: emotion is expressed best through description of images and actions which trigger referential links in the reader.  But MacCurdy (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) sees the strength of this writing in the clarity of the senses related: "Once students get beyond the clichés that can undermine the power of the experience, I have found that those emotionally charged topics can generate sharp imagery, clear sensory detail, and thematic sophistication" (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 159).  As discussed earlier, memories are stored as sensory details in the brain, so finding such complete description of the event should be expected.  However, the thematic sophistication results from the creative process of synthesis. Bucci (in Pennebaker, 2007) says, "The process of accessing and verbalizing subsymbolic  experience and connecting this to specific imagery and to language—in some cases, redefining the experience—is a fundamentally creative function" (p. 108).  In other words, expression is not enough; the experience must be put into language, a creative process, to be healing (Pennebaker, 1997; DeSalvo, 1999).  The experience must be reshaped or recreated, incorporating previously unperceived or forgotten elements to create "a new whole" (Fox, personal communication, May 2, 2011).  Johnson links this back to school writing:  "We connect the healing dimension of composing to what, in schools, is called creative writing…writing that heals is often writing in which the writer names, describes, and takes control of experience in which the writer's powers of naming and controlling have

been explicitly annihilated" (p. 86). Here Johnson links writing to what has previously been discussed about trauma, namely that in trauma we lose control but writing helps us regain, at least in part, a sense of dominion again.

Catharsis. Julier (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) states, "Writing is an act of speaking out" (p. 363). Siegel (2007) takes it one step further: "Words can free us" (p. 160). When one speaks out, one is free—much like common conceptions of catharsis. Boal (1985) equates catharsis with "purification...purgation of the extraneous, undesirable element which prevents the character from achieving his ends" (p. 32). Boal (1999) also defines four different catharses:

- medical: eradicating the sources of the suffering despite the sufferings outlet (physical, psychological, emotional, etc.). In this instance, the patient is free from illness, from pain, from hurt or harm. While emotional release might also be present, the main release here is physiological.

- Morenian: elimination of an intangible poison (like anger) with the goal being happiness. This instance might be closest to what is commonly understood as catharsis. It involves the expelling of emotion from the system, like venting to a friend, punching a bag, forcing out of the person whatever emotions are causing stress, tension, or hurt.

- Aristotelian: a means of indoctrination into societal mores, it allows the audience to live vicariously through the characters with the result that societal law is upheld. Boal calls this form "disempowering and

tranquilizing" in its bid to "adapt the individual to society" (p. 71). This

version of catharsis is not housed directly in the body but results from

witnessing and, to a limited extent, feeling within the person the

emotions and thoughts of an actor on stage. As an imperfect parallel to

the actors on stage, the audience feel a sense of release from simply

observing the actors going through the motions of healing rather than

the audience actively participating in that healing.

- Theatre of the Oppressed version: "to create disequlibrium which

  prepares the way for action. Its goal is to dynamize" (pg. 72). Boal's

  incantation of catharsis steals parts of the previous three versions. In his

  version, the audience watches actors on stage dramatize a traumatic

  situation and then upon the scene being immediately re-acted the

  audience can step into the roles and try different responses to the

  trauma. The audience then embodies the "cure" in a trial run in

  preparation for the real life situation. Within this "testing out" of

  possible ways to overcome the trauma, the audience begin to see their

  own power in the situation and receive a measure of emotional and

  mental release.

The four classifications of catharsis share one element, which see catharsis as

betterment (if one discounts Boal's objections to Aristotelian catharsis). However, the

medical and Morenian versions and, to some extent, the final version align with the

catharsis felt with writing as healing. Pennebaker (1997) states of expressive communication, like writing as healing:

> Freud and Breuer believed that the value of the talking cure lay in its ability to release pent-up feelings that the person was holding back. The two men reasoned that the release of these pent-up feelings, or catharsis, discharged psychic tension in the same way that removing the lid from a pot of boiling water slows the boiling. (p. 28).

Johnson (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000), like Boal and Pennebaker, looks back in history to see how catharsis heals: for Gorgias and Antiphon, "the flexibility of the self and its knowledge is the key to healing, for, as we recall, catharsis means casting off outworn selves and entering into new ones" (p. 102).

Another element of the process is the ability of writing to heal to create distance between the author and the issue. Siegel (2007) states, "Words can free us: as symbols they are essential to distance us from experience enough to compare and contrast and reveal patterns in a complex universe" (p. 160). Likewise, Anderson and MacCurdy (2000) cite Felman and Laub's idea of transmission: "Re-externalizing of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again" (p. 6, emphasis in original). All of these points, thus far, equate with the first two definitions of catharsis, as an expelling of something bad, a distancing. However, Warnock (in Anderson and MacCurdy, 2000) seems to associate writing as healing more with the final definition, the compelling into action. She cites Burke's idea of words and symbols as aides to not

only view events from alternative perspectives but also as an impetus to act,

metaphorically or literally. With such a new perspective, future responses to events can

be different, based upon what the individual learns from the writing. Not only are

people able to revise their writing, but they can revise their actions (Warnock, in

Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000).

Audience. One point about writing as healing where researchers disagree is in

terms of audience. Pennebaker (1997) states that writing should be primarily for

oneself because writing with the intent to share it will prejudice what is written; the

writing will not be an uncensored, authentic version but rather written to please others

or to conceal what is socially unacceptable. In Allen's (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000)

study of college students' writing, one participant illustrated that she was her first—and

perhaps only—audience, stating that she became her own witness of events and

feelings. This example illustrates Johnson's statement that not only does a speaker (or

in our case, writer) communicate ideas to an audience, but that the communication can

be directed back to the speaker/writer: "A speaker is generally his own most responsive

and deeply affected listener" (p. 162).

However, other researchers (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000; DeSalvo, 1999) imply

through their discussion of sharing, disclosure, and audience that writing, while initially

composed for oneself, may be shared at some later point. The ancient Greeks thought

that language healed because it illustrated that people are constantly evolving, that a

person has no specific form to reach, that language is a "socially engaged process that is

always available for revision" (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 87). Writing for many is

a conduit back into society, and thus sharing it further strengthens that connection (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000). DeSalvo (1999) sees this connection: "Sharing our work removes us from a solitary brooding….sharing work becomes a bridge to sharing ourselves" (p. 208). And in the sharing of ourselves and our stories, we learn we are not alone. Sharing their stories within meetings is one of the foundational elements of Alcoholics Anonymous and their sister organizations. These groups believe that meeting together, talking about their troubles, aids in healing—for the alcoholic to remain sober, for the family members to come to terms with their loved one's alcoholism and its repercussions. Likewise, in many therapy settings, group disclosure is critical to healing; some group therapies include a writing component, in which individuals not only express their emotions on paper but then share those pieces with others in the group therapy setting. In fact, Pennebaker (1997) identifies sharing as a needed element of writing to heal, with statements like, "The more that people openly talk about an issue, the less they obsess about it" (p. 126). Gere (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) found that not only did the writing she composed help her but that healing "could be multiplied by sharing it with others" (p. 29).

Nye (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) found that writing groups induced a feeling of caring for one another: "The group dynamic of sharing with one another evokes compassion, caring, and a sense of belonging…Being acknowledged is part of the healing process. Being heard, or acknowledged, is being cared for" (p. 405-406). Johnson (1946) sees this as a sign of good health. He found that many of the maladjusted patients considered themselves alone in having a particular problem and that nobody

else endured at the same level of pain.  Sharing one's issues in writing counteracts that idea.  MacCurdy (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) concurs:  "As they tell their stories [trauma victims] discover that others have been touched by pain as well, perhaps a different pain, but pain nonetheless.  This commonality helps to ameliorate the excruciating isolation that is a by-product of trauma" (p. 177).  Berman and Schiff (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) also agree, noticing that people naturally compare themselves and their experiences to that of others.  This comparison expands the people's point of view and thus the understanding of their own problems.

DeSalvo (1999) discovered that through writing we read our lives—we see ourselves as part of a larger story rather than seeing the story through a singular perspective: "Writing in groups makes us more aware of our writing as a potentially public document.  We become responsible for the words we write in a way we might not if we didn't anticipate sharing" (p. 208).  This idea of a public document is important in many cases, such as with Holocaust survivors.  By creating an artifact, the person evolves from survivor to witness, not just surmounting the experience but recounting it to others in order that they might learn and heal (DeSalvo, 1999).  Pennebaker (1997) links this personal artifact creation to society's need of memorials, such as the Vietnam War Memorial, as artifacts that permit people, who could not do so otherwise, to confront traumas related to overwhelming societal events. Artifacts, whether they be engravings on a leaf of paper or on a marble stone, are tangible enclosures of events that may withstand space and time, providing a measure of healing to not only the creator but also his/her audience.

As stated earlier by DeSalvo (1999), writing about problems creates a bridge between the author and the audience.  Warnock (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) takes this a step further, stating that the author and the audience work together to create meaning from text: "This approach to writing invites readers to revise the text by filling in the gaps, bridging the abyss, connecting the dots, and supplying the missing links" (p. 37).  Akin to Rosenblatt's (1994) theory of the reader using his background and experience to make meaning of a text, Warnock's idea implies that readers will draw what they need from the text in the same manner that the author derived his own healing from writing it.

No matter what the reader gains from the text, the author must have some basic characteristics when picturing an audience.  Johnson (1946), in speaking of clinicians, states that a listener (reader) must foremost just listen.  Whether the person is talking or reading a work aloud, listening without interruptions or without a barrage of questions is critical.   This quality of audience is why writing serves so well as a healing device:  the audience cannot interrupt the author.  Pennebaker (1997) gives a much more thorough listing of audience needs for the writer to heal.  Among these, two rise to the top.  The confidant must be nonjudgmental and trustworthy.  Payne (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) alluded to these two qualities of the reader in her chapter detailing her students' writing about their experiences of sexual abuse.  As the teacher reading these essays, Payne must be aware of the power dimensions in her classroom as well as her own capabilities in handling recounts of trauma:

Any intervention is suspect—the student naturally feels vulnerable and thus easily hurt and exploited; form needs to be separated from content, and yet doing so might further hurt the student (implying that the content is connected to the student's sense of self); the affective attachments that might occur between student and teacher might 'drain' the teacher and further damage the student because the teacher is not appropriately skilled. (Payne in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 153).

As stated previously, teachers often encounter unexpected and traumatic content in their students' writings. One would assume that the students felt the teacher was both nonjudgmental and trustworthy, a sympathetic audience.

Within a writing course, especially one that uses Writer's Workshop approach or the National Writing Project model, writing groups can be an initial form of audience—an alternative to the teacher. Such is the case with our sample. As was discussed with disclosure, trust is a major component within any writing group. Many educational theorists find trust at the heart of a peer writing group (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Ray, 2001; Burkhardt, 2003; Elbow, 1973). Atwell (1998) states, "Peer conferences won't work unless writers trust that their peers won't shoot them down" (p. 75). Elbow (1973) implies the same, saying that when creating a writing group one must choose wisely those invited into the group—or in this case the teacher must choose wisely, looking at the dynamics at work.

Within that group, each individual holds more responsibility: to produce writing of value to the group members and as a respondent to others' writing. DeSalvo (1999)

states, "Writing in groups makes us more aware of our writing as a potentially public

document. We become responsible for the words we write in a way we might not if we

didn't anticipate sharing... Sharing our work removes us from a solitary

brooding...sharing work becomes a bridge to sharing ourselves" (p. 208). Sharing one's

writing expands one's perspective (Kittle, 2008). Thus, not only is being part of a writing

group a responsibility, but it's also a benefit. Each person, no matter ability level or state

of mind or topic, can benefit from sharing writing pieces within a small group (Hindley,

1996). As Graves (1994) states, "Students need to hear the responses of others to their

writing, to discover what they do or do not understand" (p. 108). This may be true for

any writer, not just younger students because Graves and Kittle (2005) later relate how

within a group of teachers, sharing with each other benefited all within the group. Kittle

(in Graves and Kittle, 2005) states, "Eben and Ed wrote poetry. I stuck with narratives,

but I watched their moves carefully. I learned what was important in a poem, and it

changed how I teach poetry" (p. 79).Elbow (1973) states that a writing group offers a

closer reading experience often than a teacher would because the number of papers is

smaller, allowing a closer reading. Kittle (in Graves and Kittle, 2005), citing Mem Fox as

inspiration, finds that not only is her own writing enriched, but she also takes those

lessons back to her students, that they in turn step up their writing, are more serious,

more earnest. The response from peers, the support of peers lights a spark in the

writer—a spark of understanding, hope, motivation, and more. Elbow (1973) states,

"When people not only begin to improve their writing ability but also find themselves in

a group where their words are heard and understood better than they usually are, they

discover messages they want to send which they had forgotten were on their minds" (p.

123). Kittle (in Graves and Kittle, 2005) perhaps states best what a writing group does:

> A writing group is about more than writing.  There is a deep connection with
>
> these people forged from stories of pain and loss, laughter and longing, hopes
>
> and even our deepest fears.  We share.  We are heard.  We write together and
>
> try to make sense of living.  I could tell you it's simpler than that, make it sound
>
> tidy and professional, but it isn't; it's our lives in all their messy complexity.
>
> (Kittle, in Graves and Kittle, 2005, p. 81)

Environment. Obviously, the main environmental factor contributing to writing

as healing's use is that the author has experienced some event or a series of events

from which healing is necessitated.  The common understanding of where writing as

healing is used has been in counseling situations where a therapist has "assigned"

writing as a therapeutic tool.  Wright (2002 & 2005), for instance, has used online

writing with her clients who lived in a remote area and could not attend regular face-to-

face counseling sections.  Not only did Wright and her client discuss those writings in

person, but they also used the medium of writing to discuss the private writings by

emailing each other.  Both forms of writing, the personal journaling and the more public

letter (email) compositions, were used as part of a clinical practice, even though the

actual "clinic" was often a virtual one. Even within other forms of therapy, such as music

therapy, writing has been incorporated.  Hogan (2003), as an example, used song writing

and diaries as part of his music therapy practice.

However, in cases where professional or amateur writers have engaged in using writing to better understand a situation or happening or to recover from a trauma, little information beyond the writing is known and recorded—presumably because this writing was done solely for the individual.  Those who practice writing as healing outside a clinical setting generally do not publish their private compositions. However, in schools, much more has been garnered concerning writing as healing's environment, especially considering writing's use as a learning tool.  Teachers often use writing as a method for learning, such as using free writing to help students uncover hidden understandings about literature, such as Elbow (in Belanoff, Elbow, & Fontaine, 1991) recommends.  But often students amend the purpose of the writing to a more personal healing one and on occasion teachers deliberately use writing not only to help their students learn but also to help them heal from trauma.  Examples of these were addressed earlier in the Personal/Professional Examples section of this chapter.

James Moffett addresses what the university's role should be in using writing as healing:

Consider what therapy, spirituality, and the university's missions are essentially about.  I'll designate them all three by one term, getting better—getting better in the sense of healing, getting better in the sense of becoming a finer person, and getting better in sense of becoming more competent at some activity.

(Moffett in Berthoff, Daniell, Campbell, Swearingen, & Moffett, 1994, p. 261).

Writing as healing's main goal is to help the person get better, and this can happen within a classroom setting.  As we have seen stated earlier, sometimes students use the

classroom as a healing place before teachers even consider it or despite teacher's considerations.

Teachers, as one audience of student writing to heal, must consider all the ramifications mentioned above, but as Payne noted, have an element of power over the author that many audiences do not. Berman and Schiff (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) warn, "Teachers who encourage their students to write about personal conflicts need to be sensitive to those who may be at risk, and they must be prepared to make appropriate referrals when necessary" (p. 308). Not only must teachers be trustworthy and nonjudgmental, they are bound by certain moral and legal standpoints. If, for instance, a child reveals that he or she is the subject of abuse, then morally and legally, the teacher is mandated to divulge that information to authorities. This situation is a delicate issue for teachers, for if they have promised confidentiality beforehand and then read it anyway, they may argue with themselves the "right" thing to do: turn in the situation or abide by the promised confidentiality.

More pointedly, when addressing student writing that deals with trauma, the teacher must set into place an understanding of sympathy and care. As cited earlier, students writing about trauma are vulnerable and thus subject to be hurt more quickly by teacher comments. Anderson and MacCurdy (2000) suggest approaching such writing from a professional standpoint:

> Teachers can approach the stories as sites or occasions for making sense of
> experience, using their expertise as writing professionals, writers, and human
> beings to help students create texts that embody their lived experience, the

clearest expression of it, and whatever understanding of that experience is

available to the student and the community within which the student lives and

writes at the time of the writing. (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000, p. 9)

Johnson (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) agrees, adding that healing through writing

happens when the student builds a new understanding of self from his or her

environment and develops a new self-esteem.  Basically, the very routes that educators

take to help students learn are also the parameters that enable them to heal.  For

instance, Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2008)

identifies seven standards in communication arts that all students should achieve.

Among these include the obvious "speaking and writing in standard English"  as well as

writing informally and formally and identifying and assessing the association between

language and culture.

While the teacher may intend for students to write innocuous pieces, formally or

informally, that relate culture and language, what the teacher may receive, however,

could be something altogether revealing.  As an experiential example, every year I lead

my students through a poetry writing unit. One year in particular we were composing

descriptive pieces about a family member, either real or imagined.  My student chose to

describe his father who had recently passed away.  In the poem, Nathan (pseudonym)

had made a typographical error, inserting "Dead" for the title "Dad."  This seemingly

small error led to an important writing conference between us and, I believe, a measure

of acceptance that his dad was gone.  That state was not my purpose in the lesson, but I

embraced it all the same.

In the early twentieth century, education theorists, following the ideas of humanistic psychologists, considered education and therapy inseparable (Bump in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000). After all, what is therapy but learning about oneself? And, what are the aims of education and therapy but to help one "get better"? In the English classroom, both formal and informal writing assignments can give rise to not only learning about the genre or the literature or some state or federally mandated touchstone but also to new understanding of the self and how that self fits into the world. Writing an objective piece, as was done in the research setting, and then changing it to a different point of view encourages critical thinking because the students are considering multiple perspectives and comparing them to their own viewpoint, learning that there may be multiple versions, multiple outcomes of any situation. Further perspectives are added if research becomes an element of the assignment, seeing how "experts" and other objective "others" view a situation, an event, a characteristic.

As a final experiential example, learning about the narrative essay and writing one can lead Greg (pseudonym) to realize that his friends are trustworthy and supportive, giving him the courage to reveal his homosexuality to them and achieving a measure of wholeness, of being able to own who he is within the school halls as well as the community. Yes, kids can learn about the subject matter, but they can also learn about themselves, their situation, and potentially heal if needed.

Other characteristics. As stated elsewhere in this document, writing as healing is as individualistic as the people who use it, so compiling a list of common characteristics

can be difficult.  However, other than those characteristics already mentioned (links

emotions and event and is narrative and cathartic in nature), writing as healing also

sports several other characteristics at various times.

First, this writing is based in imagery (Siegel, 2007; MacCurdy in Anderson and

MacCurdy, 2000). As MacCurdy (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) states, "Image is what

we see in the dark of night, what we wake up with from dreams, what we remember

when we recall those we love" (p. 190).   Thus, this type of writing is rooted in the

image, and when writers make the image come alive on the page, they have taken the

first step toward healing.  The more detailed and real the image, the more the writer

confronts the situation. In addition, this detail helps the reader identify with the writer

and feel less intrusive into a personal condition (MacCurdy in Anderson & MacCurdy,

2000).

Part of this attention to detail in the image is also to render as complete an

objective viewpoint as possible (Pennebaker, 2007).  Of course, the objective experience

will still be linked to emotions felt, but the writer must not only see the experience

through his/her own subjective viewpoint but also try to see it through a more observer

role (DeSalvo, 1999).  DeSalvo (1999) says this transition of the author into an objective

viewpoint creates resilience in the individual.  Connected to this, DeSalvo (1999)

suggests that the writer must render the experience concretely, authentically, and

explicitly.  Pennebaker (1997) also suggests switching between the topic and its

opposite, seeing the image in what it is not.  Sometimes to do all this (render an image,

link it to emotion, look at its opposite, etc.) means one has to create repeated writing

experiences (Pennebaker, 1997).  Much like Murray's (1982) premise that writing is not a linear path whereby the writer moves sequentially from point A to point Z, Pennebaker's suggestion of repeated writings indicates that multiple writings will reveal different things in the experience detailed.

In these repeated and/or revised writings, the writers reframe their experiences, changing how they perceive the experience and how they experience it (Foehr in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000). Through revision, writers approach the subject and the written piece anew, with new parameters and perhaps altered thinking.  Although many consider revision as "rethinking" on a subject, the entire writing process is an act of rethinking.  As Atwell (1998) tells her students, writers rehearse what they are going to write, draft sometimes multiple times, revise and confer, and then edit and polish before publishing. Likewise, Burke equates writing as a wave continuously lapping back on itself to gain greater strength, calling it a recursive process.  In writing process teaching the emphasis is on the process not necessarily the product. As Blasingame and Bushman (2005) state, writing process is critical not only because the writing produced is more likely to be read but because the experience incurred is vital to writer growth— both as a writer and as an individual in relation to the subject.

Reframing the issue may involve an archetype, a myth, or a metaphor. Metaphors are appropriate tools to use in that they are everywhere, in every facet of our lives, in the way we think (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).  In talking about fear, Foehr (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) states, "Viewing fear as an archetype allows us to modify our behavior on a larger screen than just the immediate experience—it allows us to

make meaning out of fear" (p. 338).  Likewise, Hawkins (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000)

sees mythic or metaphorical patterns in pathologies, narrative stories in which the

authors try to situate themselves within their illnesses.  Hawkins says that use of myths,

metaphors, and archetypes help the writer with "the idea that positive attitude or right

behavior can affect the cause and course of an illness" (p. 233).  Lakoff and Johnson

(2003) state:

> A large part of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal
>
> metaphors that make sense of our lives.  Self-understanding requires unending
>
> negotiation and renegotiation of the meaning of your experiences to yourself.  In
>
> therapy, for example, much of self-understanding involves consciously
>
> recognizing previously unconscious metaphors and how we live by them.  It
>
> involves the constant construction of new coherences in your life, coherences
>
> that give new meaning to old experiences. (p. 233)

The use of metaphor gives the author a vehicle for the emerging story (DeSalvo, 1999).

Metaphor also gives the author a way to link emotion and events, creating contrasts as

well as connections, and move beyond detachment to a place where the author can

look on his/her likeness and feel for him/her (DeSalvo, 1999).  As Lakoff and Johnson

(2003) establish, we conceptualize the abstract in terms of the concrete (nonphysical to

physical), the less defined in terms of the more defined. So, by taking this concrete issue

and using metaphor, we create new connections—indeed, as Lakoff and Johnson (2003)

point out, neurological connections.

Effects.  As one would imagine, the effects of writing as healing's use are direct

mitigation to the effects of the initial trauma.  However, Pennebaker (1997) is quick to

warn that writing as healing is not a magic pill and that in some cases clinical therapy

with a trained professional is paramount to recovery. However, in research studies, the

following physiological effects have been recorded:  fewer visits to doctor's offices,

higher immune functions, reduction in depression, (Pennebaker, 1997), better

capabilities in fighting infection, lower heart rates, and more relaxed physical state

(DeSalvo, 1999).  Non-physiological effects are numerous and include:  improved GPA in

students (Pennebaker, 1997), a gain in confidence, a feeling of less chaotic life, an

increased self-perception, more autonomy, a feeling of living life more mindfully, a

discernment of self that is more well-rounded (DeSalvo, 1999), improved outcomes in

other courses (Allen in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000), and positive associations between

meditation, writing, visualization, and healing (Foehr in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000).

Even though these effects are abundant and essential to the person's well-being,

some of the more interesting effects of writing as healing are more intangible, more

personal in nature.  For instance, Siegel (2007) states that people who put their feelings

into words have greater flexibility and balance of emotion adaptively. Likewise,

reflective thinking, akin to that seen in writing as healing,  helps the author gain new

perspective, restructures long term memory, and changes how people tap into more

flexible classification (Seigel, 2007).  In other words, reflexive thinkers tend to use more

multi-valued orientations and to see a "thing" along multiple points of the ladder of

abstraction; they do not become "stuck" on one particular idea of the "thing" but rather

can embrace multiple conceptions. Siegel (2007) explains that much of this happens

because reflective thinking helps develop the frontal cortex, the area of the brain that

houses resilience and relationships. Further, poetry has shown to integrate the brain

because it uses both hemispheres (Seigel, 2007). Pennebaker's (in DeSalvo, 1999)

findings support this idea: "There was a congruence in brain wave activity between the

left and right hemispheres, indicating that both emotional and linguistic information

was being processed and integrated simultaneously" (p. 23). Thus, putting this

information together with what was discussed earlier about the amygdala, we see that

writing as healing—with the use of reflection and perhaps poetry—affects multiple

areas of the brain and creates greater connectivity not only in the brain but in our lives.

Citing Shakespearean and other literary characters as examples, Pennebaker

(2007) refers to disclosure as the reason behind a fully developed person: "Once the

disclosure is made…the person…becomes an internally consistent creature, wherein all

features of mind and body become synchronous" (p. 8). Similarly, DeSalvo (1999) sees

writing as a mode to make the person more integrated. Writing links past, present, and

future selves and experiences, and as such, the authors see themselves as something

more than they'd realized (DeSalvo, 1999). This integration of self extends beyond the

person to his or her interactions. A survey of schools and organizations using reflection

in education found that students experienced increased learning and academic success

and equalized emotional states (both mentioned earlier); they also exhibited improved

interpersonal relations (Seigel, 2007). So, not only does writing as healing improve the

individual's perception of self but also improves the society in which he or she is involved, especially if those reflective practices are wide-spread.

Two linked outcomes of writing to heal are agency and control; without a feeling of control, the person may feel unable to act or that it is pointless to act.  However, DeSalvo (1999) finds that writing about our traumas helps us gain control and therefore be able to take action, that in writing about trauma people create an artifact that will survive them, acquire a measure of control of their lives, imbue life with meaning once more, and share with others the lessons learned about trauma and treatment.  Likewise, Bucci (in Pennebaker, 2007) finds that use of language enables the person in many ways:

> Language is the code of communication and reflection, in which private, subjective experience, including emotional experience, may be shared, and through which the knowledge of the culture and the constraints of logic may be brought to bear upon the contents of individual thought.  It is also the code that we may call upon, explicitly and intentionally, to direct and regulate ourselves, to activate internal representations of imagery and emotion, to stimulate action, and to control it. (p. 99)

DeSalvo (1999) finds that specifically writing into a process journal will help characterize the writer as active and connected, vital in the healing process.  Further, she finds that as part of becoming active and in control, confidence is also boosted:

> Through writing, we change our relationship to trauma, for we gain confidence in ourselves and in our ability to handle life's difficulties.  We come to feel that

our lives are coherent rather than chaotic.  We see ourselves as able to solve

problems rather than as beset by problems. We enjoy a heightened sense of self.

(p. 45)

When people are stressed and do not feel like they have any measure of control, their

thinking reduces in quality (Pennebaker, 1997).

However, writing about our traumas helps move the writer from a "victim"

position to one of "survivor" and "witness," mainly because they have related their

encounter with trauma on their own terms (DeSalvo, 1999).  Sharing writing moves the

writer from a survivor to a witness, a creator of a public artifact.  And in sharing those

stories, writing as healing is like yeast, "alive and growing and changing" (DeSalvo, 1999,

p. 8).  The implication here is that the witness—if writing as healing is like yeast—can

raise others around the writer, affect the writer's environment.  As Julier (in Anderson &

MacCurdy, 2000) said, "Writing is an act of speaking out, and certain acts of speaking

out can transform the world" (p. 363-364).

Chapter Three Methodology

Method:  Research Paradigm
Research Context
    Setting
    Participants
    Gaining Access
Data Type and Collection
    Curriculum
    Data Sources
        Writing samples
        Interviews
        Video recordings
        Observation notes
Data Analysis
Quality of Study
Limitations

This study centered on the examination of how students used writing within a

graduate-level seminar course focusing on the use of various media for therapy.  As

such, the following questions guided my actions:

- What topics do the participants choose to write about?  How does the topic

  and the severity of the trauma it expresses influence the quality of healing

  experienced through writing?

- What other writing as healing events have participants experienced?  How

  does having experience with writing to heal influence the quality of the

  current writing to heal experience?

- What attitudes do the participants bring to the writing to heal experience—

  and how do these attitudes influence the outcome of the writing to heal

  experience?

    o   If participants resist writing and its abilities as a healing art, what

occurs that moves them beyond that boundary?  What is the

motivation—internal, external, or something that the instructor

or classmates do?

- o What forms does potential resistance take?

- What effect do other modes of expression play upon writing as healing?

- How does knowing (face-to-face) the audience affect the writer's healing

  through writing?

- What factors encourage the use of writing to heal?

Method:  Research Paradigm

Constructivist.  In its most basic sense, "constructivist" means one who

constructs—in this case meaning.   At heart I am a constructivist.  I look at the world, at

my interactions within that world, at the actions of other people, and I try to make

meaning of it.  What meaning can be constructed from people in palliative care finding

comfort and ease in the act of creation—creation of visual artwork, of writing, of song?

What meaning can be constructed from an adolescent's diary that continues to haunt

and inform readers and playgoers seventy years after the Nazis killed her and her

family?  What meaning can be constructed from a seven-year-old girl selecting as her

"three things" she'd have on a deserted isle the book One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue

Fish because it was the last book her mother gave her before the woman died from

cancer?

According to Hatch (2002), constructivist researchers see numerous but

individualistic realities.  Thus, reality is constructed from each individual's perception.

Creswell (2007) adds that in constructivism, the researcher relies on the subject's perspective: "Subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically...they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others...and through historical and cultural norms" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). This paradigm, as a result, best fits the topic of writing as healing.  Practitioners of writing in this manner come from unique experiences; in consequence, their experiences with writing as healing will be equally unique.  Creswell (2007) states, "These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas" (p. 20).   In order for the researcher to delve into each subject's experience, significant amounts and quality of time must be spent with each individual.  Hatch (2002) states, "Researchers spend extended periods of time interviewing participants and observing them in their natural settings in an effort to reconstruct the constructions participants use to make sense of their worlds" (p. 15). Like when one erects a building in that the individual pieces must be put together (the walls, the roof, even the nails have to be constructed separately), the researcher relies on the subjects within the study to construct the meaning of their experience and then convey those meanings to the researcher who then uses those constructions to construct a new concept.

Consequently, with the permission of the course instructor, I enrolled in the seminar course "Studies in English Education:  Teaching Therapeutic Language, Literature, & Media" and collected data as a participant observer, interacting with the subjects and recording their interactions, asking about their constructs, analyzing the

written and verbal conveyances of these constructs. Additionally, I spent time with each subject in three interviews spaced deliberately so as to best observe the subjects' reactions to writing to heal. Even further, as a doctoral student within the same program, I had already met and interacted with all but one participant as part of our studies in the university, so I began the study with some level of awareness of these subjects as individuals (save, obviously, the one previously unknown participant). This familiarity placed me in a delicate yet extraordinary position to realize insights not usually available to researchers.

However, this familiarity also brought its own issues. As Creswell (2007) states, "Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretations, and they 'position themselves' in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (p. 21). While constructing meaning from the individuals' shared experiences, I also carried my own prejudices and perspectives. I had to be metacognitive, considering how my own thinking and beliefs colored the data and analysis. I tried to mediate meaning as much as possible with participants, asking clarifying questions during the interviews to things they had said or written earlier. Hatch states "that 'knowledge is symbolically constructed and not objective; that understandings of the world are based on conventions; that truth is, in fact, what we agree it is'" (p. 15). To find that "truth," I endeavored to be as open to another's experience as possible, to vicariously live his or her life through the writings and discussions shared.

As mentioned earlier, writing to heal is unique in character to the person using it.

While some attributes can be common to most of this writing, processes and outcomes usually are vastly different, dependent upon the person. Therefore, I chose a case study model of research. Yin explains that five approaches involved in conducting case studies:

- "to explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies,"

- "to describe an intervention and the real-life context in which it occurred,"

- to "illustrate certain topics within an evaluation,"

- "to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes,"

- to be "a meta-evaluation—a study of an evaluation study." (Yin, 2003, p. 15)

Since case studies are typically used when "how" or "why" contexts are being explored, when control rests outside the researcher, and when the researcher is examining some real-life situation for current understanding (Yin, 2003), I chose the case study method. At the beginning of the study, I considered from the literature read that some overlap of outcomes might occur, but considering the individualist nature of writing to heal, I also judged that equal opportunity for distinctive outcomes could arise. Also, the descriptive and exploratory nature of case study appealed to my constructivist standpoint. In constructing meaning, one must examine and describe first before any true attempt at assembly can be made.

Accordingly, while twelve individuals stayed enrolled in the class (excluding my enrollment), I selected six cases to more thoroughly explore and describe. These example cases offer unique perspectives on the phenomenon of writing as healing as well as illustrate the individuals' impact on what writing to heal means, looks like, and how it progresses, even within rather set boundaries of a seminar course wherein students were given specific assignments to promote writing that would heal.

Research Context

Before looking at the phenomenon of writing to heal within cases, examining the broader context is helpful. As with most situations, context often offers clues to better understanding—the macrocosm informs the microcosm, so to speak. In the next sections, I will discuss the setting and the participants, including the students in the class, another participant observer, and the professor. I will also address how I gained access to these subjects.

Setting. This study occurred at a Midwestern public university with a student population of approximately 30,000. Students at this institution come from all over the United States and over 100 countries; however, the greatest concentration of students comes from the university's home state. The college is located in a small city of nearly 95,000 residents; this community also includes two other colleges, four hospitals, and numerous industrial businesses. For the school year 2009-2010, the university hosted nearly 7,500 full and part-time graduate students; the course used for this study had nearly equal numbers of full and part-time students.

The course, titled "Teaching Therapeutic Language, Literature, & Media: Studies

in English Education," met one night a week for 2.5 hours for sixteen weeks. An

elective, the course was advertized by the professor within the English education

graduate student list-serve and was suggested during advisement as an option for the

writing component of graduate programs. This course had only one section which was

originally comprised of thirteen graduate students (both master's and doctoral levels),

two participant observers (including myself), and, obviously, the professor. Typically, Dr

Fox offers one graduate level course each semester based on the needs of students in

the master's and doctoral programs in the department. These students as part of their

program must have equal study of reading, writing, and media literacy, so the cycle of

courses offered generally follows that sequence.

Each week, students were asked to read selections from required texts, both

books and articles, to compose or revise writings, and often to create some sort of

alternative medium composition relative to the writing (Power Point, MovieMaker,

PhotoStory, etc.). All total, ten written pieces were crafted, workshopped in small

writing groups (like what is done in National Writing Project institutes), and published in

a portfolio. For the most part these writings were due every other week and sought to

build upon the understandings formed from the previous writings. For example, the

course started with the mirror activity, literally an examination of oneself in a hand

mirror for approximately twenty minutes. Then, students examined the environment

around them through a mixed-senses activity, moving from self outward. This was

followed by further inner-outer exploration through manipulating a photograph of the

student's choosing. This process of relating self to environment and others around the

student continued building throughout the semester.  Within many of the assignments

Fox included a visual element, like the photograph manipulation in the second

assignment or the drawing component in the mixed-senses activity.  This pairing of

writing with visual (and sometime audio) was deliberate, forcing the student to create

an image, or to reimage, the event or issue addressed.  Manipulating the visual, for

instance, compelled a reimaging of the written word, a new perception, a clearer focus.

As mentioned elsewhere, informal writings were also composed in the course.

These generally consisted of free writes to a prompt posed by Dr Fox.  Free writes are

brief, usually 10-20 minute writing events wherein the author writes continuously,

never pausing, and are sometimes, like in this course, written with a specific prompt in

mind. Commonly, this course's prompts asked students to respond to the week's

reading assignment. However, each prompt included or implied the option of writing to

a subject not related to the reading but pressing upon the student, like writing about a

difficult experience from the day.  These writings were intended as a warm up to the

class, a refresher of reading material to help with class discussion, and as notes to help

in crafting end of semester portfolio elements.  For the culminating project for the

course, the professor asked students to create a portfolio, adding to their collected

writings a collage which merged at least three of the individual pieces together to speak

to the experience, a reflection of the course and its assignments, and a case study

wherein each student performed a small case study asking two volunteers outside the

class to complete two of the assignments from class and then the student analyzed that

data.

The first night, the class met in a general purpose building centered on campus. A generic, institutional structure remodeled in the 1970s, the building is used for over-flow classes and sports black slate chalkboards, standardized student chair/desk combinations placed in rows (the only arrangement that would fit all 30+ desks into the room), and minimal technology capabilities. The second and following class meetings were housed in one of the two main buildings used by the College of Education. The building was remodeled in the 1990s and houses a three story library of juvenile and adolescent literature, a facility that provides technology materials and support, and a much more modern, welcoming environment. The room being used for this course had ample room to rearrange the tables and chairs into a large rectangular plan or into any other arrangement the professor wanted. A mobile SmartBoard was always placed in the room for technological needs, and a series of four white boards flanked one wall; two other walls held shelves of books, and the fourth wall was comprised of brick with soft fabric-lined boards for displaying student work. At various times throughout the semester, the student work from other classes would be arranged around the room.

The university's Institutional Review Board granted permission to conduct this study. All of the participants received and signed consent forms (Appendix A), which introduced the purpose of the study and each participant's responsibilities and rights. By signing the document, each student agreed for their writing to be collected and analyzed as well as to participate in a series of three interviews.

Participants. At the beginning of the course, thirteen students (excluding me) enrolled in the course. Additionally, two participant observers and the professor

comprised the class's occupants. Table 1 provides a quick reference to their pseudonyms and a brief characterization.

Students. Of the thirteen students, one international student missed the first night's class and, feeling overwhelmed and at the encouragement of her advisor, dropped the course several weeks into the semester.  Of the twelve students who completed the seminar and the study, four were international students, all from Asian countries, and eight students were from the United States; six of the students were male, leaving the remaining six female.  The four international students were full-time graduate students; two were finishing their master's degree and two were doctoral students.  Of the eight national students, only two were full-time; one was a master's student also working toward his certification to teach, and the other was a doctoral student.  Five of the other six national students were retired or full-time K-12 teachers; the final national student worked at the university and was considering alternative certification to teach high school.

The twelve students were at various points in their collegiate careers.  Two were not actively pursuing degrees; the other ten had taken at least one course prior to the class this semester.  Most had taken several courses within the department prior to enrolling in this seminar.  For this dissertation, I am focusing on six cases:  Naoto, Mei-Zhen, Nisha, Kent, Francis, and Robin.

Naoto is a male in his late 20s from an Asian country.  This is not his first time studying abroad as he earned his master's degree from a university in Australia.  A sensitive and intelligent individual, he was rocked by the cancer diagnosis of his good

friend and was further shaken by that friend's death during the semester.  He embraced every assignment with the intent of helping himself through this loss and approached each interview with a serious yet open stance, always wanting to help me understand what meanings he was constructing about himself and his situation.  He was helpful in suggesting readings to the class, notably the Laub article I have cited elsewhere.

Mei-Zhen, on the other hand, was not as open to the experience at the beginning.  While she verbally acknowledged the purpose of the course and the benefits she received previously from writing poetry, the first interview session found her abrupt in her answers and critical and perplexed by the line of questions.  She also expressed that she did not like the sound of her accent when speaking English, which may have influenced her behavior.  With this in mind, the second interview questions were emailed to her, and she emailed her answers back.  However, upon scheduling the final interview, she expressed her dislike of writing her answers and her desire to be interviewed in person. This final session found her much more verbose and relaxed than the first time.  Her change in attitude may be related to the level of understanding she reached in her writing about the culture shock she experienced when she reached the university.

One of the three females highlighted in this research, Nisha presents a contrast to the other subjects.  A full-time teacher in an urban school 100 miles from the university, she had only taken one other course at the university before this class and, while initially expressing great interest and enthusiasm for using writing to heal, part-way through the semester she began missing classes and expressed via email to me that

she regretted being so open about her situation.  She did not convey that she wanted to

secede from the study, but she ignored repeated requests for interviews past the first.

As such, not as much data was collected from Nisha, but I have chosen to include her

here as a foil to the other subjects and to give greater breadth to the subject, Corbin

and Strauss's (2008) "negative case" (p. 84).

Robin's pseudonym was chosen as he reminds me of Puck from Midsummer

Night's Dream: intelligent and witty and a little mischievous.  This new father is a full-

time teacher at a local high school as well as a part-time doctoral student and graduate

teaching assistant at the university.  Initially resistant, he quickly embraced writing as

healing when a student in his classroom who had been abused by a trusted adult started

writing about his experiences; Robin noted that the student's writing abilities improved

and the amount he began writing academically increased as he seemed to find release

and understanding about his past through writing.

In contrast, Francis quickly embraced the purpose of the course, but the topic he

felt compelled to address did not come as easily.  A musician and full-time doctoral

student, the spring semester was not a tranquil one.  Due to a heavy course-load, he

was unable to return to his wife and home for frequent visits and expressed much

frustration about several classes he was taking, admitting that this course was a

welcome relief to his week.  He wanted to—and eventually did—write about his first

love and the difficult breakup of that relationship, but his anguish about what his wife

would think about his addressing the topic added to his emotional stress.  Eventually,

Francis found a measure of peace with both his writing topic and his uncertainty about

his wife's reaction.

Kent, rather than knowing immediately what he wanted to address, happened into his topic as the result of an early classroom exercise.  A male in his late 20s, Kent was from a small local town, the son of two teachers, and the sibling of three brothers.  He was a part-time master's student, working for a local political party full-time and spending his free time writing fiction.  His subject, the arrest of his brother for drug use when they were both in high school, stemmed from his lingering guilt feelings.

The omission of the other students as key elements of this discussion should not be construed as a reflection on their topics or their writings.  Their experiences are valued parts of the study and influenced my thinking and viewpoints.  In fact, the analysis of their data helped build my overall understanding of the course's intent and outcomes.  However, the subjects chosen presented like characteristics or illustrate more clearly key features of writing as healing more clearly or more dramatically than those omitted from this discussion—as is usually the situation when using critical case sampling, as will be discussed later.

| Table 1 | |
|---|---|
| Pseudonyms with descriptive characteristics including a simplified version of their writing focus. Critical cases chosen for examination here are bolded. | |
| Subject | Description with main writing focus |
| Robin | Male in his late 20s, full-time teacher at local high school, part-time doctoral student, teaching assistant at university, focus: crisis of faith. |
| Anne | Female in her mid-20s, worked full-time on campus and was considering English certification, focus: fear |
| Francis | Male in his late 50s, full-time doctoral student, research assistant at university, focus: lost love |
| Helena | Female in her mid-60s, retired public school teacher, taking course out of interest in material, focus: first marriage |
| Henry | Male in his mid-20s, full-time master's student, has physical disability, focus: death |
| Nisha | Female in her mid-forties, full-time high school teacher in urban area distant from university, part-time doctoral student, focus: sister's death |
| Kent | Male in late 20s, part-time master's student, worked for political party, focus: brother's drug arrest |
| Beatrice | Female in early 30s, full-time teacher at local high school, part-time doctoral student, focus: how past experiences influenced the woman and mother she is today |
| Mei-Zhen | Female in late 20's, full-time doctoral student, graduate research assistant, international student, focus: culture shock |
| Liang | Female in mid-40s, full-time master's student, international student, focus: schooling & family |
| Eun | Female in mid-30s, full-time master's student, international student, focus: abusive society |
| Naoto | Male in late 20s, full-time doctoral student, international student, focus: death of friend from cancer |
| *Note: In order to protect anonymity, individual nationalities of the international students are not given. | |

Other participant observer. Leah is a doctoral student who was also a

participant observer in the course. She and I collected writing, responded to writings,

and collected other visual data such as photographs and video recordings. We both met

with Dr. Fox before the semester and at various points throughout the term to discuss the class and the direction it took. Additionally, on two occasions when Dr Fox was absent, we lead the class together those evenings. She also led one of the writing exercises which resulted in the "monster" assignment. Other than as a sounding board and an additional responder to writing, her influence on this study is negligible.

Professor. The course's creator, Dr. Fox, is an experienced professor in English education. His research interests are artfully combined in the course: media literacy and writing as healing. This is his second time teaching a version of this course, but the first with the media literature/writing as healing combination. However, he has included elements of writing as healing in other courses he has taught and has led workshops in writing as healing. During the previous year and throughout the spring semester he was compiling data addressing how literacy professionals used writing as a healing device in their personal and professional lives.

With such thorough background in the topic, the required reading list was extensive. The two primary textbooks included DeSalvo's (1999) Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives and Tounstine and Waxler's (2008) Finding a Voice: The Practice of Changing Lives Through Literature. Additionally, book chapters and articles from both professional and trade journals were accessed.

Fox's syllabus begins with a series of questions as a course description, such as this lengthy statement:

How can writing processes and strategies that are based in the cognitive view—
one that values linearity, sequence, cause-effect, logic, and propositional

> thinking—and those that are rooted in 'other ways of knowing'—ways which
>
> value emotion, images, silence, intuition, spirituality, chaos, and the
>
> unconscious—be integrated or reconciled to assist people who engage in writing
>
> as healing? (syllabus, Spring 2010)

This is a typical characteristic of Dr. Fox.  A proponent of Socratic seminars for teaching,

he uses questions to spur student thinking.  However, he also included a set of course

principles to guide student thinking.  These include:

- Using evidence-based and standards-based teaching to also enhance students'
  wellness.

- Using a variety of writing prompts and literature to elicit and develop oral and
  writing language to explore major life events.

- Revising writing as a means of increasing one's control over major life events.

- Employing specific elements of general semantics to explore major life events in
  rational, grounded ways.

- Employing specific rhetorical and semiotic elements (such as specificity,
  objectivity, word-choice, metaphor, imagery, humor, receptivity, audience-
  awareness, freewriting, metalanguage, graphics and design, music, and sound)
  to create messages that promote wellness. (syllabi, Spring 2010)

As part of the course, he asked students to consider how writing as healing connected

to the state standards and to the national standards promoted by organizations like

National Council Teachers of English/International Reading Association.  This course was

obviously intended to not only help the individuals within it to better understand their

specific situations, but also to "pay forward" to students in their classes now or in the future.

Gaining Access. As a student within the same college with a like research interest, I have taken classes with Dr Fox as well as having presented and worked with him on previous occasions.  Seeking advice from such an experienced teacher and researcher, I approached Fox with the idea of using his scheduled course as the setting for my study. The pilot study for this research was conducted with undergraduates in an English methods course, and thus, this setting and population seemed a natural extension of that work.  Plus, as a relatively untested researcher, I found more comfort using adults as subjects.  Studying how writing as healing arises in adolescents remains research for the future.

Data Type and Collection

Creswell (2007) describes the data collection process as a circle of locating site/individual, gaining access and establishing rapport, purposeful sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data.  While each step is equally important, as with any process, the first step is crucial.  Fortunately, my shared research interests and previous work with Dr Fox enabled a smooth entry into his classroom with a ready-set population.  Likewise, already having established collegial relationships with most of the participants further eased my access into their lives and solidified rapport.  That these individuals are or are going to be educators themselves within the communication arts field proved to be an additional bonus as they did not suffer the reluctance to write or to communicate in other ways that other populations

might.  Data collection, for the most part, was already established by the course

curriculum, but as will be discussed next, was equally pre-determined by the type of

study.

Recording information and storing data became one of the more awkward facets

of the study.  Since both the instructor and the other participant researcher were using

this course for their research, we had to organize how we shared data such as writings

and other student-generated materials from this collegiate course.  Creswell (2007)

points out that several ethical issues can arise during any qualitative study.  Ensuring

that the data remained among the three of us and that anonymity of participants was

retained remain the primary focus for me.  Dr Fox, Leah, and I decided to house all

electronic versions of student work and any photographs we'd taken on the university's

"W" drive, a secure drive which allows specific personnel access to only certain sections.

Dr Fox's section of the W drive would only be available to him, Leah, and me.

Additionally, I kept electronic copies of student compositions, interviews and video

tapes on my computer's hard-drive with backups on two external hard-drives, paying

heed to Creswell's (2007) admonition, "Always develop backup copies of computer files"

(p. 142).

Other forms of data that I did not share with Dr Fox or Leah were interview

audio recordings, transcripts of those interviews, video recordings of the class sessions,

my field notes and observations of the classes, and any interpersonal communications,

like email (see Table 2 for list and description of data sources).  Since the content of

these data were derived from my research interest, which was somewhat different from

theirs, as I understood their interests, I determined that keeping this data private would

further protect anonymity of the subjects.  However, as Dr Fox serves on my dissertation

committee, he will be privy to the findings generated from this material.

| Table 2 | |
| --- | --- |
| Data sources and their descriptions. | |
| Data Source | Description |
| Interviews | I interviewed each student three times, once at the beginning of the semester, once at the end of the semester, and once after several months of summer had passed, to allow for reflection.  These interviews were digitally recorded, with permission of the interviewee, and transcribed. An objective third party spot checked transcripts for authenticity. |
| Student compositions | I collected copies of all written works, including the ten formal assignments, each week's free writing, and any other compositions, such as artwork or PowerPoints. |
| Researcher's observation journal | This data source consisted of my field notes and observations taken during interviews and class sessions, in addition to any writing groups I observed. |
| Video recordings | Video of most class sessions and approximately half the writing group sessions was recorded and analyzed. |
| Other communications | This data source comprised any other communication I incurred with the subjects, such as email or informal chats. |

While I could have compiled a more phenomenological study of "writing as

healing" and used all twelve subjects as samples, I chose to use a case study approach

with a critical case sampling.  As Hatch (2002) describes it," Critical case samples include

individuals who represent dramatic examples of or are of critical importance to the

phenomenon of interest" (italics Creswell, p. 98).  The individuals chosen as cases

illustrate distinct situations and reactions and add a unique perspective to the

phenomenon.  The subjects not chosen reflect in some manner the same characteristics

as those chosen, but their data proved less dramatic or was not as compelling for

various reasons—not writing to just one topic being the common reason.

The final component of the data collection circle, resolving field issues, includes ethical issues mentioned previously. However, no researcher, no matter how proactive, can prepare for every eventuality.  Most of the field issues I experienced were ones that Creswell (2007) and Hatch (2002) advised future researchers to be wary of, such as background noise in audio recordings and obstructions or poor sound quality in video recordings.  Nevertheless, I still experienced field issues that, while I may have foreseen, I could do little about.  For instance, my finances allowed purchase of only two video recorders, which was sufficient for documenting the class sessions but was not sufficient for documenting when participants split into their small workshop groups.  Before the research started, I had borrowed a video recorder from an organization I am associated with, but it used a disk that was incompatible with my computer system. Likewise, the "flip camera" Leah offered was equally inconvenient because it did not pick up a group setting in a manageable fashion.   So, I determined to "round robin" the cameras in workshop groups, gathering a sampling of the workshops but not recordings of every group every week.  Quite truthfully, after a few weeks, I realized that each week, the individual groups looked analogous to previous recordings I had made.  Recalling Hatch's (2002) advice to know when to stop and Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff's (2010) statement that knowing when to quit recording depends on the study in question, I quit taping the workshop groups and the class sessions before the semester ended, determining that no new significant data was being compiled.

To further protect that anonymity was assured, all hardcopies of materials were

kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Typically, I would not bring professional materials to my home, as the risk of family or guests inadvertently uncovering material. However, my school office is even more insecure as I have no place to lock materials away from prying eyes. Thus, I felt the double security of the locked file cabinet in addition to a locked door was the best of safeguards. As for the manner in which I organized data, since the research was a case study, I kept electronic and hardcopy data in files by subject name. Video files were organized by date recorded. As Creswell (2007) states, "The approach to storage will reflect the type of information collected, which varies by approach to inquiry" (p. 142).

Curriculum. As stated previously, the week before the winter 2009 semester commenced I met with Dr Fox and Leah to review the syllabus (Appendix B) and discuss the course and our individual responsibilities. Because of personal and professional commitments, Fox asked Leah and me to lead the class two weeks of the semester (February 9 and March 23). As the synesthesia assignment February 9 pertained to a literature review I had completed for Fox the previous semester and as Leah and I both had taught within public school systems and encountered students with various mental health issues, both week's activities posed no anxiety.

The writing assignments were dispersed in three batches throughout the semester. The full list is given in Appendix C, but I have listed them below by data assigned or date of initial activity:

JANUARY 19: In class brainstorm of 30 potential ideas for narratives

FEBRUARY 2: Turn in narrative derived from mirror activity.

FEBRUARY 16:  Turn in narrative derived from synesthesia activity.

FEBRUARY 23:  Turn in fixing the photo assignment.

MARCH 9:  Turn in narrative from Imagining Mama, Part I.

MARCH 16:  Turn in narrative revisions from Imagining Mama, Part II.

MARCH 23:  Turn in third revision including research for Your Objectivity Plus

Their Objectivity

APRIL 6:  Turn in satirical piece for Entrance Into Another World and option of

turning in Mini Case Study for instructor feedback.

APRIL 13: Turn in letter or other genre from Monster/Angel Assignment.

APRIL 27:  Turn in power point of Great/Small.

MAY 4:  Turn in script of Conversation Across Time.

MAY 11:  Portfolios due during the week.

The syllabus, as a flexible document, changed throughout the semester, as readings were omitted and due dates were changed.  However, the modifications were minimal and did not impact the study.

Initial Preparation. At the first class session I distributed consent forms to the twelve students who would comprise my data set (one student was not in the United States yet and would eventually drop the course).  I explained the purposes and process of the study, that the only addition to the coursework I was asking of them was to meet with me for three interviews.  I assured them that their course grade would not be affected by their participation or lack thereof in the study and that they could choose to not participate at any time during the semester or thereafter.  Students asked questions

about the data, my aims for the study, and my reasoning for doing this study in this

class.  I asked that they return the signed consents to me within the next week; most

signed and returned them that night.  I also made copies of the consents for participants

to keep for reference should they have questions in the future.  Hatch (2002) states, "I

believe it is an ethical necessity to signal everyone involved that you are a researcher

studying something with identifiable boundaries" (p. 46).  The consent form was

intended to help in delineating those boundaries.

Data Sources.  Obviously, the quality of data is a major factor in the quality of the

research.  Hatch (2002) states, "The fewer the number of participants, the more

important it is to include multiple data sources" (p. 50).  Yin (2003) adds that the data

collection should be "aimed at corroborating the same fact or phenomenon" (p. 99).

Thus, while some of the data was predetermined by the assignments generated in the

class, I chose other sources that would strengthen my findings and provide additional

illumination.  These sources include writing samples of the various formal papers

assigned in the course as well as free writes and other miscellaneous classroom writings.

Other sources were a series of three interviews with each student, video recordings of

class sessions and writing groups, and observation and field notes kept throughout the

research process.

Writing samples.  Hatch (2003) determines student writing as an unobtrusive

data source, specifically an artifact.  The student writings compiled for this study were

the ten individual assignments spaced throughout the semester, free writes completed

during class sessions, and the components of the concluding portfolio, which were

mainly a collage and a reflection. (The portfolio also contained revised versions of the 10 pieces, but I am not differentiating them from their earlier constructs, unless noted individually.) Of unobtrusive data, Hatch (2002) states, "Because their nonreactive natures makes them one step removed from participants' intervening interpretations, they provide an alternative perspective on the phenomenon being studied, and they are relatively easy to acquire" (p. 119). He also states that data such as artifacts "can be gathered without disturbing the natural flow of human activity" (Hatch, 2002, p. 119). On their own, unobtrusive data can be misconstrued or misrepresent the phenomenon, but they provide an exceptional component in triangulation (Hatch, 2002).

Interviews. Like the schedule for the course, the schedule of interviews was equally flexible to accommodate the subjects' schedules. The first interviews were conducted near the beginning of the semester, mainly in March. The second set of interviews were conducted near the end of the semester, mainly in May, with the final interviews occurring in the following fall, mainly in September, to allow for reflective time to elapse. Spacing the interviews gave us writing assignments on which to ground the interview questions and time for the subject and me to reflect upon their answers.

The interviews were formal in nature, in that I composed questions based on what the subject had written and tended to ask similar topics but not necessarily the same exact question of every subject. Hatch (2002) states, "Building flexibility into the structured interview is what distinguishes formal interviews from standardized qualitative interviews...Formal interviews, like their informal counterparts, can be adapted for use within any of the qualitative paradigms" (p. 95). As I've stated

elsewhere, writing to heal is as unique as the individual using it, so I anticipated that the interviews would follow the "untrod path." Hatch guided my thoughts on this characteristic of the interview. He states, "Researchers have questions about certain topics in mind, but they are open to digressions, they expect the interview to move in the direction that the informant takes it, and they plan to create probes or follow-up questions based on the responses they receive" (Hatch, 2002, p. 95). Since each interview was distinctive, individual questions would take too much space here. However, the final interview did include a set of standard questions:

- Overall, what do you think you gained foremost from the writings we did this semester?

- What aspect of writing best helped you get a better understanding of your issue?

- Looking back, how has your understanding of your issue changed from doing these assignments?

- Did one assignment help propel your understanding more than any other?

- What do you feel you've learned about yourself from doing these writings?

- What do you feel the writing and/or the class has helped you learn more about others?

- Considering the various modes of expression we used, which propelled your understanding of your topic the most?

- What influence did your writing group have on your piece? What influence did they have on your understanding of your issue?

- What influence did Dr Fox have on your issue?

  Was there anything in particular he did that helped you better understand your issue?

- What influence did our interviews have on your understanding of your issue?

Otherwise, the first interview was characterized by "getting to know you questions" and all three interviews included questions about the subject's intent in writing a certain piece and whether that intent was gained, the inspiration for specific pieces, the role of the instructor and the writing groups during the writing process, and the role of the readings and class discussion on their writings and understandings of their topics. These questions helped reveal information directed at a few of my overall questions for the topic, such as the attitude subjects brought to the writing as healing experience, the reasons behind selection of topics, and the role of audience in the writing to heal experience. Some questions explicitly targeted these overarching questions, especially in the case of the role of audience, but other questions were more implicitly used, as I attempted not to influence the subjects' responses by couching topics in more generalized ways.

To insure that the transcripts of interviews were accurate, I used a digital audio recorder and asked an objective third party to spot check accuracy of the transcripts, especially those of the international students to ascertain that accents had not inhibited understanding. Hatch (2002) states, "Body language, facial expressions, and verbal prompts signal the informant that the researcher is engaged and interested in what they have to say" (p. 108). As such, I attempted to convey that the participant was my sole

focus for the interview by maintaining eye contact, leaning toward the participant when appropriate, and keeping an open stance. Thus, I made observational notes of the interviews directly after the session's completion.

Additionally, during the interview I tried to remain mindful of the subject's comfort level. Hatch (2002) says, "Informants need to know ahead of time about how long interviews are expected to last" (p. 111). He adds that his interviews are typically about one hour in length. I, too, tried to keep interviews to that time length. However, due to outside factors, some interviews by necessity were shorter, namely those interviews with two high school teachers which occurred during their planning period at their schools. A few interviews were longer for various reasons, usually because the participant by nature is loquacious or often digresses.

Video recordings. Hatch (2002) equates video with the records a historian might collect. However, Creswell (2007) warns that video recordings raise "issues for the qualitative researcher such as keeping disturbing room sounds to a minimum, deciding on the best location for the camera, and determining whether to provide close-up shots or distant shots" (p. 141). Originally, one of the reasons for video recording the class was to document what the instructor did in class to encourage writing as healing, but that line of research was dropped during the study, as I felt the overlap of Dr Fox on my dissertation committee created too much room for both error and awkwardness. Plus, that line of inquiry could afford to wait for future research opportunities.

However, the line of thinking in video recording the classes remained the same. I wanted to record student actions and reactions in the class in as authentic manner as

possible. Since I essentially wanted students to forget the camera was recording and to

act as naturally as possible, I decided to use a fixed camera approach (Heath,

Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010). This method "allows the researcher to remain relatively

unobtrusive and avoid, as far as possible, participating in the scene or drawing attention

to the camera by continually looking through the viewfinder" (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff,

2010, p. 40). I also took into account recommendations by experts in video recordings

and placed cameras next to a wall to avoid mishaps such as the camera being knocked

over (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010). I also followed Hatch's (2010) advice to become

familiar with the equipment before actual recording started, running a "test session" the

first night of class for this reason and to build in time for participants to grow

accustomed to being recorded, another Hatch (2010) suggestion.

     Additionally, I chose to use two video cameras to record class sessions and small

writing group meetings. Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff (2010) state that, if one viewpoint

limits or weakens the capacity to analyze situations or events, then multiple cameras

should be used. They cite their own study of auctions in that they needed one camera

on the auctioneer and at least one camera on the audience. Likewise, because of the

number of people in the room and its layout, in order to record faces (full or partial),

two cameras were used. The classroom was situated in a rectangle, so each camera was

positioned so as to capture as much of half the class as possible, thus, together

imperfectly capturing the whole class (for the most part—sometimes people were

"hidden" behind others when they shifted in their seats). This positioning of the

cameras was not, unfortunately, ideal, for as Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (2010) warn,

sometimes audio did not record as well as the video did.  For example, Mei-Zhen speaks extremely softly, so her voice, especially when she faced away from the closer camera, was not always digitized.  Another issue Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (2010) discuss with fixed cameras are unavoidable obstructions, such as people moving in front of the lens. I also encountered this problem, most notably when the Dr Fox sat on the table where the camera was located, directly in front of the lens.  Obviously, my efforts to make the camera "disappear" to those in the class was effective at times.

Like the audio recordings of interviews, video recordings should also be kept in secured facilities, and researchers using video should keep backup copies (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010).  I followed the same format for video security as I did for audio recordings, except that I did not keep copies on my main computer as video consumes too much space on the hard drive.  However, in use of video, Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (2010) state that video is much more difficult to use because researchers find it more difficult to cloak participants' identity and to disseminate verbally what is seen in the video, researchers must be much more descriptive than they would be otherwise.  Thus, I have chosen to use the video only in writing, not to show any video in presentations drawn from this data so as to preserve anonymity. Additionally, I used video as a subsidiary resource in triangulation, relying more heavily instead on student artifacts and interview data, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the analysis section.  Basically, due to many factors, the videos were only used as confirmation of findings seen in other data and proved of little use for any substantive analysis.

Observation and field notes.  Observation of subjects can be one of the most difficult aspects of research.  As Hatch (2002) states, "Observers attempt to see the world through the eyes of those they are studying" (p. 72).  This vicarious experience cannot be completely truthful, because the researcher does not have the same background experiences and knowledge that her subject does and, as stated elsewhere, the researcher also brings along her own experiences, knowledge, and therefore biases.

However, observation adds tremendous credibility to any study.  Hatch (2002) lists several reasons; ones that pertain to this study include:  better comprehension of context, occasion to witness events "taken for granted" (p. 72) by the research subjects and thus not raised in interview situations, and opportunity to inject the researcher's understanding of the situation to the analysis.   Yet, researchers using this method must be wary of how intrusive they are in the setting of their study (Hatch, 2002).  A participant observer, as I was, might miss important data due to involvement in the setting.  This proved troublesome for me.  My interest in the topic and the students in class often captured my attention so totally that I did not immediately record data.  In these instances, usually, I was later able to create the situation in my notes, but of course, these impressions would not have been as fresh as if they had been noted in the instant.  This detraction is offset by another factor, though.  "The more involved the observer is as a participant in the setting, the closer he or she is to the action" (Hatch, 2002, p. 75).  Thus, I trod a fine line between seeking to be as close to the situation as possible and yet remaining distant enough not to miss documentation.

Hatch (2002) also states that excess-identification with subjects can lead to a loss

in perspective as a researcher.  He adds that such "myopic vision...can lead to distorted

findings" (p. 76).  With such a warning in mind, I tried to be as objective as possible,

often including within interviews questions to the subject to clarify that my impressions

were valid in their eyes.  Asking questions like, "So, in this instance it seems like you feel

an outsider to the town; is that a valid statement?" were a method for me to self-

monitor that I wasn't injecting what I wanted to see into the study.

Observation and field notes are intended to be records of what subjects say and

do, to record the constructs as they occur. Hatch (2002) advises, "No matter what

qualitative paradigm is framing the study, observational data should be as careful a

representation as possible of the action observed in the research setting" (p. 78).  He

also suggests mapping the setting, bring questions to the setting, and to continually

refer back to research questions throughout this portion of data collection.  Since I was

also videotaping the class, my descriptions of the setting were not as detailed as they

would be otherwise.  However, I did go to each class with usually the same type of

questions in mind:

- How did this week's reading impact each subject's understanding of
  writing to heal as a concept?

- How did this week's composition/activity affect each subject's
  understanding of writing to heal as a concept?  (if there was a
  composition or activity)

- What new understandings does participating in a group—either small
  writing groups or large class discussion—bring to each individual both on

his/her topic and the overall perception of writing as healing? While these questions were intended to be a guide for the observation of participants, I feel the observation documentation was my weakest point in data collection. I often became too involved in what was happening and left off recording data. I relied too heavily on the video recordings made, and I neglected to follow some of Hatch's (2002) advice about protocols, like that of keeping interpretations separate from descriptive data, using bracketing, and being consistent. Nevertheless, I do have the video recordings as back up for these observations, though that was not the original intent for including them. And, I believe that by including interpretations with the data, even without the brackets, I show more closely the links between the two and, of course, have less chance of knowing which interpretation goes with which data. So, while imperfect, the flaws are not altogether detracting from the study.

Data Analysis

Following Hatch's (2002) advice, I began analysis soon after the first data was collected and continued throughout the collection and even throughout the writing process. As he says, "No qualitative analysis is ever complete" (Hatch, 2002, p. 149). I would add that no one approach is ever appropriate to data analysis. As such, I drew from a variety of sources when analyzing data.

Creswell (2007) states, "For a case study, as in ethnography, analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting" (p. 163). He cites Stake's four types of analysis used in case study, namely: categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, patterns, and naturalistic generalizations (Creswell, 2007). Yin (2003), on

the other hand, proposes three strategies: relying on theoretical propositions, thinking

about rival explanations, and developing a case description. I chose to draw from both

these experts, combining what I felt would work best for this study. First, I wanted to

look at each case individually, interpreting what it could offer about that person's

construction of meaning and describing his or her experience. Then, I also wanted to

look at patterns, what was common across cases, what similarities and differences

arose. Hatch (2002) in discussing typological analysis states, "Patterns are regularities.

They come in several forms, including similarity...difference...frequency...

sequence...correspondence...and causation" (p. 155). I tried to remain open to all these

patterns, but similarity, difference, and correspondence seemed to be the most

common in my data set.

I am leery of using any type of analysis that would attempt to categorize or

generalize writing as healing. As I stated earlier, writing as healing is as individualistic as

the person using it, so I see benefits in looking at the phenomena from the individual's

viewpoint and also examining the cases for patterns that develop—but not stating that

each pattern will be found in every writing as healing event or even with every person

using the phenomena. This aspect of the phenomena, as well as the character of case

studies in general, seems to lean toward a polyvocal analysis (Hatch, 2002). Thus, I drew

heavily from this approach. Following Hatch's steps, I read the data to gain a holistic

sense of the phenomena, I identified each voice present in the data (including my own),

and I determined which voices should be used in the dissertation and composed a

narrative for each chosen; as I analyzed data, I returned to those narratives and revised

and amended them as new analysis uncovered novel facets or understandings. Since

this study includes six cases from within one seminar course, I also composed a

narrative of the course, including a description of the setting, which Hatch (2002)

suggests as part of polyvocal analysis.  This holistic narrative, I felt, helped link the

individual experiences and gave me one more perspective to consider.  This story also

aided with the discovery of patterns within the data.

Of course, the literature read in preparation for this study also influenced some

of the commonalities, so while my knowledge of grounded theory did influence my

analysis in that I read through data letting topics arise spontaneously (Corbin & Strauss,

2008), the analysis relied more heavily on approaches associated with case study.  Table

3 provides an overview of codes that arose during analysis.

| Table 3 Data analysis codes with description | |
|---|---|
| Code | Description |
| Inspiration | Where did inspiration spring:  within own life, from assignments, other |
| Isolation | Feelings of being an outsider (or not an insider) or expressions of aloneness as catalyst for writings |
| Silence/secrecy | Feelings of having to keep topic/event secret, not being able to tell others about event as catalyst for writings |
| Perspective | How changing perspective spur healing in writing events |
| Acknowledgement | How acknowledging topic and hurt commences writing as healing |
| Understanding | Various forms of understanding attained: self, others, etc. |
| Resistance | Various forms of resistance to writing as healing experience |

Additionally, to keep my thinking clear, I used a variety of strategies proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) to ensure that I constantly approached the data with fresh eyes. For a semantics perspective, I used their "Various meanings of a word" strategy (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 78), looking at what other meanings could reside within a statement. In a nod to the code "perspective," I also occasionally used "The Flip-Flop Technique," looking at the contrary meaning or extreme span of a statement. This allowed me to better contextualize the statement's meaning as I examined it from other angles.

Of course, with a topic such as this and with my personal history of using writing as healing, I also drew upon my personal experience to help determine meaning. While Corbin & Strauss (2008) acknowledge bias in this strategy, they express that "we want to use our experiences to bring up other possibilities of meaning" (p. 80). So, I tried not to let my personal experiences prejudice the findings but rather used them to see other perspectives. Of course, I looked closely at the language used as well as literary devices, such as metaphor and simile, which use is discussed as beneficial in therapeutic practices in the literature review of this study. However, I also asked two questions: "so what?" and "what if?" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 84). In asking these questions I determined if what I thought I was seeing was important enough to share, if the subject's experience was unique enough to be a case, and gained a new perspective by imagining different scenarios. By asking, "what if this other thing had happened instead," I could see why the actual event made such an impression on the person and how it influenced his or her healing.

In spite of all these research experts' advice, I found that their approaches seemed contrived and didn't generate much information from the video data.  Thus, I searched out experts addressing video specifically.  Following examples from Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff (2010), I considered the following questions in determining analysis for the video recordings:

- What documents, tools and technologies do people use and rely upon in the setting?

- Are there specialist terms or jargon that people use?

- What are the general tasks and activities in which participants are engaged?

- Is there a formal or working division of labour in the setting?

- Can routine patterns of action be identified?

- Do unusual events arise during filming? (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010, p. 50)

While these questions do not altogether appear appropriate to my topic, evaluating the video from this social/business world dynamic gave me a new perspective into this data set.  For one, it made me much more aware of the jargon—especially the alphabet soup of acronyms—educators use.  By calling upon one or more of these questions when approaching the video, my vision rarely grew stale, and I usually found some caveat that supported a feature illustrated in the writings or the interviews.  As a prong of triangulation, viewing the video through Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff's questioning lens proved valuable.

Since I collected data throughout a sixteen-week course, I analyzed data as I collected it. Each week, I began analysis by reading through the writings participant's turned in as part of the coursework. Usually, this included at least a free writing piece, but some weeks it also included a hard copy of their formal assignment due that week and/or a visual accompanying it. This initial reading served two purposes: to give feedback to the writers, as Leah and Dr. Fox also were doing, and to record any themes or points of interest that arose, as is done in grounded theory. Then, I also sat down and reviewed the video tape for that week, keeping in mind Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff's questioning lens as well as the themes noted from my initial reading of the piece and any previous writings. The video, as I've said elsewhere, was of poor quality, many times not recording voices adequately to gain any meaning, and midway through the semester, with only minimal information gleaned from the video (and of that information, only so much as corroborated what I had noted in other data), I stopped filming class and writing group sessions.

Next, before each interview, I read through each participant's writings and my field notes/observations, using Pennebaker, DeSalvo, and other researchers findings as a lens, noting where characteristics of writing as healing arose as well as how participant's used writing as healing as described in those theorists and by Dr Fox. Thus, I initially read pieces across participants, looking for themes, and then paid closer attention to each participant by reading his or her work as a whole. Finally, once all data had been gathered, I looked yet again at each participant's writings and transcripts of interviews with each subject, which I kept collected in a folder assigned to each person,

as a whole, noting what was indicative of the person's use of writing to heal and marking on a legal pad what qualities appeared across participants.

Quality of Study

This qualitative study, as with all qualitative studies, could be viewed as being very subjective toward the topic.  Thus, I considered the following seven criteria (Cresswell, 2007) to enhance the quality of the study:  sensitivity, triangulation of data, audit trail, community of research, transferability, critical advocacy potential, and integrity.

Sensitivity. Foremost within this study was sensitivity to the participants' experience.  As Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (Creswell, 2007) expressed as a secondary criteria of validation, sensitivity to the subject and the participant is critical to qualitative research.  By sharing their examples of personal transformation through writing, the participants voluntarily opened themselves, making themselves vulnerable to their emotions and to the researcher.  Therefore, throughout the data collection and writing of the findings, I remained cognizant of the participants' needs (be it anonymity, space, withdrawal, etc.) and the potential for harm.  When I saw that the interview questions or some other aspect of the study was potentially jeopardizing their psyche or heart, I took immediate action to correct the situation, repeating to them that the interview could stop or pause at any time. Likewise, the professor assured the class that the writings, while required as course content, were also intended to help, not hurt, students, and thus incorporated an element of choice to the assignments as well as made available information concerning counseling services accessible on campus.

Triangulation of data. Using the validity model of triangulation promoted by Lather (Creswell, 2007), the data in this study consisted of several sources, centering on the participants and their lived experience.  Data included multiple interviews with each participant, observations of them both in the interview and during the class sessions, their required assignments for the course, and any other artifacts generated, such as personal email or other communications.

Audit trail. I kept a close record of the research process to ensure quality data collection (Creswell, 2007).  This journal included a close account of events as well as my decisions throughout the process.  This audit trail encompassed the field observations as much of what is accounted there could have overlapped with the auditing process.  However, if needed, the auditing process could have been kept separate from the field notes as the research process could have in some manner influenced understanding of the notes.

Community of research. Considering Creswell's (2007) idea of interpretive community as a method of validation within qualitative research, I chose to employ a community of research to help validate this study.  As a majority of the research already completed in transformational writing has been generated in quantitative studies, this research broadens the scope of the topic from the medical field and its kin to the educational construct.  Additionally, the community of research, which comprises personal narrative—from the researcher as well as the subjects—as a data source, bridges the divide between objective research and subjective experience, adding validity to the personal stories, which comprise the remainder of the literature associated with

this topic.  When authors/teachers such as Moran (2004), Antzoulis (2003), Milner

(2005),  and DeSalvo (1999) have empirical research to reinforce their message, the

entire body of knowledge gains in credibility.

Transferability. With the explosion of self-reflective, expressive writing on the

Internet, the transferability, as described by Lincoln and Guba (Cresswell, 2007), of this

study is easily possible.  Informal research of blogs, wikis, "tweets" and other new

literacies shows a marked presence of reflective, expressive, and other forms of

personal writings, including some instances of transformational writing.  Therefore,

should future researchers (including me) intend to attribute the parameters of this

study to that of an online class, for instance, in Blackboard, the characteristics could

easily shift to this media.  Therefore, I will attempt to make my findings and the manner

in which I gained them as transparent to others as possible.

Critical advocacy potential. Taken from the ideas of Lather (Cresswell, 2007),

this study has critical advocacy potential.  The current global climate of war, terrorism,

and economic distress necessitates more avenues for healing.  Applying therapeutic

principles already researched in quantitative studies to more qualitative settings may

help ease the burdens of contemporary sufferers, not to mention help validate the

already documented qualitative studies like Antzoulis, Moran, and Nugent.  For

instance, children whose parents are currently serving overseas in the war in

Afghanistan, the occupation of Iraq, or as support personnel in another country, these

children may need a method to vent their fears, anger, and other volatile emotions.

Writing activities within a classroom, as hopefully corroborated, at least in part, in this

study, provides those methods.

Integrity. Several researchers within Creswell (2007), namely Lincoln, Guba, Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle, cite credibility as a key feature to validity. Nobody is more critical of a person than that person himself/herself usually. This condition is true for me. Throughout the research and data collection, I endeavored to be both reflective in my practice, monitoring what worked and what didn't, as well as critiquing my own technique in order to better my skills. As such, a section of the findings includes a self-critique.

Moreover, I assured participants from the beginning and at various times in the study, that should they wish to review the transcripts, I would make a copy available. The only time this option was requested occurred sporadically during interviews when the participant requested to see the context of a statement that was being addressed in the later interview. No participant requested a copy of any of the transcripts.

Limitations

Cresswell (2007) states that when fearful of disclosure of participants' identities, the researcher should fall back on generalities. This is not applicable for my study as the subjects and their writing topics are so intertwined in the findings. Audiences for this dissertation must know the details that might disclose identity to fully understand the healing that occurred within the writing process. Thus, I have taken every avenue I can to cloak identity but realize that by sharing topics, those within the course may be able to ascertain specific individuals.

Obviously, the amount and extent to which participants were willing to share

limited the data collected in the study. If they were unwilling to share or uncomfortable with talking about events with strong emotional ties and the writing concerning these events or if they became "'antagonistic-defensive'" (Hatch, 2002, p. 96), then the study could have stalled and little knowledge would have derived from it. With this in mind, I took all possible means to reassure the participants of their anonymity, safety, and autonomy. Two occasions, which are discussed elsewhere saw this possibility become reality (Mei-Zhen and Nisha), but in the end, these awkward situations proved to be learning experiences and added to the overall knowledge of writing to heal.

Considering the sensitive nature of some of these writings—and, of course, the finding that writing to heal arises sometimes from a feeling of secrecy or isolation—participants may have difficulty opening up, may censor themselves, or may withhold details or emotions from a stance of protection of self or another or as a habitual, internalized behavior. Building rapport with participants may mitigate this reticence, but finally I can only trust that the participants shared openly. Research into writing as healing is not a pry-bar to reveal the secreted shadows within but an elixir, a potion, that is delicately gathered and then decanted only in the hopes of helping others. To pry into an individual's life is to risk the host slamming the door firmly with a result of hurt expanding and rebuilding upon itself until it explodes.

Also, considering the compressed time frame and the full schedules of these students, finding opportunities to conduct interviews could have strained the outcomes of this study. As such, I took steps to be accessible when the participants were available, to not add undue burden upon them, and to be as reassuring and congenial as

possible.   Scheduling the interviews so widely apart was also an attempt to forestall

subjects feeling pressured.

An additional factor of having two other researchers in the class (Dr Fox and

Leah) may have weakened the quality of this study.  To forestall that possibility, I met on

several occasions with the other researchers to coordinate our actions with the

intention of not stressing the participants.  As graduate students and the professor, we

understood the already established pressures inherent with graduate studies and

sought to not add to their educational load.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Results

Robin's Story:  Redefining Religion
Mei-Zhen's Story:  Assimilating into New Culture
Francis' Story:  Reconciling Lost First Love
Nisha's Story:  Retreating from Examination of Lingering Pain
Kent's Story:  Resolving Role in Brother's Situation
Naoto's Story:  Alleviating Pain of Friend's Death

As I have stated in the Methodology, people use writing to heal from situations or troubles in their lives in as individualistic ways as one person is from another.  As such, I chose to analyze the data derived from this study as individual hermeneutic cases.  This decision is not to imply that characteristics of the writing, the process, or some other element are not found in multiple cases—the synthesis of which will be found in Chapter 5.  Indeed, many of the students, for instance, saw changes in their understanding and a measure of healing from looking at their situation from multiple perspectives.

Additionally, I omitted from this discussion more than half the students enrolled in the course.  While I did analyze the data derived from all the students, some stories lacked an element or several elements that the stories included within this document did not.  For instance, Ju also explored her own transition from Asia to America in many of her pieces.  However, her frequent digression in topic and her overall lack of flow in her pieces made her story not quite as compelling as that of Mei-Zhen.  Ju, for another reason, still struggles with the English language, which Mei-Zhen appears to have mastered.  This approaching proficiency with the language  made some of her data unreliable, as I was never sure that she completely understood what was going on or being said or asked.  On the other hand, some cases did pose similarities, which made

me evaluate which set of data was the most compelling and would provide the most

insight, not only to the subjects but also to their topics and experiences. For instance, I

chose Francis' data over that of Helena, though both provided an incredible entry in

their personal lives, as well as plenty of data to explore. Both writers also explored

similar topics: love lost decades earlier and the influence that love and loss imparted on

their lives now. However, Francis, though not using his topic for all of his in-class

assignments, focuses more exclusively on his lost love and provides a more compelling

example of how this type of writing can heal even decades-old hurts. Likewise, because

Naoto's case seemed the most compelling use of perspective shift, I chose to focus on

his writings, his experience in relation to perspective.

But what do we mean by "healing"? In this study—and I believe for writing to

heal universally—healing encompasses a broad spectrum of feelings. Usually, people

associate healing with a topical wound or some type of physical injury or disease.

Surely, this program of writing can be useful to expel the fears and anxieties and

frustrations a wounded or ill individual experiences while going through either an

allopathic or holistic treatment. However, anyone can use writing to help them through

any type of trouble, no matter death-defying trauma or seemingly inconsequential

rudeness. People the world over need healing from arguments, from conflict of all

fashions, from the daily stresses of living. Healing, likewise, can take many shapes. It

can help a person who is "maladjusted" (Johnson, 1946), someone who has significant

mental health issues. While it will not cure the person, it may ease the symptoms or

have some other beneficial effect. Writing may help adolescents who are trying to

figure out who they are, who they love, what they like, what they want to do, be, or become.  Certainly, writing helped me through almost every stage of my life—from the first time my family moved (I wrote an "I am staying letter"), to trying to find my place in each new city and school, to dealing with the deaths of dear friends in junior high and then in high school, and even as an adult, it helped me come to grips with a father slowly succumbing to Alzheimer's and eventually dying.

Healing in relation to writing means understanding, moving beyond, coming to grips, seeing the whole picture, finding peace, settling anxieties or other negative emotions, and other issues, more than there is room to list here.  Writing as healing is unique to each person, and thus, the version of healing will be equally unique.  One person may be able to set that topic of trouble aside after writing about it, while another may continue to grapple but uncover new tools within the self to battle emotions.  Hopefully, people who use writing to heal will learn—learn more about themselves, learn more about others in their lives, learn more about the world, learn more about their experiences, learn more about feelings and thoughts and dreams. Each of the six stories presented here illustrate a different type of healing.  Each one wrestled with an issue—some mild issues, others gravely traumatic.  But, each one also reached a level of understanding and appreciation of themselves and the qualities in their lives.

Additionally, while I give readers an overview of each assignment's guidelines, developed by Dr. Fox, students were given the option to alter the assignment as best suited their needs.  For instance, the second part of the "Mama Assignment" asked

students to change the viewpoint from third to first person and to make the ending a

positive one.  However, several students did not follow those directives and chose

instead other avenues, individualistic to their concerns. Likewise, the next part of the

"Mama Assignment" asked students to incorporate research, akin to the Foy article read

for class, but again several chose to either keep the research wholly separate or to only

include it as footnoted material instead of seamlessly weaving it into the narrative of

their pieces.  I will attempt to point out such instances when doing so seems to derive

importance either upon the analysis or the reader's understanding.

One final element to consider:  the layers of context for each of these cases, the

supporting structures in place that influence each case as presented.  As I've stated

elsewhere, Dr. Fox is not only the instructor for this course but also my advisor and the

first reader of this dissertation.  However, he is also the advisor for all the students

enrolled in this course.  This sense of the instructor not only as an authority figure in the

classroom but also in the participants' professional/educational lives bears some weight

on their willingness to write to heal, to divulge to others sensitive topics from their lives.

Another layer of context is the class structure itself; the theoretical readings, the

instructor's examples, having peers reading and commenting upon each others' papers,

the examination of the course/the topic of writing to heal in comparison with academic

standards, all of this worked together to impact students' levels of participation in the

writings as well as bled over into their responses within this study.  Already having one's

mind geared to thinking of the theoretical understanding of writing to heal within the

class probably made each subject more apt to reflect and consider this study with more

consequence.

Robin's Story: Redefining Religion

Robin's story begins nearly a decade before this study was conducted. In the midst of his undergraduate coursework, he began to question the fundamentals of his life. Having grown up in a small city in the middle of the United States, he absorbed the typical Midwestern values: hard work, resourcefulness, and service to others. Additionally, raised within a Catholic family, he matriculated through the parochial school system in his home town, graduating with a firm belief in that religion's values and tenets. And finally, when the beloved father of Robin's friend was killed because an intoxicated person chose to drive, Robin also opted to abstain from consuming alcohol throughout high school and beyond his 21$^{st}$ birthday.

However, during his undergraduate days, his devotion to Catholicism and in avoiding alcohol began to shake. Courses designed to stretch and challenge the mind— and the professors who taught them—further undermined his certainty in his childhood beliefs. He began to question his religion and many of his practices. Studying abroad as an upperclassman, Robin's faith ultimately crumbled. With this integral principle failing, other pedestals wavered: he reconsidered his moratorium on drinking and contemplated breaking the relationship with his long-time serious girlfriend (who eventually became his wife). Thousands of miles from home and the supports inherent with it, Robin found the very foundations of his life shifting under his feet.

Idealism, Frustration, Demoralization. Robin's situation falls neatly in with the identity principles established by Johnson (1946) and Hayakawa (1991). First, in Robin's

steady disintegration of belief, we see Johnson's "Idealism, Frustration, Demoralization" (IFD). Where he once idealized his catholic religion and considered his abstinence from alcohol a standard perhaps all should embody, when the pedestals underneath those ideals began to crumble, Robin expressed that he felt frustration—mainly annoyance with those who didn't subscribe to his own lofty standards. At this point he had begun to see that the "word is not the thing" (Hayakawa, 1991, p. 17) and that the idealized version of that thing was not the thing in totality. Catholicism, for all its merits, also has flaws; alcohol, while consumed in excess can destroy a person's life and greatly impair the physical and mental processes, is still legal and, for some, enjoyable in small quantities. Once the pedestals disintegrated and he was alone with his new view of both religion and alcohol, demoralization, the last component of Johnson's IFD, descended. And, while he has functioned well in this "maladjusted" state, marrying his college girlfriend, starting a family, beginning his professional life, this time period of his life and his status as a disbeliever still gnaws, drawing him to this topic for reflection and healing.

Circumventing the Assignment. For the Teaching Therapeutic Language, Literature, & Media course, Robin eventually focuses on this precarious time in his young adulthood. First, though, he initially prevaricates, an action which mirrors several of his classmates' reactions to what the course and the instructor were asking of them. The first assignment of the course asks the students to gaze into a mirror for nearly a half hour, jotting down whatever they observe or consider when seeing their reflections. Then, they are to take those notes and compose a reflection of the experience. The title

of Robin's essay, "I'm Just Not That Into Me," predicts the mood of the entire piece—typical characteristics of Robin: candid yet humorous, intelligent but bashful.  The essay as a whole indicates a mindset expressed by some of his peers:  a reluctance to examine himself too closely.  And, it also shows a mindset shared by others in class: he has nothing to "heal" from; he is "fine."Hence, he spends most of the essay discussing how looking at other people is much more interesting, but in one paragraph, the shields slip, and through the ongoing humor, a bit of self-revelation emerges:

> I'll save you the trouble of calling Family Freud—I'm clearly deflecting my own insecurities, preventing the path to healing, probably hung up on some latent sexual anxiety—but naming the quandary is the first step, right?  Hi, my name is Robin, and I have a problem.  I'm just…well…not that into me.  [Father, it's been five years, eight months, and six days since my last confession].  You see, I know me; I listened to that Delphian know-it-all and checked it off the list some time ago. (Mirror assignment, February 2, 2010, emphasis in original)

While Robin mixes his allusions here, first referring the Freud (the father of psychoanalysis) and then characterizing that image of the great counselor as an oracle of Delphi, the understanding is clear.  He expresses frankly that he is deflecting, putting off the self-reflection that is so critical in healing.  His statement, "I know me," indicates that he has already gone through the motions of understanding what happened, how he became who he is, and does not feel compelled to search out any unresolved issue, even if that issue is only a mild annoyance and not a full-blown "trauma." At this point he does not see any need to self-evaluate, even though Moffett (in Berthoff et al., 1994)

indicates that just living in the world gives anyone material enough to use writing to heal.  Yet, looking closely at what Robin does include in this section also reveals the subjects monopolizing his inward self:  Catholicism, alcohol, and that fateful trip abroad. He does have something to explore—he just does not admit it yet.

Clearly he knows the purpose of the course's assignments: to eventually find some measure of healing from an experience through the use of writing and imagery. However, in subverting the point of the assignment, he perhaps unwittingly sets the path of his future writings.  His nod to Alcoholics Anonymous' Twelve Steps beginning with an admittance of—at least with AA—an addiction, leads directly to a confession, a definitive reference to Catholicism.  Finally, the last sentence of the paragraph hints at that semester in England, when in the midst of depression he reconsidered every conviction. Is this unconscious?  Perhaps, but before Robin can wrestle with these issues, he has to first wrestle with his outlook that he has nothing to examine, nothing to resolve in his own life.

Two weeks after his initial attempts to circumvent the assignment—and finding and exploring his own topic—through humor, he approaches the topic in a more serious tone. He asks questions of himself and perhaps the reader in a "looped freewrite," an exercise wherein the writer underlines a key point from the first venture of freewriting that evening and uses that underlined point as the starting point for another, more focused freewriting episode, which can then generate another underlined topic for yet another freewriting episode:

I just don't feel like writing right now, especially "on topic."  I suppose that's an

interesting point though (and loosely connected).  Does writing only work as

therapy if you "buy into" it?  Clearly the act of doing any writing requires some

buy-in, even if it's just "to get points" for "this stupid assignment." But if you

don't go into it with a mindset of catharsis, or worse, as a cynic....will the process

unconsciously "get you" finally....slowly, over time, despite your best intentions

otherwise?  (looped freewrite, February 9, 2010)

While his questions are directed toward a mysterious "you," they seem to pertain to his

own inner battle, the understanding that he's supposed to examine some life issue

through his writing in the course versus the attitude that he has nothing to delve into,

that he has nothing new to learn from his experiences.  Additionally, he expresses some

aggressive resistance in reference to "the process unconsciously 'get you'....despite your

best intentions."  He is pushing against the process, unwilling to concede yet almost

frightened the process will overcome his barriers. Presenting almost a "meta-conflict," a

conflict-within-a-conflict, Robin has "the issue" to explore, but first he must struggle

within that issue to determine if he will "let" writing help him through "the issue,"

"through" meaning to better understand, to better accept, to better live with the events

precipitating "the issue."

Even so, the next segment of writing brings a slight understanding, a tentative

move toward—if not embracing—acceding the merits of writing as healing.  He asks:

Will a continual regiment of writing really break you down to the point of self-

confession/discovery if you don't want it to?  Do you stop putting up a front

when it's just you and the page?  Some people never stop when it's just them

and their head...so is writing really that different?  The act of getting it out seems

to let you objectify it, put distance between it, etc. (looped freewrite, February 9,

2010)

Amidst the questioning of writing "breaking down" the writer, of being skeptical if the

process can work if someone resists, he includes a moment of understanding its merits,

using terms the instructor often vocalized in class as well as terms found within the

literature read for the course.  However, during the Quaker sharing (a practice wherein

people share words, phrases or sentences from their writing "as the spirit moves them")

following the looped freewrite, instead of sharing this insight that writing helps a person

objectively perceive an occurrence or thing, he reverts back to the resistant stance:

"Does writing only work as therapy if you 'buy into it'?  If a person won't talk about his

problems or even consciously think about her problems, why would he start to write

about them...especially if the act of writing does not come naturally to her" (videotape,

February 9, 2010).  Robin continues his dance, waltzing between seeing the merits, yet

reluctant to partake of writing's healing potential.

In an interview conducted a month after this writing, Robin states, "The very first

night, I came up with a huge laundry list of things [topics to write about].  That said, I

was still kind of resistant about the...I don't really feel like I need to be healed kind of

thing.  There're things to process, but like I said in a lot of that writing, I still feel like

there's nothing wrong per se" (interview, March 12, 2010).  At this point well advanced

from the initial resistance, he has the objectivity that time and distance provide to see

the fuller picture. But, at the time of these writings he is still struggling.  Part of it is an

admitted feeling of not having a "dramatic enough" reason to write.  He states, "I don't feel like my 'concerns' are anywhere near the weight of those of my students or like Karen from the article [read for that night's class], because I've been blessed to not have to face such burdens in my life. Compared to these, I feel my experiences pale in comparison and feel trite" (freewrite, January 26, 2010). Much like Boal (1985) initially considered Theatre of the Oppressed unneeded in the United States because Americans lead lives so much better off than the lives Boal had encountered in Brazil and other countries, Robin cannot see that his issues are just as valid, even if not as "dramatic," as those he witnesses in his students and in the readings for class.

Finding his topic. Coincidentally, though, the same night that the initial crack in his resistance formed in that freewrite, he found his topic for the remaining assignments: his loss of faith.  Robin, a self-proclaimed devotee of visual, multi-media compositions, embraces writing as healing through the integration of music, imagery, and writing.  After the Quaker sharing, the class participated in a synesthesia activity wherein they began listening to "A Night on Bald Mountain" by Modest Mussorgsky and "Dance of the Hours" by Amilcare Ponchielli. While listening, each person was asked to draw on a long sheet of butcher paper images that arose to mind.  At the end of class, students tore off their sections of the paper and used those images (or writings or whatever they had recorded onto the paper) to compose a written piece.  Robin's drawing (figure 1) is dominated by his representation of a cathedral and an amorphous figure with a dialogue bubble proclaiming "HEALED" (picture, February 9, 2010).  While the drawing is satiric in nature, as with most satires, an element of serious truth resides

in the artwork.

The night of the synesthesia (mixing of the senses) assignment using the music, art, and writing together to craft meaning, Robin loosens his restraints—



Figure 1.Robin's Butcher Paper Drawing indicating his interest in exploring his faith.

maybe because of those visual, multi-modal tendencies.  Of that night, he states:

> It was when we were doing the music—perfect question about how a single event influences things—a classical piece was played.  It just immediately made me think of church, so that's what I drew.  That had been one of the thirty topics on my list, and once I started drawing, that particular piece ended up that way. From there I thought, well, this is something I could keep unpacking. (interview, March 12, 2010)

This point is reinforced later in the interview when he states that this activity began to engage him more with the class and its goal.  He states, "The music was kind of the stimulus for that, but I really started to get images and I started to get the idea that I could play with this religious overtone" (interview, March 12, 2010).  Within the writing from that activity, he explores what happened over the past decade as he slowly comes to his realization: "My god was gone" (synesthesia assignment, February 16, 2010).

At this point, while Robin has seized upon a topic, he has not fully invested—yet.

Within the writing for the synesthesia assignment, he states, "I wasn't seeking redemption in writing this, and I haven't felt any deliverance in completing it. Perhaps in sharing it a catharsis will come...or perhaps doubt will beget more doubt" (synesthesia assignment, February 16, 2010). Again, he waffles, but realistically; this experience—depending on the writer, the experience, and numerous other factors—has the potential to raise more issues and not firmly resolve anything. But, in the end—like with an earlier assignment—positivity arises. He states, "With renaissance music in ear and oil paints in hand, I was drawn to an old friend, and, ever fleetingly—it mattered" (synesthesia assignment, February 16, 2010). Obviously, the topic is important enough to him to keep drawing him back, and the use of imagery and other modes appeal to his particular interests and learning styles. Or, it could be that as van de Wetering, Bernstein, and Ley (in Sheikh, 2003) noted, that imagery is thought to be operational in specific parts of both hemispheres of the brain; therefore, Robin, through accessing multiple parts of the brain laterally across the hemispheres, also triggers those memories, circumventing the blocks he had set in place. As Baer, Hoffmann, and Sheikh (in Sheikh, 2003) note: when words are blocked or inaccessible, images can outwit the blockage.

Using abstraction. Another part of Robin's "pushing back" is his use of high level abstraction. Talking about his students, using "you" instead of "I", and even his use of metaphor are sometimes ways of distancing himself from his topic. He might already know what he wants to explore for his assignments in this course, but he's still not wanting to consciously see them at first, which is part of the healing process, to take

those "high level abstractions" which keep us from seeing our maladjustments and bring

them down to more "concrete" terms that we can identify and therefore deal with (Fox,

personal communication, April 23, 2011). In the second assignment, the Synesthesia

activity, he writes about his time in Europe through a biblical allusion, "I ate of the tree

without even tasting, and know forever more that I am naked" (synesthesia assignment,

February 16, 2010).  While this assignment is his "breakthrough" piece, where he first

begins to explore his topic and begins to see some healing, it still retains a metaphorical

element of distancing.  Just one week later, though, he begins to record more concrete

details, is more self-revelatory about his decisions and his feelings: "After writing the

week 2 piece, I knew I wanted my photo to be from Europe, symbolic (thought at the

same time literal in many ways) of this religious ambiguity/annihilation" (freewrite,

February, 23, 2010).  By the end of the semester he is directly confronting his beliefs, his

history, and himself, both literally and metaphorically, in the Conversation Across Time

assignment (See Appendix C: Assignments, assignment 10: Conversation Across Time),

wherein students were asked to create a dialogue between themselves as they are now

and themselves as they believe they will be in two or three decades.  While

confrontation is an inherent part of the assignment, Robin appears to embrace that

element of it—in fact, amending it to include not just his future self but also his previous

self at the point right before he leaves for Europe.  He depicts this former self without

amelioration, showing his stubborn insistence through what the young man says to his

later selves: "I don't know how I could go on living as an atheist.  I mean, knowing that

every single action I did had absolutely no significance....No, Europe isn't going to turn

me into an atheist.  I know who I am and what I believe, and nothing's going to change

that" (conversation across time assignment, May 4, 2010). In the final interview, Robin

acknowledges that because he had that two-valued orientation—he was always going

to be a Catholic, alcohol should never be consumed, etc.— the process he experienced

with all the pedestals crumbling around him would have happened regardless of the

advice given him, as shown in his Conversation Across Time piece, "Gift of the Magi"

(interview, August 26, 2010).  Now, his perspective is more multi-valued, realizing,

"Maybe it's just redefining what religion is for me.  This idea that there is some

spirituality out there and we survive this and something new has grown from it"

(interview, August 26, 2010).

Student as model of writing as healing. One coincidental event that helps Robin

"buy into" this idea of writing as healing occurs around the same time that Robin is

acknowledging his resistance in that first interview:  Adam, a student in Robin's class,

begins to use writing to process his own situation in the foster care system and what led

to that placement.  Because of confidentiality, Robin could not share details about

Adam, his home life and experiences.  However, Robin did reveal that Adam is a transfer

student who had been removed from his previous home because of danger to his well-

being.  Only in Robin's class a month, Adam was having a definite influence on his

teacher.  The morning before one of our class sessions Adam, socially-awkward and,

from all accounts, desperate for a positive male role model, gave Robin his journal,

saying, "Read this."  Robin's freewrite reveals his unease with this student's disclosures

in that journal but also his growing sense that writing can help heal:

No I did not ask for this—and to be truthful, it'd be easier if it stayed locked up

somewhere out of my sight—this is information he <u>voluntarily</u> wanted to make

at least semi-public, or as other writings this semester suggest, that he simply

<u>had</u> to make semi-public, to get out, to cleanse himself in catharsis and regain

some semblance of power over his recent history. (freewrite, March 16, 2010,

emphasis in original document).

Here, Robin sees how this student uses writing to help him emotionally recover from

trauma and connect with another individual, his teacher. (Although Robin never

expresses the nature of the student's trauma, the implication is that the student was

most likely traumatized through abuse or some other equally grim manner.)  The

implication with the student wanting Robin to read the journal entry immediately

instead of waiting until the designated due date is perhaps that this student not only

wanted Robin to understand him and his situation better but also wanted to connect

and perhaps gain acceptance from an admired adult.  This use of writing to heal to

connect to others is not a facet originally associated with the practice.  In fact, while

Pennebaker (1997) stresses individuals should only write for themselves, not an

audience, other researchers (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000; DeSalvo, 1999) and

practitioners (Antzoulis, 2003; Moran, 2004; Nugent, 1994) indicate that sharing of this

sort can be helpful. Not only does it allow others to know the writer better and thus

understand the writer's situation and behavior better, but it also builds a community of

like experiences.  Until the experience is shared through disclosure, writers may not

know who else has experienced similar situations and can sympathize with them.

Nearly a month later, Robin is noting additional benefits writing in this manner gives his student: Adam is writing more, he is writing more fluently, and he is writing more and more often on the topic of the prompt instead of one of his own choosing, all definite academic benefits. Robin states, "You see this progression; he's writing that. He's writing more and more fluently. Then, he even starts to transcend that" (interview, April 23, 2010). At the same time that Adam's spontaneous embracing of writing to heal begins to emerge in Robin's writing and conversation, instances where Robin indicates questioning the validity of writing to heal or how Robin has nothing within his own life that necessitates this reason for writing begin to disappear. And, by the end of the semester, Robin has noticed his own benefits gained from the writing in class.

In the "Connections" paper for the course portfolio, he states, "It wasn't until I was doing this type of writing myself that I could truly empathize. By putting myself in a student's (or patient's) role, I was able to experience first-hand the hesitations, demands, and ultimate rewards and transformations of this type of writing" (connections assignment, May 11, 2010). In this sense, he is seeing the direct correlation between theory and practice because he is actually completing the action— and because of his student's spontaneous use of writing to heal, he is also seeing further instances of theory being put into practice. Of course, the "Connections" paper asked students to do just that: illuminate and discuss all the connections they could between the visual and the verbal elements in every facet of the course, from the readings, from the visual compositions, from the writings both formal and informal done in class and for class, from the discussions held during class and within their small writing groups,

and so on.  In the final interview for this study, Robin talks through some outcomes he

has started to reach.  He acknowledges that, while he had already processed the

experiences and was not feeling any residual angst from the events, he still appreciates

the opportunity for reflection and vocalization.  He realizes something that perhaps

should have been self-evident, that writing as healing "was really just euphemism for

writing as a means of introspection, or processing important life events" (reflection

assignment, May 11, 2010).

Embracing the process. Although Robin is normally a very astute individual, he

still needed to come to what others find self-evident, that writing of this kind aids the

writer in processing the milestones of a life.  As discussed in chapter two, people in

quandaries do not always perceive events, situations, others, themselves, and so on

clearly due to numerous factors, such as their maps not matching their territories, they

are using abstractions to keep from confronting the issue, etc.  Robin, in this instance,

needed to embrace the process of using writing to address his life issues equally as

much as he needed to address those life issues.  Without the one (embracing the

process), he cannot perform the other (confronting his loss of faith, his approach to

alcohol, his relationships). As he says, "It helped me see the whole picture maybe"

(interview August 26, 2010).  While most of his conclusions are tentative, like the one

just cited, they are still part of the process; one can distinguish the step being taken

toward full understanding.  For instance, in one part of the interview, he transitions

from somewhat sure to more positive.  He states of the religious experience:

Even though I'm not necessarily feeling it right now, but this idea of maybe there

is some hope out there, maybe it's not as dead as I think it is, and maybe that's

what this whole process has pulled out.  Maybe it's just redefining what religion

is for me.  This idea that there is some spirituality out there and we survive this

and something new has grown from it. (interview, August 26, 2010)

Yet elsewhere he seems more definitive: "I think the conclusion I reached [is] that I

don't think I could have changed the outcome of any of it" (interview, August 26, 2010).

So, while some conclusions are still being formed and may never be fully realized, he

was able to learn (one might say "heal") from the experience.

Using imagery. Another outcome that directly links with his learning style and

interests is the idea of linking to his former self through images.  Throughout the

semester, when pictures or other images are part of the assignment, Robin readily

accepts their inclusion, admitting often that he begins with the image (interview, April

23, 2010), such as with the "Monster" assignment, wherein students are asked to create

a visual of their issue (their monster), morph it into a positive image, and then write a

letter to that monster. Students were free to use whatever technique they could to

"morph" their monster, anything as high tech as using software to distort pictures to

such low-tech methods as ripping the physical photograph or drawing into many pieces

and then reassembling it.  In his freewrite after the Great & Small assignment, he

reflects that the process of sifting through photos for the "right" ones is cathartic:

The <u>real</u> thinking, and the <u>real</u> healing/processing/catharsis came from the

process of sifting through the hundreds of pictures on my computer to choose

those select six images that would represent the <u>best</u> and <u>worst</u> aspects of my

life. It was a fun, <u>cathartic</u>, absolute, definitive experience <u>re-living</u> memories of

the past that all-too-often stay boxed up and isolated. (freewrite, April 27, 2010,

emphasis in original)

Being confronted with past memories, having to focus on recalling the former self that

took that photo or was in that photo is just one aspect of the assignment that deals with

manipulation of images.  The assignment itself is geared to enhance reflection and self-

understanding.  It asks the student to use PowerPoint and on each slide maneuver six

photos (one positive and five negative) in relation to each other.  The first slide is of the

negative image filling the slide.  The next slide contains images of five positives in the

student's life.  On the third slide, the student combines the six images, making sure the

negative one is bigger in size than the others. The following slide has all six images of

equal size and gives the suggestion to include an image of the student as a gravitational

center with the positives and negative images circling the self image.  Finally, on the last

slide, students were to make their positive images in decreasing size according to their

levels of positivity; the negative image was left to the students' discretion as to size and

placement.  Baer, Hoffmann, and Sheik (in Sheik, 2003) state that since creating an

image pulls upon previous perceptions of that image, the person is conceptually

perceiving the image anew.  Thus, this shifting and resizing of the figures influences the

perception the student has of the event or thing each photo represents.  The

juxtaposition of images, as well as their resizing, transfer new connotations to each

image, thus altering the individual's overall perception of the object.  In this instance,

the process heals as much as the product.

This facet is true for Robin as well. He states, "It was just the act of making me think in creative ways and looking back at all my moments, stopping and remembering and having to do something creative with that was more important than necessarily having something to show for it" (interview, August 26, 2010). However, for Robin while the process is the most important, so is the combined use of image with writing in many of the assignments. He states, "Piece after piece there were so many important visual elements that's a part of making it all come together that I can't imagine the process having worked the same without it...I needed both symbol sets" (interview, August 26, 2010). This more inclusive use of multiple modes makes sense, as Baer, Hoffmann, and Sheik (in Sheik, 2003) noted that in holistic therapies, "imagery" actually includes all senses, not just the visual. The clearer people can reform their situations—through sight, scent, touch, movement, etc.—the greater chance they will have of healing, as they will be able to experience it, confront it, and with catharsis, move on.

Mei-Zhen's Story: Assimilating into New Culture

My introduction to Mei-Zhen occurred the first day of her initial doctoral class at the university, nearly a year and a half before this study. That entire semester, she observed the world through fire engine red eyes, swollen from hours of crying. Many who met her worried that financial pressures as well as the academic rigor and culture shock would make that semester her only one at the university. But she persevered—thrived, in fact. Finding a kindred spirit in one professor, she began to love poetry—writing it, reading it, hearing it, cherishing it. And in the Therapeutic Language, Literature, & Media course, her experience as a new visitor to the United States and her

love of poetry coalesced.

Challenging herself through poetic form. From an Asian country, her readers find it difficult sometimes to believe that English is not her first language, because not only does she capture so effortlessly the beauty of the language and include such detailed imagery in her poetry, but also because she tackles some of the most difficult forms of the genre. For instance, she chose to write a palindrome poem for the Monster assignment, mimicking a Palindrome she had seen on YouTube. This form necessitates the reader be able to create meaning reading the poem both forwards ("I am defeated" to "I will succeed") and backwards ("I will succeed" to "I am defeated"):

I am defeated
And I refuse to believe that
I can make a difference
I know it is hard but
"Dreams come true"
Is a joke and
"Nobody can change the fate"
So I told people
I don't trust myself
My life is broken because
The monster
Is more powerful than
My strength
The monster stole my identity and hope
I would be lying to you if I said
I will have a great future ahead
Before everything I must know
Failures are inevitable
Why is it?
Shame and insecurity are so ingrained in me
I don't think
My life will be filled with joy and the sense of great achievements
Myself
Is controlled by
The fear
There is no way to turn things around

> It is foolish to presume
> I will succeed (Monster assignment, April 21, 2010)

Not only are her peers in class impressed by a poetic format that challenges any author's writing abilities, but also professional educators who heard her presentation of the poem at a conference are astonished at the craft she uses in it (observation journal, June 2010).

While her version of the palindrome is powerful in its imagery and message, I also noted that it bears striking resemblances to the inspiration poem on YouTube. However, enough of the poem was changed to make it reflect Mei-Zhen's experience, conveying her sentiments at her lack of confidence and her trials and struggles to succeed. As I often used "model" poems in my high school class as a low-stress way to introduce my students to writing poetry—much like painters copy the "masters" in order to learn technique—I did not find it unusual for her poem to closely resemble this earlier version. I also noted that Mei-Zhen is from an Asian country that has "flexible" understandings of copyright and plagiarism, so I also took into account that this assignment also is a literal example of her culture shock. Another student in class asked if this poetic form was her original idea, and she disclosed that she modeled her poem after another person's example, which gave opportunity for the class to discuss America's copyright laws and the university's plagiarism codes, furthering not only Mei-Zhen's understanding but also the other international students' comprehension of mimicking another person's work. Her modeling her poem so closely after the original may be an example of her wanting to challenge herself and being somewhat insecure of her language abilities, or it may be an example of a cultural barrier she still has yet to

cross.

A barrier surmounted.  Likewise, language barriers do crop up occasionally, especially in informal conversation.  For instance, we had the following exchange during an interview:

> Rebecca:  If you are a butterfly, what are you flying toward?  What is your flower, your nectar?
>
> Mei-Zhen:  If I am a flower?  That's a hard question.  I would be in a garden, and the garden had different genre of writings. This is a poetry garden.
>
> (interview, September 14, 2010)

A seemingly small misunderstanding, this and other small instances of misunderstanding in our conversations caution me that the analysis of our conversations may be inexact. In our initial interview, most of her responses are short, nearly abrupt, and she sometimes questions why I ask about certain things. Frequently in response to questions of inspiration or process, she answers, "It just came to me" (interview, March 5, 2010)—as opposed to later in the semester when she answered immediately when another student's in-class question concerning her inspiration for the palindrome poem (observation journal, April 20, 2010). My initial response to "It just came to me" is to question if she understands the questions or if this is a form of resistance to further self-reflection, an extension of her not wanting to dive into her topic.  In my observation journal after the first interview, I write:

> Many answers were equivalent to IDK [I don't know].  "It just came to me."
>
> Interview was like pulling teeth.  She often looked confused/frowned at

questions, like she didn't understand why I'd ask a question like that.

(observation journal, March 5, 2010)

Upon reflection and additional observation of her in class and interacting with her writing group, my initial reaction alters: "Mei-Zhen is the poster girl for passive resistance. Her 'I don't know' or 'It just came to me' is akin to Bartleby's 'I prefer not to'" (April 4, 2010). Now with additional time and more data, my perception changes again, and I begin to question. Is this a lack of confidence in herself or in me as an interviewer or is it a reflection of her feelings toward writing as healing? When I begin the recorder, having secured her permission to tape our conversation, she comments that she does not like the sound of her voice, her accent on recordings. Or is it a difficulty with the language? Could it be a lack of trust with me, the interviewer? Could it be a result of her culture? Possibly, this terseness resides in a combination of many things, not all of which are readily apparent.

In an effort to ease her—not having her voice recorded, not having to answer face-to-face, having more time to consider answers—I emailed the next interview questions to her, which she answered in writing and sent back. By the third interview that fall, several months after the completion of the course, at my request for an interview, she in turn requests we meet in person and conduct the interview as we had the first time. Her answers in that instance are still briefer than her contemporaries, but in comparison to the earlier conversation, her responses are much richer, more insightful and detailed. For instance, in response to a question about her process creating the palindrome, she states:

You have to decide what you're going to do first. I decided to do the negative part first, because we usually think of things negatively. So, I wrote about my frustration first. I thought I will fail, I will fail, and I will then succeed. I chose words to create that meaning. Then I need to create a positive mood. So, actually I need to revise that, of course. When I'm doing the positive, it's more difficult because if I found it doesn't work, I need to change it going forward. (interview, September 14, 2010)

The openness and acceptance is clear in comparison to the previous interview. Part of this change appears to be from a rise in confidence. In her first interview, her verbal cues are not totally in the words she uses but also in the manner she speaks them. For example, in realizing that she is making the culture shock even more difficult for herself because of her reactions to others, she states:

I was too hard on myself. I was new here…I wanted to do better, and I have some kind of expectation, but I found that I couldn't reach that. I ignored time and patience…Teachers or friends were saying, actually I'm doing fine. [In barely a whisper] I don't know why I feel so bad, so that's what I felt. The person who tortured me was myself. (interview, March 5, 2010)

While Mei-Zhen is never considered a loud speaker in comparison with her American counterparts, she deliberately lowers the second portion of her comments above, almost as if the admission is nearly as severe as the experience. In her second interview, these variances in tone and volume are not available for comparison since the interview was conducted solely on paper. However, another step toward greater self-

assurance is taken. She admits, "I feel more confident since my works have been recognized" (interview via email, April 14, 2010).   Even more strides are taken throughout the rest of the semester and over the summer. Not only is she more comfortable answering questions in person and giving longer answers, as mentioned earlier, she also is less meek, more willing to stand up for herself.  For instance, when I try to re-phrase an earlier question to see if we are having any miscommunication, she scolds, "I already told you that" (interview, September 14, 2010).  Confidence does not appear to be an issue, at least by the end of the study.

This self-assurance seems to tie closely with her use of language.  During her presentation at a conference over the summer, she admits that when she speaks Chinese, her native language, she bows her head, speaks softly, and does not make much eye contact. However, when she speaks English, her stature changes:  she, for the most part, meets others' eyes, speaks more loudly, and stands straight, feet planted (personal journal, June 2010).  Did this change occur because of the writing? Perhaps. Other factors include increased time and experience within the American culture and interacting with native English speakers, especially those brassy Americans, such as her interviewing local American poets as part of her comprehensive exams projects, her one-to-one interaction with professors she worked for as well as her advisor, and more. However, the writing that she does on her own culture shock probably contributes to this evolution.

Confronting her issue in writing. In her first formal writing, she set up her topic, the anguish she feels at not fitting in and not feeling like she can connect with others:

I see my bright eyes eager to search for my soul

The half one I have lost

Struggling in the foreign culture

Confusion, shocks

Life is difficult

I see my red lips

Erupt touching voice

I speak their language

They don't understand me

I drown in each embarrassment

Perishing (mirror assignment, February 2, 2010)

In her reflection on this piece, she illustrates how this writing has started helping her: "I see myself through others' eyes, from different perspectives, and the answer toward my questions has emerged. I need more confidence. Revision helps me see myself more clearly" (mirror assignment, February 2, 2010). This element, perspective, is one that will carry throughout her writing in the semester. By seeing herself through others' perceptions, it affects her own.

She admits this herself in her reflection on the next assignment. Quoting DeSalvo(1999, p. 11), she states, "'We use writing to shift our perspectives'…Through writing and reflecting, I became ready to 'move on'" (synesthesia assignment, February 16, 2010).

Using images and music. But writing is not the only medium to aid Mei-Zhen's confidence building. She also uses images and music. For instance, in her second formal

assignment, she uses Bach's "Air on the G String" as not only her background music for

her digital composition but also as her inspiration.  In her reflection for the piece, she

paraphrases how Bach's rivals broke every string but G on his violin to keep him from

winning a contest, but he instead won with this particular piece, using jus

t that one string. His resolve encourages Mei-Zhen, "I learned that we could do

an amazing job even when we are in a difficult situation...Every time I listen to his music,

I seem to hear his courage and his perseverance" (photo fix reflection assignment,

February 23, 2010).

Likewise Mei-Zhen also draws, literally and metaphorically, from visual media.

As mentioned previously, she creates a visual montage of words, images, and sound for

her second formal assignment.  The assignment only asks students to take a

photograph, preferably of themselves, and alter it to convey some type of meaning, so

that the alteration shows a new, more positive connotation from the manipulation

done.  Mei-Zhen chooses not only to manipulate the actual photograph but to do so

digitally in a multitude of ways, each working with words and music to indicate a

different shade of understanding.  For instance at one point in the montage in which she

describes her feelings in a new country, she alters the photo so that only a vague,

almost unintelligible, version of half her face is showing.  Over the image, she writes

"frustration" (see Figure 2, next page) (Photo Fix assignment, February 23, 2010).

Obviously, Mei-Zhen is using the options within the software to create representations

of how she felt.  The images, in these instances, are not used to show "historical truth"

but to show Mei-Zhen's truth.  As Taal and Krop (in Sheik, 2003) advise, "The historical

truth is not as important as what the client thinks happened" (p. 397). In her next slide, she changes the image yet again to a negative with the word "shock" (see Figure 3) (Photo Fix assignment, February 23, 2010).



Figure 2. An image from the beginning of Mei-Zhen's movie depicting her metamorphosis in understanding.

Later in the montage, she has the photo ripped in two pieces with the words "Loneliness tore me into pieces" (see Figure 4, next page) which is followed by the photo fragmented into many pieces (see Figure 5, next page). However, by the middle of the montage, Mei-Zhen has met what she called her "angel," a professor who she sees as a kindred spirit and who sparks the love of poetry, adding richness and confidence "layer by
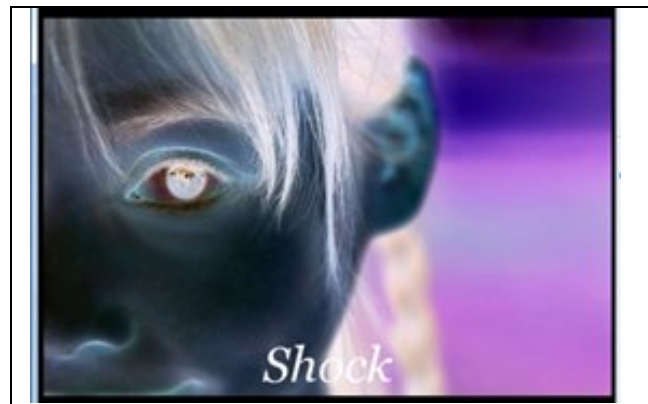


Figure 3. A transitional image from Figure 2 in Mei-Zhen's movie depicting her metamorphosis in understanding.

layer" to Mei-Zhen's American experience (Photo Fix assignment, February 23, 2010). This process seems to parallel the steps she took in gaining confidence herself: she starts in frustration and anxiety, meets a person who gives her strength while picking up other forms of inspiration (music, imagery), and comes out the other side stronger, more sure, and, as she states, "whole" (Photo Fix assignment, February 23, 2010). At

the end of the visuals, Mei-Zhen is no longer using just half her face, but the picture of her whole self, unmodified.

While the assignment did ask students to manipulate and change the photo, the options of how to do so were left to the individual—though the professor suggested "think adding,



Figure 4.  Mei-Zhen's image of her photo, showing only part of her face, ripped in two.

subtracting, substituting, altering color, background, etc." (see Appendix C: Assignments, number 3: Fixing the Photo).  While Mei-Zhen may have been inspired by

the model shown briefly in class the night this piece was assigned, the choices she made and the message conveyed are wholly her own.  She chose to begin with only part of herself showing.  She chose to amend the photo to look like a crayon drawing. She chose to make the photo into a



Figure 5. The next frame after Mei-Zhen's ripped photo where the image is placed over fractured boxes on the screen.

facsimile of a photo-negative.  She chose to tear the photo into pieces and further into a quixotic mosaic.  She chose to resolve the PowerPoint into a picture of her whole self. These choices appear deliberate, illustrating through visuals and the words paired with them her growth as an individual, her emergent confidence in herself both as a student
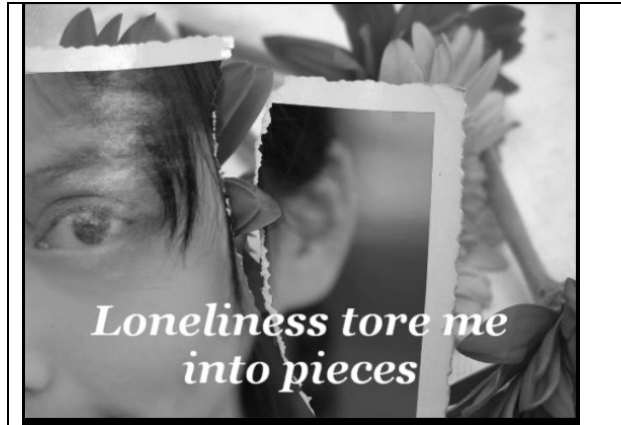
and as a person assimilating into a new culture.

Additionally, at the end of the visual montage, Mei-Zhen leaves off the images and uses the music, the written word, and a voice-over narration to convey meaning—yes, she recorded her own voice, a definite indication that her perception of herself is altering in some manner. The most obvious is her recognition that she has "A Voice," meaning that she has thoughts, opinions, feelings, and more even more important, that she can share them with others, that she can argue and enlighten and project herself into conversations, into classroom discussions, into the world-writ-large. While multiple factors probably contributed to this transformation—her close relationship with a professor, her growing understanding and assimilation into American society, her continued participation in seminar courses that encourage and, at times, mandate outspokenness—the reflective nature of the work in the Photo Fix assignment and the other assignments for the class certainly are built to advance better understanding of self and situation, which would innately hearten greater self-confidence and more favorable mindsets to taking risk, such as speaking out, vocalizing.

In this voice over section she states, "I may have more challenges ahead of me, I may fail again, I may shed more tears. But I know I have the nourishment and encouragement here to accompany me to keep going" (Photo Fix assignment, February 23, 2010). This transformation from darkness to light reappears in her drawings the night of the synesthesia activity. In that depiction, she shows how she came out of the dark clouds and turbulence of her early days in America (see Figure 6, next page) and transcended into a light-filled, more hopeful existence (see Figure 7, next page). Using

the butterfly image for the first time, she sets in place an image she will return to later in a free write, saying the experience "was like being in the process of transformation in a chrysalis.  I can't say I am
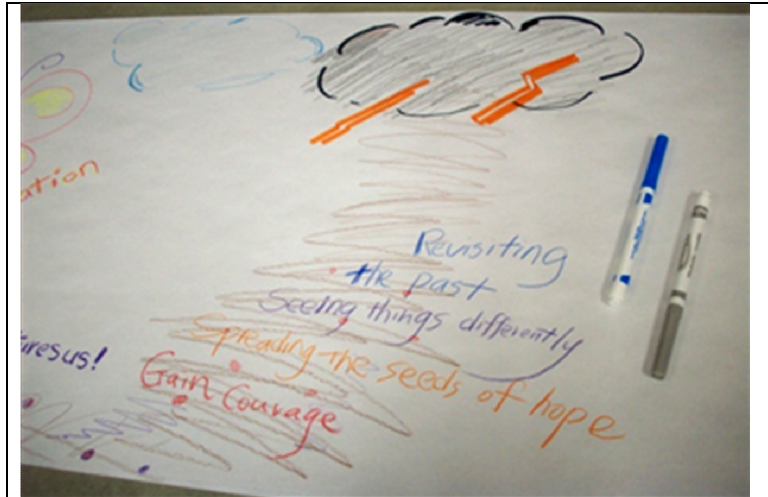
Figure 6.Mei-Zhen's depiction of her turbulent emotions at the beginning of her time at the university.

ready to push myself out and fly with new wings, but I am changing" (free write, April 13, 2010). The juxtaposition of the positive and negatives (Figure 8) graphically illustrate her shift in thinking.

Using metaphor. Obviously, imagery—both verbally and visually expressed—is an important component to Mei-Zhen's perspective of herself and her world.  As Bolton (1999) found, poetry uses imagery to express complicated and sometimes abstract occurrences. Here, Mei-Zhen is using both the literal image with the

Figure 7.Mei-Zhen's depiction of how her situation transformed from a negative to a more positive experience.

metaphorical image created by her words to create a deeper understanding. The literal

images of stormy skies give way to sunshine and butterflies, to seeds planted in hopes

that nurturing will help them grow.  Likewise, her words invoke the metaphorical

connotations to these literal representations.  She is not only illustrating how the

physical seeds she planted will grow and blossom with nurturing, but she is also

demonstrating how she as a writer and as a person like the butterfly can transform from

a more tethered being to a more liberated entity, flying free, ready, as she states, "to

MOVE ON!" (synesthesia artwork, February 16, 2010, emphasis in original).  As

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) observe, metaphors are appropriate vehicles for writers,

especially in writing to heal, since people naturally gravitate toward metaphor and are

surrounded by metaphors; individuals tend to consider things by association—a block of

cheese worn on the head connotes the Packer football team, an apple becomes



Figure 8. Mei-Zhen's complete drawing from the synesthesia activity illustrating her transformation from negative to positive

iconography for teachers or education—connecting certain traits of one thing to another. For instance, a description of a female lawyer could be, "She's a real pit bull," meaning many different connotations, depending on the receiver's understanding of "pit bull:" tenacious, destructive, a loving companion, and so on. The human brain thinks in metaphor, and therefore it is only natural that Mei-Zhen uses metaphor to express elements of her transformation.

This metaphoric thinking appears most prominently in one of Mei-Zhen's final assignments when she looks closely at the people and things around her and their influence upon her. The Great and Small assignment, like many of the other assignments, asked students to manipulate images, one representing their issue and five representing the best elements of their lives. As related in Robin's section, this assignment asked students to manipulate these images, making them bigger or smaller in relation to each other. In this project, she equates herself to a seed (a recurring image in her writing) and her family as the earth. Likewise, her husband is the sun, traveling is water, and poetry is air. Each of these elements work to help the seed (Mei-Zhen) grow and develop. Further, she uses the metaphor of an angel for teachers and friends, those who encourage her along her way. Through using the images—both in a digital composition and in writing—she sees how each one helped her overcome the worm, which symbolizes her culture shock (great and small assignment, April 27, 2010). While she doesn't expressly state it, her words and images also imply that all the positive images worked together to help her develop and blossom, that without one or two she might have survived but never completely thrived like she did because of all

those factors: earth, sun, water, air, and care, working together. Like Lakoff and Johnson (2003) stated, metaphors enable writers to make sense of their lives; metaphors give writers new pathways to find new meanings of what has happened within their lives and tools in which to construct fresh understandings.

As stated previously, this assignment asks students to manipulate images—in this case to make them smaller and/or bigger in relation to each other, to show influence on self and the other objects. Mei-Zhen performs each manipulation except the last, which asks her to make one element bigger than the others, indicating it has more influence or greater power. She states of her decision:

> I didn't follow step (e) to make each of the 6 slides a different size. I couldn't tell which element is bigger since each one of them is so important for me. I just spread them all around me. I understand the enemy is always there, what I needed to do is to look at it differently. I've already got the most precious nutrition, I shouldn't be afraid of the worm. Most plants have worms but many of them still bloom. I will become a beautiful flower as long as I stay strong and I believe in myself. (Great and small assignment, April 27, 2010)

The indication here is that that looking at oneself and one's situation from another—perhaps even multiple—perspective has allowed her a measure of healing. She sees that she needs to look at the situation differently and to have confidence. DeSalvo (1999) notes perspective as a major factor in writing as healing's benefits, that writing allows the individual to look at a situation—which previously had been seen very subjectively—from another perspective, allowing a measure of objectivity because

multiple perspectives by nature build a more encompassing understanding, balancing out subjectivity.

This self-understanding of how perspective helps the writer appears in Mei-Zhen's connections paper, a reflective element of the semester-ending portfolio:

> I enjoyed manipulating the meaning on the visual and printed parts.  For me, it is a sense of taking control....The works turned out differently each time I made a change. It also means the life can have many alternatives if I would like to make a change. Doing projects is like living a life.  There is not just one way.
>
> (Connections assignment, May 11, 2010)

Here, Mei-Zhen appears to have used writing and images to alter her internal map of the situation.  As Hayakawa and Hayakawa (1991) propose, people make maps of the territory that comprises their lives.  When the person's map does not match the terrain, to continue the metaphor, a "fault" is created; along this fault is where the situation "rubs" against people's minds, making them anxious, sad, or some other negative (Johnson, 1946).  Mei-Zhen seems to have used her writing and imagery to alter her map to meet the territory, seeing it more objectively and through new perspectives. When the map once more matches the terrain, people have less severe "earthquakes" or, as Benson (cited in Baer, Hoffmann, Sheikh, in Sheikh, 2003) termed it, return to "remembered wellness."  They are relaxed.  They are whole. Mei-Zhen exhibits traits of feeling calm and whole in her response cited above.

Francis' Story:  Reconciling Lost First Love

Imagine a man entering the third phase of his life.  First, a professional musician,

he transcended from Southern roots to abide for a time in New York City, playing gigs and making albums.  Then, he returned to his roots to teach high school English and raise a family.  And now, at an age when many people begin to consider retirement and with two children grown and in college, Francis himself returns to school to earn his doctorate, leaving his wife behind like the mythic Odysseus abandoned his wife Penelope (her pseudonym for this writing) to await his return to the island of Ithaca.

Talking with Francis, one feels that no matter where he resides, his thoughts and actions are constantly tied to those Southern roots.  Often in interviews, he links what he is feeling or events he discusses to his boyhood in the South, his very conservative parents and grandparents, and even events related to desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement.  While in a previous class he had written about the complex relationship he had with this father, in this course he chooses to explore his momentous first love and the residual guilt, even forty years later, that he feels from how that relationship ended.  While this is not the only topic he explores in his assignments, his first love remains his most prominent writing-as-healing experience as he continues to revisit, revise, and re-explore the writing concerning this topic throughout the semester, into summer, and finally reaching a resolution to his thinking and feeling at the beginning of fall. This continual revisiting the topic reflects Francis' thoughts sporadically returning to his first love and their relationship throughout the years.  Obviously, the relationship did not end well, and Francis' part in the relationship's end has weighed heavily upon him for several decades, ever more so that he's reached his midlife.

Confronting guilt. However, the choice to focus his writing on that failed

romantic friendship creates new and understandable guilt. After a decades-long marriage, Francis feels in some manner he was being unfaithful to his wife by examining—and to some extent, reviving—his feelings for this girl/woman who first held his heart. In our first interview, Francis has just touched on this topic in writing after moving through several other topics in the opening assignments, but even then with just the capturing of that initial, innocent rush of finding first love, he still feels pangs of guilt: "I tell you if Penelope knew that piece existed, it would break her heart" (interview, March 4, 2010). But, he does not let those feelings stop him; he continues working on the piece—though not sharing it with his writing group or turning it in to the professor or sharing it with his wife—and eventually finishes the piece. Only then does he make the radical step and share it with his wife, who never saw it in drafts, only as a finished product:

> I did finally give it to Penelope to read. And, it was rough for about a week. I had not even mentioned to her that I was doing anything like this until I had the semblance of the complete draft, and I wanted to share it with her. The night I finished it, the first thought was wanting to send it to her which I did do electronically. She was in Ithaca and I was here. Her initial reaction was very positive. By the time I got home that weekend, it was not good...The point of it was ultimately to show how, at least in my case, I got to this wonderful place, this relationship with another person [Penelope], this woman, that seems as durable as a thing can be and is in every respect wonderful. She was really upset. We do talk. Anyway, finally I said, you know you're talking as if I had

been unfaithful to you.  For her at that point a light came on.  That's it.  She said,

that's the way I feel.  (interview, September 1, 2010)

His very real anxiety at Penelope's learning that he was writing about his relationship

with Selene, even though it occurred forty years previously, comes to fruition.  As

Wegner & Lane (in Pennebaker, 2007) note, secret-keeping can lead to severe

psychological issues.  Disclosure is seen as a therapy for secret-keeping's manifestations.

Yet, usually the secret-keeper has very real reasons for not divulging—in Francis' case,

he did not want to hurt his wife in any manner.  However, the eruption of feeling

between spouses and their eventual discussion leads to new understanding.  Disclosure,

in this case, while causing initial unease—a "normal" process for this type of writing

(Pennebaker, 1997 & 2007, DeSalvo, 1999) does lead to a new, mutual understanding of

each partner and their partnership.

Midway through the semester, Francis hinted that, though he had thought about

this relationship over the years and felt guilty for his part in its end, in reality, his writing

about it was part of a mid-life crisis.  In an almost covert manner, he hinted at a

potential reason for focusing on his first love, "The thing I'm trying to work out.  You

know me:  I have no pride.  Mid-life crisis, I have an element of that.  Why should this

girl—and think about that time when I didn't know shit about anything. Not that life was

easy" (interview, April 28, 2010).  The disjointed nature of his speech here and the

mentioning of a mid-life crisis falls in the center in what is the only complete sentence.

Even if in inverted syntax, this mentioning of midlife crisis exposes potential significant

ramifications. Clearly, Francis is in the midst of what Barnes (1992) calls exploratory talk,

absorbing concepts—fitting ideas into his own schema. While he is trying to convey to me his thinking, this is not fully formed, one might say "formal," speaking—he is still working out the concept, thinking it out aloud. But even in the middle of his exploration, a nugget of understanding arose. This nugget is fully polished after having completed the written piece, sharing it with his wife, and eventually discussing it with her. He seems abashed not only to find that what he considered a terribly romantic relationship is, in reality, rather ordinary but also to reveal that his referring back to it now is just as ordinary, a mid-life crisis event:

> I had to confront the truth that there was an element of mid-life crisis there.
> When I described it, I think I described it as disappointingly ordinary. It was. I
> thought I was above that sort of thing, too mature, too savvy for that sort of
> thing. Wrong! There was an utterly irrational, wistful, romantic element. By
> talking it through, writing it, I was able to, I think, see it for what it was or is.
> (interview, September 1, 2010).

The disjointed discussion from earlier is absent since his epiphany. Gone are the fragments, the stops and starts. Instead, full sentences comprise almost entirely his conversation and the sentences are longer, Barnes' (1992) final draft speaking. It is a much more peaceful passage to read and hear. As Barnes states, exploratory talk is just what the name implies, talk that wanders through a subject to uncover meaning. But here, Francis is using what Barnes called "formal draft speaking," which implies that the speaker has resolved his thoughts and is now expressing them in a manner which takes into account the needs of his audience. Francis has worked out his thoughts and

feelings and can now express them in a manner more easily understood and absorbed by his listener.

In addition to the guilt he feels at exploring this topic, Francis also expresses a lingering guilt for his actions in ending the relationship, which may have influenced his feeling compelled to write on this topic. Selene and Francis were a couple in high school. Then, Selene, a year older than Francis, had left for college. During her first year at university, she attended a party, over-consumed alcohol, and was intimate with another male. Though she called Francis and confessed, Francis could not deal with it and hung up on her, effectively ending the relationship.

Preoccupied by relationship. Though Francis chooses a variety of topics for the different assignments (his father, his beloved dog that he accidentally killed, his son's severe childhood medical condition, and others), he returns throughout the semester, not necessarily for the class assignments, but to this one piece: his first love. Initially, when asked why he had chosen Selene as a topic, he comments briefly, "That's something that's been bothering me" (interview, March 4, 2010). However, well into the interview, he adds, "I've wanted to write it for literally decades, but to some extent afraid, but more than that, not sure I could capture it" (interview March 4, 2010). Even later he adds, "I'm not quite sure why I feel compelled to understand that, but I am compelled. I'm somewhat feeling guilty because of what I did to her. By 'did to her,' I mean, 'not respond.' She tried to do the right thing" (interview, March 4, 2010). This lingering guilt seems to be an element of his feeling compelled to write, which is implied in his statement, "I knew instinctively that that was a bad thing [his actions at the end of

the relationship] and that I was right.  I needed to convince myself" (interview, April 28, 2010).  As Laub (cited in Anderson and MacCurdy, 2000) stated, too often writers feel compelled to write about certain issues. They need to examine their stories in order to understand why they survived or, at least, evolved in such a way from the events within the situation.

Francis' drive to explore his story is so fixated, in fact, that the topic leads him to ignore the instructions of the monster assignment and return to the topic of Selene, attaching a note, "I hope it's OK that I did this. I needed badly to work further on this piece, and I feel I made significant progress" (monster assignment, April 20, 2010).  The story, the situation, is weighing heavily on him after forty years, and now that he has opened the channel to those feelings and memories, he does not seem willing to step away from it, even if he is not sharing it with his writing group or the professor of the class—or even to some extent, himself.  To use a popular metaphor: once he opened the floodgates of memory, he cannot contain the waves of emotion and thought once more, until his entire reservoir of memory and feeling is depleted.  It takes him several drafts, several trials, before he can reach the crux of what in the story requires healing, namely his role in the breakup.

In his initial piece turned in for the synesthesia assignment, Francis had only written half the story, the section detailing the golden time when love was new and untouched.  However, when he revisits it, he adds to the narrative yet still does not tell the full story.  Instead of including the emotionally wrenching end, he chooses to focus on only the positive beginning of the romance, ending the writing on a romantic, almost

rhapsodic euphoria, "I had hit the jackpot.  My ship had come in.  My life had changed, for the richer, forever. And I wasn't about to miss a single thrill" (monster assignment, April 20, 2010).  While he seems to be fixated on this topic, he also appears to be resistant to uncover and explore the traumatic end, not unexpected since most people prefer to recall happy rather than negative events.

However, he eventually does address the traumatic ending of the relationship. Taking a grade of "incomplete" in the course, he also takes the summer off to sail on a lake near his home, to spend time with his wife, and to take a break from contemplating his writing topic and the stresses inherent in a doctoral program.  Ultimately, he does return to campus and to his topic, finishing the piece about his first love—entitled "How I Learned to Love my Wife"—in the fall.  In this final version, he has finally confronted the breakup, her indiscretion and his reaction to learning of it.  Additionally, he includes an element that he had only discussed in our conversations: how this failed relationship had prepared him for his beloved wife and their enduring marriage (interview, March 4, 2010).  Like in the previous incantation, he ends on a positive note, yet a more reflective, insightful one—less romantic and more realistic:

> To be sure, I still have pangs of regret that the lessons I learned as an adolescent came at such a high, human cost. But, boy did I learn!  And from where I stand today, it looks as though I learned at precisely the right pace….Thirty years into our life together my wife and I still have passion.  But we also have friendship, we have compassion, we have loyalty, we have generosity, we have honesty, we have frivolousness, we have humor, we have adventure, we have independence,

we have love.  Thirty years in, we share a relationship that smokes anything a

teenager could ever imagine.  If I could thank my cheerleader, I would. (portfolio,

August 23, 2010)

Not only does Francis go into further depth in examining the events and his feelings, but

the piece grows from a mere nine pages to twenty-two.  Within that breadth, he

includes a separate section detailing the breakup with Selene and his three

introductions to his future wife.  The heartbreak for that seventeen-year-old Francis is

still evident, but the contentment in his life now is equally apparent.  In our final

interview, this peace is still in place, "The real challenge of that second part was writing

how I felt at the moment of that fatal phone call [revealing her indiscretion].  But, forty

years later, I feel really glad what happened happened" (interview, September 1, 2010).

Obviously, this writing experience, if only started in class but completed for the most

part outside of the course, has resolved some issues for Francis.  Not only has he

experienced the catharsis of which Boal (1985) speaks, a purging of emotions that

clouded the mind and burdened the soul, but also he has uncovered new facets of the

situation, most notably that it resulted from his looming mid-life crisis and also his

residual guilt at having reacted poorly to her confession.  He has reframed the story and

understands anew the experience and his perception of that experience (Foehr, in

Anderson &MacCurdy, 2000).

        Unresolved trauma. However, not all traumas found such a satisfactory

completion through writing.  As mentioned earlier, Francis' son, Bret, had experienced a

childhood illness that nearly devastated Francis and his wife.  During that situation,

Francis had to make a decision on Bret's treatment that would have long-lasting,

somewhat negative effects.  Bret's condition, a congenitive condition that caused him to

have multiple bouts each year with pneumonia.  The treatment involved cutting through

his ribcage, which impacted the growth plate.  Thus, Bret's  ribcage stopped growing,

even as the rest of his body continued to mature.  This left his heart and other internal

organs unprotected.  His skeletal structure continued to develop into an adult-sized

body, but his ribcage remained that of a young boy.  This situation, especially Francis'

decision to allow the surgery, haunts Francis now twenty years later.  Francis chose this

topic for a series of inter-linking assignments that first asks the students to write in third

person an objective report (much like a newspaper account).  Then, students are asked

to amend that narrative, making it written in first person point of view and to change

the ending to a more positive slant.  Next, students research secondary information

from within their narratives and integrate this research into the text of their narratives.

This assignment is based on Foy's article "Burning Olivier," which may have influenced

Francis' topic selection, as Foy's article describes the death of his son and Foy's attempts

to create as appropriate a burial as possible as a last fatherly act toward his son.  In

Francis' version, the first draft is objective, ending with the situation unresolved:

> Francis and his wife gave the OK for a surgeon to cut their son's sternum free of
>
> his ribs, trim the excess cartilage, wire a broad, flat bar to the underside of his rib
>
> cage, reattach his sternum, and then wait 18 months for his body to heal itself,
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> at which time the bar would be removed (in an outpatient procedure) and, with
>
> any luck, the child and his parents would be rid of this propensity toward

pneumonia forever.  (objective mama assignment, March 2, 2010)

When asked why he left the piece uncertain of the surgery's outcome, Francis admits

that part of his decision is based in his disliking of the assignment, "The first one I just

didn't get that far... It's my fault—I thought it was a stupid assignment.  The college of

ed has spoiled me.  I've gotten comfortable writing in the first person all the time"

(interview, April 28, 2010).  However, emotional considerations also play into his

treatment of the situations and the assignment.

In the next draft, Francis adds more detail, but not necessarily the shift toward

positivity the assignment requested (as mentioned earlier, students had the option to

change the assignment guidelines to better meet their needs).  In this section, Francis

and Penelope watch their son be given a drink that will aid him in not recalling anything

associated with the surgery.  Unfortunately, the drink has a negative effect on the boy's

state of mind.  Francis ends the piece:

> Blessedly, the anesthetic did finally kick in and Bret grew drowsier by the
>
> moment.  I, on the other hand, was moments away from the most painful
>
> experience of my parenting life to date.  Having just seen my son far more
>
> agitated than I had ever seen him before, and having invited a surgeon to wield a
>
> power saw on my son's chest, a chest that, on that morning anyway, was
>
> perfectly healthy, and having decreed that my son should endure the long,
>
> grueling misery of healing and rehabilitation for a procedure that was not
>
> guaranteed to eliminate the problem for which my family and Penelope's family
>
> had assembled in Ithaca that day, watching the orderlies cart my boy through

those double doors and down that refrigerated corridor, knowing there was a

very real, if remote, possibility that I wouldn't get my Bret back, might have been

too much to bear. Except that I had no choice. (subjective mama assignment,

March 9, 2010)

Much like he did with the writings of his teenage romance, Francis approaches but stops

short of the real issue in the situation, in this case, the decision to cut Bret's chest open

and disconnect his sternum, which broke the growth plate and caused his ribs to not

fully develop as he matured.  Though Bret is fine now, an active and confident young

adult, Francis still feels remorseful, for Bret is limited—marginally—by what he can do.

For instance, he could not play football because his organs were not adequately

protected from the blocking football entails.  Francis' guilt at not waiting to see what

would happen as Bret grew, at taking the doctors'—experts in their field—advice on the

matter, has not yet been examined in writing.  In an interview months after the writing,

Francis admits that the situation was too much for him at that point.  Even in our

conversation, he could not hold back his emotion:

> Francis: I'm not trying to beat myself up.  Actually I do remember thinking about
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>> one way I could have ended it and it would have cleared up…The day he
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>> had been moved to a private room, the last time I had seen him, he'd
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>> been in the ICU. [chokes up]  He had seven tubes coming in and out of
>>
>> him.  I came in and he was drinking a chocolate shake.
>
> Rebecca:  The great panacea for all children.
>
> Francis: I…[chokes up again]

Rebecca: You're okay.

Francis:  I didn't know how to write that. (interview, April 28, 2010)

His last comment is interesting in that he has just told me the situation, yet doesn't feel

he can write it. Perhaps the writing to that point had helped him to verbalize it.  Still,

some issues or events are too tender, even after decades, for some individuals to

explore; like poking an open wound, they hurt, causing emotional or mental pain. But,

as mentioned earlier, initial unease or pain at examining these traumatic events is

"normal" when using writing to heal (Pennebaker, 1997 & 2007, DeSalvo, 1999).   While

all of life innately moves toward wholeness (Baer, Hoffman and Sheikh, in Sheikh, 2003),

people do use mental blocks as coping mechanisms.  While Baer, Hoffman, and Sheikh

(in Sheikh, 2003) consider images a way to get around such blockages, if individuals are

not ready to explore that wound, then forcing writing upon them may not help.

In the final assignment in that series, Francis again tacks on more to the end, a

summative explanation of his son's handling the condition as an adult and a description

of the full life Bret leads, even with a smaller ribcage and a noticeable dent in his chest.

When told that the surgery was done too early in Bret's life, Francis ends the piece with

the universal parent lament, "We thought we were doing the right thing" (research

added mama assignment, March 16, 2010). When asked why he stepped so tentatively

toward that final piece of the puzzle, he answers frankly, "That was something that I

battled to delve into frankly.  That's a place too painful to go, and I pulled back.  I can't

deal with it.  I can't tell you how bad I feel about that" (interview, April 28, 2010).

When pressed about what he held back, considering how objective the first piece is

written and how fully fleshed the final piece appears, he adds, "There's a lot more to say. I panic in the night. I wake up, feeling guilty about that. I realize every year since is an incredible gift…There's no bottom to this real love. [chokes up]" (interview, April 28, 2010). While writing can help individuals to understand and move beyond traumatic events, writers must first be willing to confront the situations. Some things, no matter the space that time creates, are still too close to examine—even when the person knows that writing can provide distance that enables healing and understanding. This may also be the case for Nisha, which will be discussed next.

Nisha's Story:  Retreating from Examination of Lingering Pain

A popular saying states that for every rule, an exception exists. Nisha's story illustrates the truth in this statement as she presents in this study as a "negative case" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As I stated in the Methodology chapter, Nisha is a full-time teacher in an urban school district over two hours away from the university campus. This was only her second course at the university, and she expressed a lack of confidence in her writing abilities—though she also expressed an initial enthusiasm for writing as healing (interview, February 26, 2010).

Witness versus actor. This enthusiasm seemed linked to her students as she spoke fervently about a particular student in her school whom she had seen use writing as a therapeutic aide. The girl, an émigré from Somalia, was feeling caught between her native culture and that of American society, wanting to please her family yet also wanting the same freedoms of her new American peers:

She's just writing with such emotion about her situation. It makes me want to

cry, but I cannot step in there.  I'm not the one.  Maybe I can talk to another

teacher or counselor to talk to her and encourage her, but from my experience I

know she doesn't...I don't think anything can be done.  It is what it is. (interview,

February 26, 2010)

Nisha has an obvious emotional reaction to the girl's conditions, yet at the same time

she feels disempowered: "I don't think anything can be done.  It is what it is."  Nisha

knows that the situation results directly from two cultures clashing:  the Somali family

planning out the young girl's future while the girl, who has assimilated more

mainstream American philosophies, wants to control her own life.  Additionally, a facet

of Nisha's character emerges, which may give clues to why she retreated from sharing

and fully engaging in writing to heal.  While she aches for this child, she also feels

powerless to change the girl's situation and steps back from the situation instead of

stepping forward in action.  She remains a witness instead of an actor in this story.

This dichotomy, of witness versus actor, emerges again toward the end of the

interview when she expresses wanting to be a support for her students in distress,

something altogether different from what she actually does with the student from

Somalia:

That's what I see for myself, that I can be an advocate or a place where they can

go outside of a private journal.  I'll encourage that too, but I can be someone

that if they want to tell their story, I can handle it.  Now maybe there's this

student that will drop something on me that's so agonizing, so disturbing, but so

far I'm getting a sense of how I need to respond to these students...I hope I can

do that. (interview, February 26, 2010)

Here, she wants to be an advocate, someone who takes action on behalf of a student. This falls in line with Warnock's (in Anderson and MacCurdy, 2000) view of writing as healing, as a stepping stone to action. Yet, in reality—at least with the girl from Somalia—Nisha has not taken that action.  On the other hand, the constant throughout the interview is that she is a listener for her students. And this role—as witness—is one she seems very comfortable in.

Throughout her only interview, Nisha asks me to stop recording while she talks about personal details—her marriage, for instance—or asks me about my life.  In my observation journal, I record that this "off record" instance felt like a "tit for tat session, as if she were giving away something and wanted me to give away something too" (observation journal, February 26, 2010).  In classes, both this course and her previous course at the university, she seldom speaks up or interjects comments to the entire group—except in one exchange, a disagreement of opinion with Francis (observation journal, March 23, 2010).  This reticence, the observer stance, seems inherent to Nisha's character.  In my observation journal, I record my impression that she was fighting her inner reserve, a lifetime of not "wallowing" but just going on (April 4, 2010).  And she implies it herself, "When I think about healing, I always looked outward from myself: therapy or something else, someone else had to be involved" (interview, February 26, 2010).  This friction between outward sources of therapy and inward founts of healing also creates another dichotomy, linked to that passive witness stance.  Nisha is inured to seeing healing as something that begins from outside a person, instituted in another

person, like a counselor.  But, writing as healing rests upon the inner resilience of an

individual, that person's ability to reflect and use perspective to understand and

reconcile thoughts, feelings, actions, and situations.  This course and its projects are

asking her to carry out actions, both concrete and abstract, that she does not usually

perform, actions she finds uncomfortable and shies from doing.

       Another factor in Nisha's reticence is perhaps her "differentness" from her peers

in the class.  Trying to protect Nisha's identity, I will use more general terms to describe

her.  On this Mid-Western campus that is still primarily populated by Caucasian,

Christian students and in a program filled with nearly equal numbers of international

students from mainly Asia and students from American Caucasian, Christian

backgrounds, Nisha is immediately discernible as none of these.  From the tone of her

skin to the manner in which she dresses, she is outwardly different from her peers in the

program and, for the most part, on campus.  While in the city, her status as a "minority"

may not be a conscious situation, I think it may have contributed to her unwillingness to

open to both me, a white, Anglo-Saxon; Dr. Fox, a white male; and to her classmates.

Being "other" can be uncomfortable at the best of times, but in an academic setting,

being "other" can also incur feelings of needing to explain or justify thoughts or feelings

that the majority population does not deem necessary to do for their culture.  Being

"other" in an academic setting, such as this graduate course, caries the tremendous

weight of responsibility; one is not only representing oneself but also the populace to

which one belongs.  As a "person of color" and of a "certain age," Nisha also may have

the added weight of history muting her.  In the area of the country where she grew up,

minorities were not as thoroughly discriminated against as they were in the Deep South,

but she still probably experienced times of prejudice and ill-treatment. To speak out in

those times was to invite rougher treatment, a lasting lesson.  Though she never

expressed such sentiments, I cannot discount her culture and her culture's history in my

approach to her data.

Resistance. Whereas Robin's resistance emanates from not acknowledging that

his "issues" are just as important and needing of examination as those who may have

more dramatic or traumatic experiences, Nisha starts the course with a clear idea of

what she wants to explore: her sister's death when she was a relatively young adult

(interview, February 26, 2010). However, this exploration never comes to fruition.  Early

in the semester she admits, "I keep stopping when I'm little, for some reason—well

before the sixth grade.  I haven't been able to jump forward, which I'd really like to do"

(interview, February 26, 2010).  Part of this may rest on her relationships with the rest

of her family.  She feels she is the mediator, a pivotal role within the family dynamic

(interview, February 26, 2010).  Fearful of disrupting the equilibrium within her family,

she may be consciously or unconsciously holding back, which links to Bracher's (1999)

ideas of why people do not disclose—a fear of censure from others, in Nisha's case,

more than likely, her family.  Even though students in the class agreed from the

beginning that what was discussed/written in class—of a personal nature—would not

be shared with others outside of class, Nisha still seems to have some inchoate fear that

her writing about it, letting it loose into the world on paper—even if never shared with

anyone—is to risk disrupting her family, upsetting the fragile equilibrium they have

established.

This resistance is also apparent when looking at her writing pieces.  Jumping from topic to topic, she never hits on the subject she expresses wanting to examine. Instead, she writes about trees, her best friend, her family as a whole, going to the dentist as a young child, Oprah Winfrey, and household clutter, in that order.  Looking at the entries, she increasingly distances herself from personal subjects, choosing instead to write about celebrities and abstracts, like her first piece about trees details her childhood fear of the plants, never confronting the source of that fear or making it more concrete in nature.  This distancing, especially by use of "high level abstractions," as was seen briefly with Robin, keeps her from processing, from healing.  If a person does not see the problem, then the problem is never dealt with (Fox, personal communication, April 23, 2011).  As Johnson (1946) stated, how we label a thing determines in large part how we react toward it.  By using such high level abstractions, such overly general labels, Nisha cannot confront her maladjustment because she cannot see the concrete thing but instead only the more nebulous abstraction.

About the same time she makes the turn from personal subjects to detached ones, she also explicitly states her desire to withdraw from exposing her emotions:

I have decided to change my collage project to something less personal.  I really don't feel comfortable talking about such an intimate topic. I kind of regret opening up the way I did. Instead, I will focus on the colorless memories of childhood.  These feelings could possibly stem from having to hide my feelings, thoughts, etc.  (personal email, April 20, 2010)

While she directly states the root of her issue, having to subjugate her thoughts and emotions, she still draws back.  Perhaps even expressing this statement, her feeling that she must hide her innermost feelings and beliefs and ideas, is a positive step toward healing.  Perhaps identifying her issue is the first salvo in a battle she will resume later.  However, this withdrawal, unfortunately, is not unexpected.  Earlier in the semester she had stated, "There's too much of me in the writing" (interview, February 26, 2010). For Nisha, examining herself, turning inward and making herself vulnerable is new.  She states, "In the past, I have not taken the time to look and see myself or examine my feelings.  I'm still struggling with that" (interview, February 26, 2010).  And, while she may want to understand her emotions concerning her sister's death or the very reasons why she is so resistant (hiding her feelings and thoughts), this may not be the venue she would feel comfortable doing so or she may not yet be at a place of comfort to closely scrutinize this painful event.  As discussed in the literature review, trust is a major component in the writer toward her audience for writing to heal to work effectively (Pennebaker, 1997; Payne, in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000).  Since Nisha defers from continuing in the study, I am unable to ascertain whether a particular audience, such as did I do something or Dr. Fox or someone else in the course to turn her away from being more reflective, or are all her audiences seen as censorious or untrustworthy.  However, if she sees all her audiences as judgmental or intolerant, then she is over-generalizing, a semantic quandary.  As stated previously, over-generalizing is akin to thinking in the abstract instead of concrete:  it may create a mental map that doesn't fit the territory (which will cause trauma when the Nisha eventually begins to see that not all audiences

are harsh) and it keeps the issue, the audience, at a distance, not confronted and

therefore not dealt with (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1991). By grouping audiences

together into one generalized mass, by keeping her audience at a distance, she

surrounds herself in a barrier, like Johnson's (1946) analogy of quandaries being verbal

cocoons from which people find it difficult to hatch.  Nisha's barrier here protects her

from potential future hurt from audiences but it also keeps her mired in her issue,

constantly immersed in her cocoon.

However, the idea that she will turn her gaze to the colorless—less threatening,

perhaps—memories of childhood could be in itself a place to start.  Nisha here may

need to build toward those other, more troubling topics.  If starting with colorless

events, presumably events that hold less dynamism in her past is a way to enter the

pool of writing as healing, it is at least a starting point.  To expand the metaphor, if

Nisha needs to step gradually into the wave-pool of writing to heal, of confronting

emotion-laden memories and exploring them with pen and paper, then that is her best

route.  Not everyone has the personality or emotional resources and supports to dive

daringly into the deep end and explore the depths of experience.  Some may need a

more gradual entry.  Nisha appears to be such an individual.

Gradual withdrawal of self. Within the documents, Nisha consistently grows

more distant.  For example, in a formal piece near the beginning of the semester, she is

detailed and personal, conveying feeling and exposing some vulnerability:

I remember running through leaves, the smell of autumn, and sweaters.  These

were the times that I felt a part of a whole.  Everyone would rush home to the

smells and sounds of a big family preparing the evening meal. Cold nights,

flannel pajamas, reading, and the happiness that comes from being a part of

something that completes you are good memories. That was then. (Fixing the

Photo essay, February 23, 2010)

The writing is rich with specifics, alive with movement, and imbued with the emotions of

the young girl.

Likewise, a later piece is filled with implied emotion. Influenced by the class's

reading of Maya Angelou's (2009) visit to a dentist, Nisha recounts one of her own

childhood dentist visits when the doctor did nothing to deaden the pain she and her

siblings felt as he drilled into their teeth to fill cavities. She ends the piece with

questions: "Was this just a protocol that he followed for younger patients? Did race

play a part in his decision not to deaden the excruciating pain?" (Objective Mama

assignment, March 2, 2010). The hurt is almost vicariously felt in the reader in these

final statements. This assignment in particular is interesting because it asks the

students to take an objective stance, writing in third person. However, in the next

version of this assignment, students are asked to add subjectivity to the assignment

when they amend it. Dr Fox suggests changing from third to first person, including more

emotion, and altering the ending. Nisha only modifies the ending, eliminating the

references to the dentist not using painkillers and the emotion-laden questions of why

he did so. While she does even further emulate Angelou's piece by tacking on to the

end a description of what her mother could have done and did not—confronting the

dentist—Nisha's piece is effectively wiped of feelings.

Finally, by the end of the semester, Nisha is no longer even hinting at emotions in her pieces. In the Monster assignment, described earlier in Robin's section, she chooses an abstract concept that holds no emotional hold whatsoever: clutter. The language is factual, less descriptive and certainly not holding the figurative language of earlier pieces:

> Then one day [a co-worker] told me that she felt that my cluttered desk represented my mental state of mind. At first I was hurt. How dare she say something like that? After thinking about her words for a few weeks, I began to give her credit for her observation. I now know those areas that represent the clutter in my personal life and have taken time to analyze them. It is a slow process to actually begin to deal with those areas that could possibly be responsible for the clutter in my life that manifests itself in an untidy desk.
>
> (Monster assignment, April 20, 2010)

Others in the course seize this assignment to address their topic head-on, penning letters to a personified version of their topic, but Nisha does not, adopting a more objective stance, writing the less personal genre of the essay. It is almost as if she is acquiescing to completing the course but has withdrawn from the more personal healing element of the course subject. She will do the academic work, which, of course, involves some level of personal writing, but she will not attempt the more personally intimate mental and emotional tasks.

*Tentative steps toward confronting issue.* However, looking back at the topics she examined in her writings, minute links to her sister, her professed topic, are present.

Since the data I collected from her is incomplete, due to her desire to quit participating in the study, I can only fragilely connect these elements, but I believe they are significant enough to be presented here, in hopes of creating a more well-rounded representation of Nisha.  Her mirror piece details Nisha's lineage, from which parent did she gain certain physical attributes (mirror assignment, February 2, 2010).  So, she's already thinking about her family and her place within that family.  In her next formal piece, an essay composed from brainstorms while listening to two classical music compositions, she relates herself to the sister that she intends to make her focus for the class.  These two girls shared a room and in the process shared their imaginations, creating elaborate stories to entertain themselves, but they grew apart.  Her sister became shier and more irritated with how Nisha cleaned their room (Butcher paper assignment, February 16, 2010).

In a later assignment, which asked students to research three secondary topics from within one piece of writing, Nisha chooses to explore cleanliness, Body Dismorphic Disorder (BDD), and sibling birth order.  Researching cleanliness and BDD relates directly back to her sister, who Nisha has previously stated wanted a much more clean space than Nisha did and to her sister's taking of the drug Phen-fen, a weight-loss drug which may have contributed to the aneurysm that eventually killed her sister.  Additionally, by examining birth order's effect on children, Nisha reveals why she and her sister, who was several years older, diverged in personality, as middle children tend to oppose their older siblings, trying to set themselves apart from the older brothers and sisters.  This research also uncovers explanation for Nisha's innate reticence:  "Because the middle

child feels that the world pays him less attention, he tends to be secretive; he does not

openly share his thoughts or feelings" (research added mama assignment, March 9,

2010). However, within her reflection on that assignment, she seems to disagree to

some extent, finding that middle children are more out-going than the research

indicated: "I tend to think that middle children make friends more easily and are

generally happier people" (research added mama assignment reflection, March 9,

2010).

Nisha's last two assignments allude to her sister if only in Nisha's selection of

topics.  For the Monster assignment, wherein students were supposed to create an

image of their monster and then recompose that image into a more positive one, she

chose clutter, perhaps a direct reference back to her sister's tendency to disparage

Nisha's less tidy habits.  In that piece she states that a friend told her Nisha's cluttered

desk at school was an indication of her mental state (Monster assignment, April 20,

2010).  Since Nisha did not want to participate further in the study, I could not ask her if

that "cluttered mental state" reflected back on her thoughts concerning her sister, but I

believe the indication is clear:  she wanted to examine the relationship with her sister

and her own feelings about that sister's death because those thoughts and feelings are

so disordered, keeping her in a quandary. And, concerning that death, she definitely is

muddled.  The Entrance into another world assignment asked students to figuratively

step into another world, related to their topic, and see what this new, potentially

exaggerated or satiric version, would reflect on their topic.  Nisha chose to step onto the

stage of the Oprah Winfrey Show amidst all her panels of "experts," who in Nisha's

retelling divulge just how unskilled and uninformed they really are (Entrance into another world assignment, March 23, 2010).  In a freewrite about that assignment, Nisha relates this piece back to her sister's death:  "The autopsy said she died of aneurysm due to the prescription drug Phen-fen.  However, since she suffered from migraines for most of her adult life, we cannot really be sure that the 'experts' were correct in their findings" (Freewrite, April 13, 2010).  So, while not directly confronting her sister's death, she is still picking it apart from the fringes, slowly unraveling the tapestry of what happened and how she feels about it.

Issue within an issue. However, her sister's death may not be the true issue at hand but rather only one element of a larger issue.  At several points in Nisha's writing and in her interview, she alludes to a fracturing of her once close family.  In one piece she talks about her eagerness to return home from school each day, racing her brothers and sisters to get there first.  She also recalls getting ready with her siblings, playing sports with them, and the family meals:  "Those days will always be remembered as the best times for me" (Butcher paper assignment, February 16, 2010). In another paper she again eulogizes her childhood:

> These were the times that I felt a part of a whole.  Everyone would rush home to the smells and sounds of a big family preparing the evening meal.  Cold nights, flannel pajamas, reading, and the happiness that comes from being a part of something that completes you are good memories. (Photo fix assignment, February 23, 2010)

Obviously, she feels her sister's death keenly, but these hints of fracturing within the

family are also present and may be the greater issue in her life. From the early death of her father, leaving the mostly school-age children fatherless (Mirror assignment, February 2, 2010), to the death of her sister in adulthood, Nisha has seen her family lose members and change irrevocably because of it. While this situation is not unique to Nisha's family, the fact remains that it may still be a series of traumas that Nisha, with her more reticent-to-share personality, still has not dealt with emotionally or mentally.

While Nisha may not have taken advantage of this opportunity to fully delve into a personal topic, that of her sister's untimely death or her family's fracturing, she may at some point in the future return to writing to more completely understand her issue and herself. She states, "This is the first time in my life that I've really been able to look at myself closely. I think that regardless of how the class turns out, I have really accomplished something" (interview, February 26, 2010). Additionally, she has the model of a friend who underwent counseling and within that therapy used journaling to help disseminate her emotions (interview, February 26, 2010). So, she has several examples, not only from the university course but from her professional life at her high school and within her personal friendships. Now that she has seen others use writing to heal and now that the gates have bowed under the force but not opened, perhaps she will return to writing to explore her feelings about her sister's death. Perhaps.

Kent's Story: Resolving Role in Brother's Situation

Kent, the youngest of the six individual cases, is also the only non-doctoral student, working instead on his master's degree and teaching licensure. Much like Robin, Kent struck on his topic, family, relatively early in the semester, hitting upon it,

inadvertently, during the mirror assignment the second session of the course.  One of

four sons, Kent was the third born of the four (Zeke, Finn, Kent, and Lee).  The eldest, an

academically successful student and socially respected young adult in the community,

had left their town of less than 2,000 and gone to law school, moving to the East Coast

to become a well-paid and respected lawyer. The family's rural community held the first

born as a "hometown boy done good," someone kids still in school should emulate.

Finn, the second oldest and the subject of Kent's writings, lived in the oldest son's

shadow and, after a time, took the opposite route, a life that included illegal drug usage.

The fourth son, Lee, is seldom mentioned in Kent's writings, as if he lives a world apart,

which may be logical as the baby of the family and several years younger than Kent, his

nearest in age sibling.

Many of Kent's writings center, for the most part, on the night Finn was arrested

with several of his friends at a drug-bust in their small, isolated town.  Kent's

examination of the incident and other writings not necessarily dealing directly with the

drug-bust, concentrate on Finn's drug usage, how the events influenced Finn's life, and

how the events influenced Kent's life and sense of self.  Several themes run through

Kent's writing.  First, in relation to himself and his brother, he often portrays an outsider

isolated from a set of insiders.  Second, as is found in many of the other student writing

topics in this class, he explores his own sense of guilt in relation to his brother's drug use

and what it did to the family.  A third theme relates closely to the second, the idea of

secret-keeping.  Kent helped Finn hold the drug abuse secret from their parents, making

the bust and their parents' reaction that much more damaging to Kent.  His seeming

duplicity throws him into internal conflict.

Insider versus outsider role. Kent's near constant struggle between insider and outsider begins innocuously enough in the very first formal assignment, the mirror activity. Students are asked to spend a significant amount of time looking at their own reflections in mirrors and recording what they saw. Kent, looking into his own hand-mirror, records the standard parts of the whole: dark thick hair, dark eyes with long eyelashes, a shark-fin-like nose, etc. However, in short order he begins to look beyond himself, literally, in the mirror's reflection. On the wall behind him are poster boards depicting images of family (see an example in Figure 9); the posters were made by other classes at the university and left in the room as display art, becoming a source of inspiration for Kent as he examines himself and his role within his family. These images make him consider his looks within the context of family, the true insider role, yet he is still set somewhat apart. For instance, he writes, "I need a haircut, but at least my hair is think [sic] and full, unlike my



Figure 9. An example poster board displaying familial images on the wall behind Kent the second night of the course.

brother, uncle, and grandfather whose balding heads are the sources of much friendly family chiding.  My face is familiar.  I like it because it reminds me of the people who mean so much to me" (mirror assignment, February 2, 2010).   In three sentences—and in the rest of the document—he explores what physically denotes him as a member of the family and yet what sets him apart from some of his kin.

In the next formal writing assignment, the synesthesia activity, he takes one step further, examining how he is still connected to his hometown, Oxford, and yet an outsider, having left for college several years ago and continuing to live approximately an hour away.  In this piece, Kent examines the path he chose to take, versus the path his childhood friends took, much like Frost's "two roads diverged in a yellow wood":

On the drive home, I think about how I have outgrown the town.  How I have outgrown my old friends.  We live in different worlds now.  We think different thoughts.  I love my roots. I love my hometown.  I learned a great deal there, and I hold the people there in the highest regards.  But life there is too simple, too settled down for me anymore.  I am an outsider because I want something more. (synesthesia assignment, February 16, 2010)

In the piece Kent has returned to Oxford for the funeral of a classmate's father only to find that the man is not the only death being lamented.  Kent himself has lost that intimate friendship with his childhood classmates; now he feels himself relegated to "acquaintance," another form of outsider.  In writing this piece, he reveals in an interview that he deliberately chose the funeral as a setting because it is one situation where everyone is ill at ease: "The funeral was the thing that put me out of my element,

as funerals do.  Everyone's a little off.
You feel out of place....The funeral was
the part of that trip that was out of the
norm for me" (interview, March 10,
2010).  In deliberately choosing this
setting, he shows that in a situation
where everyone is feeling a bit out of
place, Kent realized he is even further
removed from their intimate circle.  But
Kent is not the only outsider he explores.



Figure 10.  The photo Kent used to manipulate to show his situation.  [I have obscured their faces to retain anonymity.]

In his next assignment, he returns to the topic of family and investigates his brothers.  In an assignment that asks students to take a photo and manipulate it to show a truth

about the contents, Kent takes a photo of
the four brothers standing side-by-side (see
Figure 10) and amends it so that Finn is just
a shadow next to the others, especially the
oldest who has been given a halo and wings,
befitting his angelic status in their
hometown (see Figure 11). In the
accompanying explanation, Kent says of
Finn, "He is the odd man out.  And despite
the fact that he and I are very close (we live



Figure 11.  Kent's altered photo revealing the oldest brother's exalted status by townspeople and that the next oldest feels in his shadow. [Again, I have obscured faces to retain anonymity.]

together) and despite the fact that Lee (far left) and him share the same office at work, in our family, Finn is the odd man out" (photo fix assignment, February 23, 2010). Thus, while Kent himself feels an outsider in the community, Finn's situation is one step further out, an outsider even within his own family.

This theme of the outsider is not a new one.  Kent confesses that it is an ongoing theme in much of his writing, especially his fiction writing.  In answer to a question about the outsider motif, Kent discusses how this motif arises in his pieces:

Yeah, there's somebody who feels like he's on the outside.  Which is weird because I go through my normal life, I don't think about it at all.  But then certain things will happen, like if it's from an earlier piece where I went back to attend a funeral and I hadn't been back for a while.  It's like I am an outsider.  I talked to more and more people through this whole situation and see that I have a disconnect and he has a disconnect.  That part just kind of happened while I was writing.  But in my fiction there's usually a character who is dealing with that in some way.  I wonder what that says about my character. (interview, May 5, 2010)

This use of the outsider in fiction writing also appears in Kent's course assignments.  He uses the suggested satirical assignment, where students are asked to take one element of their subject and show a satirical point of view, to look at another form of outsider in his hometown community: the older farmer.  Kent's freewrite composed the night the assignment is due gives his explanation of the piece:

The character I become in it is an outsider in a way.  He is a farmer who used to

be a perfect fit for my town, but he has aged.  He lives outside of town, he is

older than those he does business with, he is stuck in the past, and he is out of

touch with the changes going on in the world around him.  He is in many ways an

outsider.  But he is different because he is an outsider because he feels he is

superior to others.  He has been there, done that, knows all there is to know.

My brother, though, I don't believe felt superior...but instead he felt inferior to

my oldest brother.  The Ivy League grad was too much for him. (Entrance into

another world assignment, March 23, 2010)

While Kent uses this assignment to gain another perspective on his brother's drug

arrest, which will be discussed later, he maintains the stance of outsider, illustrating that

he does not need to move from Oxford to be considered outside the norm, outside the

accepted.  This image of outsider may pose part of what Kent feels he needs healing

from.  As Anderson and MacCurdy (2000) posit, sharing writing helps people know they

are not alone in their situations, a condition Kent seems to be experiencing on many

levels.

In the collage project from the portfolio, the recurring motif of outsider is seen

not only in the topics discussed and the verbal images created but also in the word

choices used.  Words and phrases such as "separate," "odd man," "alone," "disconnect,"

"no longer part," "divide," "chasm," and "severed" show implicitly the feelings of

isolation and being set apart from others (collage paper, May 11, 2010).  In addition to

outright usage of the word "outsider," Kent also more subtly implies being cut off from

others with verbally painted images:  a windowless room or a couple so in sync that

everyone else is an outsider to their perfect harmony. In this collage, Kent has taken

only sections of various writings, parts of the different assignments, from the course to

make a new piece with new understandings, all actions which were part of the

assignment instructions.  Choosing specifically those sections, either consciously or

unconsciously, that contain pointed references to outsider status emphasizes that,

despite the recurring motif of "But it can't all be negative.  Nothing ever is" (collage,

May 11, 2010), he and perhaps his brother still feel outcasts from Oxford, at the least.

However, by fall, Kent's further reflection has altered his perspective somewhat,

"Thinking back more about that, that's probably not as far outside as I think I am,

though I still think that and it's tough to change my mind completely" (interview,

September 28, 2010).  He honestly believes he will continue to feel somewhat outside

his hometown community, but he implies that the feeling is not near the negative it was

before the series of writings.  However, like DeSalvo (1999) and Murray (2007) found,

through writing, Kent has found a new perspective on his situation, that he and his

brother are not so far outsiders as he originally thought.  Perhaps with further writing,

Kent's perspective would shift even more widely.

Secret keeping and guilt. Kent's second and third themes are intertwined.

Without the drug abuse, there would be no need to keep secrets, to be silent. Without

the drug abuse and arrest, Kent would have no reason to feel guilty.  Without the drugs

and arrest, Kent would have much less to address in writing and perhaps no need for

writing to heal.  This moment that made an indelible imprint not only on Kent but also

his family is a characteristic Kent acknowledges, "That's been the event.  Finn and some

of his issues...define our family" (interview, March 10, 2010). Though Finn's drug arrest

links to nearly every piece of writing Kent completed in the course, he only directly

addresses it in three interlinking assignments: write the narrative objectively in third

person, amend the narrative so it is in first person and has a positive ending, and finally,

add in research connected to the topic or some element of the narrative. Kent's first

draft, the objective narrative in third person, details explicitly the events at the family

home the night of the drug bust—from Kent's being awoken in the middle of the night

as his parents leave to pick up Finn, to his mother's questioning Kent upon their return,

"Did you know?" to which Kent lied, "No" (objective mama assignment, March 2, 2010).

Barely two pages in length, the piece is imbued with Kent's remorse:

> The boy raised into a sitting position and asked where they were going. At
>
> hearing his voice, his mother jumped slightly, and turned to him. Even in the
>
> darkness, the boy could see tears in her eyes. She said nothing, but turned and
>
> walked into the garage, opened the passenger side door of the green mini-van,
>
> and climbed inside...Then there was silence. The boy [Kent] was wide awake
>
> now. He did not turn on any lights. And though he picked up the remote control
>
> to his television, he did not hit any buttons. He was there. Alone. In the dark. In
>
> silence. (objective mama assignment, March 2, 2010)

Looking at this selection—and knowing that upon her return from the police station,

Kent will lie to his mother about knowing of Finn's exploits—the guilt is heavily implied.

Obviously, the sense of isolation is profoundly present—sitting alone in the dark—but

the sense of being buried in grief, in guilt—a basement bedroom, darkness, silence—is

emotive here.  Here again, the outsider motif arises; Kent feels utterly alone because of the secret he must keep.  The threat of censure from others (Foehr, in Anderson &MacCurdy, 2000), probably his parents, as well as the desire to protect, are working to keep Kent ill-at-ease.

In his next draft where he is asked to make the piece more subjective and to alter the ending, making it more positive in tone, Kent keeps the third person narrative, adding small details throughout the piece, but he fictionalizes the ending to a point where, when asked if he had known about Finn's drug usage, he tells the truth:

> "Tell me everything," she said.  And he did.  From the beginning. The words flowing freely out of him from some deep, dark place where they had been secretly stashed away for years.  Together, the two of them, mother and child, carefully examined all of his brother's demons by the light of an ever-growing dawn, and discussed plans of how to exorcize them…And in the county jail, twenty minutes away, his brother awoke to the darkness of a windowless holding cell.  Feeling hopeless. Feeling powerless. Unaware of the bright radiant day that was forming outside those walls. (subjective mama assignment, March 9, 2010)

In moving from objectivity to subjectivity, Kent also moves from a totally self-focused narrative to one that turns its gaze to his brother.  His perspective is shifting to one larger than himself, more encompassing, a key ingredient to healing according to DeSalvo (1999).

In an interview conducted the day after his submitting the second draft, Kent

explains his purpose for these writings: "It's going to center around my brother Finn and I think Zeke will be brought into it and I obviously put myself in there and examine the effects. I think that's the real reason for doing this, what effect it has had on me as an individual. I think that's the route" (interview, March 10, 2010). However, nearly two months later his focus has changed somewhat to one that involves multiple perspectives:

> I know there's some specific aspects I'd like to look at. My parents being a major
> part of it because I've looked at the influence of the culture that we grew up in
> and the pressure that my brother was under because of our oldest, all the
> accomplishment. I've looked at those factors and also how those have affected
> me. My parents are right there on the outside I haven't delved into yet. I think
> that's something I'd like to see, how they felt about it. I've gotten other
> perspective but I don't' have theirs yet. I think that's important. (interview, May
> 5, 2010)

This progression follows DeSalvo's(1999) theories on writing as healing involving multiple perspectives. Not only does it slow down the writer's thought processes about the event (Pennebaker, 1997), but it also provides distance between the author and the subject, allowing additional perspectives to enter (DeSalvo, 1999).

However, part of Kent's guilt is because of his awareness throughout of Finn's drug use of those multiple perspectives. His silence is bought as a way to spare their parents the anger, disappointment, and despair of knowing their son was doing something illegal and perhaps jeopardizing his health. Once the drug use is exposed,

Kent's guilt transforms; he feels by hiding Finn's actions, Kent has failed his parents as a guardian to his brother:

> I kind of felt that fear of failure, of not speaking out before, so the guilt came along. I felt maybe I failed my brother, maybe I failed my family because I tried not to get him in trouble and it could have led to much worse things....It was the fear of failure, not speaking out, made me feel guilty about not doing it, maybe I failed in helping along his recovery. (interview, September 28, 2010)

While Kent has not taken on his brother's guilt—a version of "he's not heavy, he's my brother"—he does accept much of the other guilt being distributed. This confirms Foehr's (in Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000) idea that fear of censure from others often is at the heart of trauma and the resistance to disclosing it either in talk or in writing.

A deeper understanding. It is through writing about the situation, reflecting upon it, talking about it in writing groups, and other activities of the class that Kent reaches a deeper understanding not only of the situation but also his role in it. His collage uses a refrain that morphs as his thinking evolves. It begins, "It can't all be negative. Nothing ever is," which is repeated several times (collage, May 11, 2010). Shortly before the end—between his inclusion of the two end variations of the narrative discussed earlier, specifically after the positive (fictional) ending and before the realistic end—the refrain mutates, "But it can't all be positive. Nothing ever is. And so this is how the story really goes" (collage, May 11, 2010). While he wishes the situation had been different, he understands it cannot be changed. Those multiple perspectives (an objective observer, a loyal yet conflicted brother, a farmer removed somewhat from the

situation, a third person objective look at families of drug addicts) have coalesced into a wholeness of thought, what Benson (cited in Baer, Hoffman, and Sheikh, in Sheikh, 2003) calls "remembered wellness."

Kent goes even one step further. Not only is he more accepting of events and his role in them, he has uncovered elements of his own character that contributed to his feeling culpable in the situation:

> I find it easier to put more blame on myself than on others. I find it obvious that Finn definitely had a lot of blame and I'm sure my parents took a lot of blame on their shoulders and his friends did as well…Yeah. I'm usually harder on myself in most instances because I feel like I could have done more and it makes me think I'm more self-important than I am that I could have effected more change. (interview, September 28, 2010)

Later in the interview, he repeats this affirmation, "I'm harder on myself on the issue…It's coming to the realization that I shouldn't be as critical of those things as I've been" (interview, September 28, 2010). This writing process has led him to the understanding of his own thinking, his taking on of responsibility where it is not entirely warranted, as well. As he states in interviews, "That's really the conclusion I've come to throughout all of these pieces. It's such an obvious one. It makes sense, but it took me having to look back at papers to realize" (interview, May 5, 2010). The writing and reflecting back on the writing has enabled him to clarify his thinking and reach a new understanding.

Naoto's Story:  Alleviating Pain of Friend's Death

Like Mei-Zhen, Naoto is an English Language Learner, having traveled from Asia to study for his doctorate at the university.  Shortly before the beginning of the semester, he had learned that a very dear friend from his undergraduate schooling had been diagnosed with an aggressive and usually fatal form of cancer.  While Naoto suggested various alternative treatments when the traditional therapies failed, the family ignored that advice, perhaps out of a disbelief in these unconventional remedies or out of a lack of finances to pay for such care.  Naoto's sense of powerlessness in addition to his being so far geographically from his friend contributed to his grief.

Delayed addressing topic. Naoto did not start off writing about Hiroshi, his friend with cancer, choosing instead a variety of topics.  Early on I wondered if this was a form of resistance, writing in my journal, "Naoto, I think, has the idea but can't settle on one topic—could be a form of resistance" (journal, April 4, 2010).  Of course, exploring a variety of topics does not necessitate resistance.  For example, as an English Language Learner, Naoto may have been experiencing language or cultural issues that prevented him from fully embracing the practice—a situation he alludes to in all our interviews, his appreciation for "corrective" comments on his papers in this class and others.

However, before that month waned, I saw a definite change in Naoto's demeanor toward writing as healing. Specifically, he became much more open when speaking about his feelings.  I observed, "Naoto is surprisingly candid about his feelings—maybe my own preconceptions set me up to expect differently" (journal, April 23, 2010).  Whether it was an increased feeling of trust and comfort in sharing himself

or that his friend's deteriorating condition forced him beyond the potential

personal/cultural barriers, Naoto opened up not only to me but to the entire class.

Naoto typically did not show emotions, imparting a much more placid façade.  But, in

one instance, the mask slipped a bit.  While presenting in his writing group his narrative

and a Power Point, his emotions overcame him as he read, catching in his throat and

making his reading halting (video, March 2, 2010).  Letting his emotions surface in even

that small amount seemed a sign of trust that the group, a microcosm of the class,

would not hold his feelings against him and that he knew he would find support from

others in the course.

Trust. As Pennebaker (1997, 2007), DeSalvo (1999), and Payne (in Anderson &

MacCurdy, 2000) state, trust is a major component in any writing to heal that is shared.

This status is just as true for Naoto, and probably all students in the course.  In our first

interview, Naoto poses in two separate places that trust is a major factor in this type of

writing.  First he says, "If we find somebody who is trusted and we got a personal

problem, chances are we can communicate with that person and we can share

information, not necessarily to get the feedback or response, but it could be an

emotional outlet" (interview, March 5, 2010).   Later in the same interview, he states:

> I think writing has power, but as DeSalvo said, writing could only show that
>
> potential power once it is conducted in a safe, trusted, sharing, caring
>
> environment.  Somebody would not share their writing who are not let [sic] their
>
> ideas down on paper if they think their ideas will not be valued or be criticized.
>
> (interview, March 5, 2010)

So, by his opening up and sharing not only in writing but in his presentation, he reveals the solid level of trust he felt with his classmates and the instructor, who that night is wandering from group to group. Naoto is speaking freely without any sign of resistance. His level of trust with me and the rest of the class are seemingly validated, making him comfortable sharing emotions and thoughts.

Stages of Grief. Unfortunately, midway through Naoto's writing about his friend's condition, he received word that Hiroshi had died. While Naoto's demeanor both in class and outside of school remained rather stoic, his writing denoted that he was working through the grieving process, as defined by Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2005). Mainly, Naoto's work illustrated his progression through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).To start, Naoto rarely called Hiroshi by name, using instead "my friend" or some other epithet. When asked about this, he admitted the use of epithet was a coping device, "I don't want to use his private name most of the time because I don't want my mind to think of his situation. So, it's just 'my friend'…I don't want to directly call out his name" (interview, September 6, 2010).

Additionally, Naoto showed denial in his inability to stay on topic, wandering from topic to topic in his writing; he did not want to think about his friend's dying, so he avoided it and wrote on abstract and inconsequential topics. This process relates back to Johnson's (1946) theories on people being maladjusted, looping their speaking and thought in huge circles without direction or focus. They obfuscate and avoid troublesome topics, evade confronting the cause of their maladjustment, by using

abstractions or talking in circles. For instance, in Naoto's first formal writing he spent

one paragraph discussing how actors sublimate their feelings to portray a character

(perhaps a cloaked reference to his own sublimation of feelings) and in the next

paragraph discussed how eyes capture images and how detectives of the future might

be able to use a dead person's eyes to catch his or her killer, as the eye may "record"

the image of the murderer in those milliseconds before death.  In his next formal

writing, he again wandered, mainly talking about an email he had received that included

a parable of not wasting a moment, about not saving for someday but enjoying today.

Toward the end of that piece, he finally hit on his true topic, the one that he would

explore more fully throughout most of the semester, tacked on in almost after-thought

fashion:

> 'Can anybody find the stopping point for your drawing?' Rebecca subtly
>
> requested.
>
> I can't.  I have an unfinished project with my students [back home in Asia]. We
>
> planned to equip our classroom with a small, interactive library in which my kids
>
> could read books, hear their favorite songs, surf net, watch movies and favorite
>
> program; a library where their imagination and innovative ideas could be
>
> unleashed and be appreciated.  And I have had virtually no time to visit my close
>
> friend who is now fighting with death. [He describes the situation].  I want to do
>
> something special for my Mom and Dad this Lunar New Year's Festival, and I
>
> want to see my sweetheart this Valentine's. (synesthesia, February 15, 2010,
>
> italics in original)

His freewrite the next week about his process within the synesthesia activity and in composing the written assignment shows distraction, moving away from subjects: "I searched my mind for ideas to draw, how to connect the ideas together and how to use colors to paint them....When I got stuck, couldn't find what my mind ment [sic] to tell, my ears could let the music in; but this stopped immediately when I found the detail I wanted" (freewrite, February 23, 2010).  Even though Naoto has hit upon his subject, he still spends one more assignment (fixing the photo, February 23, 2010) addressing other topics before focusing exclusively on Hiroshi's illness.

However, he reveals in our interview that the email that spurred his thoughts in that synesthesia assignment is from the very same friend who is dying (March 5, 2010).  So, while not talking directly about the illness and the eventual loss of his friend, his thoughts still return to that person, like a sore that will not heal.  He states, "It's an emotional push, that something's already been planted in your mind.  But it just stayed there.  You've got something to pull it out...That kind of push is really important" (interview, March 5, 2010).  The "push" he refers to is the email, but I wonder if the very fact of the assignments, the notes Dr Fox, Leah (the other student-researcher), and I wrote on his assignments aren't also subconsciously part of that "push." For instance, on the synesthesia assignment, I wrote, "Perhaps this friendship is something you'd like to explore in writing.  You are very young to have a friend contract such a deadly disease.  This situation must be difficult for you—especially being so far away" (February 20, 2010).  While Naoto may certainly have been often thinking about his friend, such comments from not only the instructor but also by those in his writing group for the

course, as well as by others in his daily living could potentially have spurred him to write about Hiroshi. And, of course, there is that internal drive, that inner need to heal.  As Benson (cited in Bear, Hoffmann, & Sheikh, in Sheikh, 2003) states, all of nature drives toward wholeness, toward being one.  Certainly other researchers in this field have recorded students and others using seeming spontaneous uses of writing in their classrooms and elsewhere (Anderson &MacCurdy, 2000; DeSalvo, 1999; Murray, 2004; Nugent, 1994; Wooldridge, 2007).

Denial may have had a strong grip on Naoto initially, but he also exhibits anger, as well as the other stages of grief, during the semester.  In the second version of what I am calling the Mama assignments, where the writer is supposed to amend an objective narrative to make it subjective and to create a more positive ending, in that ending, Naoto implies anger toward Hiroshi's family for not embracing a more holistic, non-traditional treatment for his friend's illness in a conversation between Naoto and the man's father:

"The physician promises the treatment is free," he explained.

"But it might be too late now. My son's too weak to endure any new round of x-ray. Let it be natural.  We can't stand seeing him struggling with post-X-ray therapy anguish," said the father.

"I believe it's not gonna be X-ray.  Something new, something effective.  We can't let him go while we're just sitting here doing nothing. Again, we should be more optimistic, shouldn't we?" he insisted. (mama subjective assignment, March 9, 2010, italics in original)

While obvious pain, almost begging, is displayed, the anger is still for the most part suppressed, but it is there. Naoto admits as much in an interview a few weeks later: "I blamed the parents. Moving on to the second piece [the subjective version of the narrative] which follows the first [objective] one, I think I kind of moving [sic] more toward the other end, still blaming, but it's not whole lot of blaming there" (interview, April 23, 2010). However, several assignments later, after Hiroshi has died from cancer, Naoto's anger has surged to the forefront and taken a different object to focus on.

The monster assignment asks students to write either a poem or a letter to their monster and then to find an image of that monster. Placing the monster image in a PowerPoint, students are asked to take the image apart before re-shaping it into a depiction of their angel, a creature that is "far more benign" than the original monster (syllabus assignments, January 15, 2010). Naoto chooses cancer as his monster, personifying it in a letter, addressing it head-on. He uses pithy epithets to show his rage, calling it a "criminal," a "killer," an "unwanted stranger," and an "unwelcome guest" (monster assignment, April 20, 2010). His final lines embolden the reader's sense of her anger, flung like knives into the ephemeral body, "You may notice that I do not include my address in this letter. Do not reply for we do not want to hear from you" (monster assignment, April 20, 2010). Naoto states that his choice to personify cancer is deliberate, giving him a concrete person instead of an abstract thing to direct his focus. He says, "We're scared of something invisible, but when something's in front of you, I think we have strategies to deal with that, if it's an enemy. I visualize things" (interview, September 6, 2010).

Visualization. Naoto's use of visualization not only appears in his writing as a healing technique but also in his artwork (see also Fox's (2012) article in International Journal of the Image about Naoto's use of image). The image he creates for the monster assignment depicts cancer as an octopus (see Figure 12) with a hyena's head, a skull and crossbones behind it. His PowerPoint describes the tentacles as nerve-laden and quixotic, changing shape and difficult to recognize. The creature's head is often



Figure 12. Naoto's image of cancer for his Monster assignment PowerPoint. Note the octopus like creature has a hyena head with a skull and cross bones superimposed.

undetectable, seen only in certain conditions, but deadly (monster assignment PowerPoint, April 20, 2010). In contrast, Naoto literally rips apart the octopus image and refashions it into a star with the letter "H" in the center (see Figure 13). Like with the monster image, the angel image here is full of symbolism:

My lucky star [the angel] is special in a number of ways:



Figure 13. Naoto's image wherein he ripped apart the octopus (Figure 12) and re-crafted cancer into a star with the letter "H" at the center, taking a negative image and making it positive.

-It is made of five different colors (blue, white, red, pink and purple).  Why?

These colors make a real contrast: blue and purple symbolize peace, hope and

courage, while red and pink imply war, 'hot', and adversity.  Half of the star is in

bright color, the other half is in dark. This implies the struggle between the evil

and the angel.  There may be times when darkness shadows the light; yet is [sic]

will never overlap the angel; just like day comes after night, sunshine after rains.

It also means the coexistence of the two elements.

-Five sections of the star differ in size: the BLUE part is the biggest; purple is the

second biggest, and RED occupies the smallest proportion.  So what?  In the

battle of the good against the evil, the good often triumphs in the end.

-There's a big 'H' in the center, that could be "HOPE", "HEAL", or "HEAVEN" (not

Helpless, Hinder, and Hell) for cancer patients, including my dead friend.

(monster assignment PowerPoint, April 20, 2010, emphasis in original)

Obviously, Naoto wants healing and peace for his beloved friend, but he also wants

these for himself.  Within the PowerPoint, he has the star pin-wheel, and as it spins, the

"H" becomes an "I" and so forth.  When asked whether this representation is deliberate,

Naoto deflects the question with "It's a big and huge question" (interview, September 6,

2010), focusing instead on his attempts to change his own perspective to one more

positive in nature.  Not coincidentally, this assignment is also Naoto's last to focus solely

on Hiroshi's illness, perhaps because he has reached as far as he can with the writing.

Grief stages. While Naoto's depiction of his talks with Hiroshi's family about

alternative medicines is a type of bargaining seen in the stages of grief and,

unquestionably, Naoto becomes depressed considering the impending and then eventual death of his friend, these series of writings and activities seem to have led him to acceptance, the final stage of grief. Naoto attributes this first to having an outlet and then to a perspective shift, that he is able to look at the situation from multiple perspectives and therefore gain a better understanding of the situation as a whole, rather than the brief part he is used to seeing. Like what is seen with the image of the octopus and the personification of cancer, these activities give him a tangible object to focus his rage and other emotions on, an outlet. He states, "When we discern that's a person we are talking to, it's kind of more focused, more specific. Instead of going nowhere. When we know exactly the person we are talking to, yeah, it's an emotional outlet" (interview, September 6, 2010). Naoto, like Edson (2008), sees writing as making the abstract tangible and therefore something that a person can in every sense move beyond:

> Writing down is a way of letting go. As you say, we can walk away from the writing, from the problem. If you can really do that, I think you delete a part of the information in that and then you can save the space for another thing. I'm thinking the purpose of doing that. If I'm just writing down, I save some memory for my incoming information. What am I going to do with the written piece? I don't know, maybe I can get a solution for that, I can go back and solve the problem, or I can let them be, walk away. That's one of the way of getting rid of information...I think the analogy of the hard disk can explain my point.
> (interview, March 5, 2010)

Naoto echoes a captivating idea discussed often in the readings for the course, that by

writing or crafting a piece that expels the memories and the emotions attached to them,

a person either can return to the work to forge a solution or can abandon the work

entirely, but by expelling these memories and emotions, the person has also freed

resources within the self that gives opportunity to confront new situations.  Much like

Benson's (cited in Baer, Hoffmann, & Sheikh, in Sheikh, 2003) idea of remembered

wellness, Naoto sees writing and art as tools to open up the healing elements within

himself.

　　　　Shift in perspective.  One of those resources is perspective shift, looking at the

situation or event from another or multiple points of view.  As is obvious in the Mama

assignment with its three step process moving from objective narrative to subjective

narrative before adding researched material relevant to the story, perspective shift is a

key element of writing as healing.  As was seen elsewhere, DeSalvo (1999) credits

perspective shift as a major factor in writing to heal's effectiveness.  Yet, another

assignment deliberately requires students to shift perspective. Naoto wrings the most

he can from this assignment.  Called "entering another world," the charge asks students

to do just what the title suggests: through their writing, enter into another world, one

that may be unfamiliar to them but that may shed new light on their topic and must be

related to their issue.  Naoto chooses to slip, like a ghost, into the house where Hiroshi,

his wife, and parents live, eavesdropping intentionally on a conversation between his

friend's mother and father.  Of course, this conversation is entirely fictional—no doubt

similar conversations occurred between the two parents, but Naoto is not privy to their

content or the extent they discussed treatment. However, this writing allows Naoto to

explore possibilities as well as perspectives. He begins the piece with description of the

house: slightly run-down and barren of most furniture. Only the essential elements

remain in the residence. Then, Naoto adds dialogue, an argument between the mother

and father, who remain unnamed, first about the father smoking and then about the

proposed holistic treatment Naoto had suggested. The father says, "'Think about the

logistics for either you or me, plus our son, for the whole treatment...We have already

suffering now...Oh God, tell me where to dig money out?'" (Entrance into another world

assignment, April 13, 2010). Even though the treatment may have been of little cost to

the family, other costs relative to treatment will burden them: the cost of

transportation, of someone taking off work to help Hiroshi get to treatment, of the

paraphernalia needed to keep up with treatments, and so on.

Naoto also explores that the one asset the family has left to pay for all this is

their house, leaving everyone homeless if they use it as collateral. The piece ends with

yet another reason Hiroshi's parents are not continuing treatment: mercy. His father

states, "For god's sake, he should go away in peace, trouble-free from pain, from his

parents and family" (Entrance into another world assignment, April 13, 2010). Through

this assignment, Naoto has seen more reasons why his friend's parents denied the

offered non-traditional treatment—and he found a measure of peace:

Writing down all possible reasons...into their thinking/mind helped me released

[sic] a bit. As I had to question myself why and based on what reason my

generous offer was rejected. I could agree with myself that maybe my friend's

> parents were afraid of risking themselves one more time; maybe they had
>
> already calculated too much; and that's their final decision.  If I hadn't entered
>
> their dialogue to see why they refused my offer, I would have wondered for my
>
> whole life; even after my dear friend passed away (a couple of week [sic] ago).
>
> My mind shoothed [sic] a bit for I knew it's not my fault; nor it was my friend's
>
> parents'.  It's just the way it was! (freewrite, April 13, 2010)

His initial ease brought forth from this writing lasts.  Over four months later he is still

expressing that this particular piece helped him emotionally and mentally, stating,

"When I put myself in their situation, I have a deeper understanding of the situation"

(interview, September 6, 2010).  And, equally important, Naoto sees how shifting his

perspective has helped him:

> If you're not an insider, you may not fully understand the problem deeply.  But
>
> when you step aside, or somebody around you may have a different
>
> understanding of the problem, it may help.  If we are in the problem, we cannot
>
> see.  Too many things.  People around you may have a better understanding, like
>
> playing poker or cards, people standing aside may have better strategy. But
>
> someone playing may not. (interview, September 6, 2010)

This new perspective relates back to Hayakawa and Hayakawa's (1991) theories of two-

valued orientation versus multi-valued orientation.  Through these writings, Naoto has

moved from a two-valued orientation in which he is blaming the parents, questioning

why they did not embrace the holistic treatment, to a multiple-valued orientation, in

which he sees that the entire situation is fraught with difficulties, to continue treatment

may have made the entire family homeless without guarantee that the treatment would

work, that the parent's anguish in their son's condition lead them to accept that

perhaps a natural death would be better than a prolonged suffering treatment may

have caused, that bad things sometimes happen to good people.  He better grasps the

"whole picture" and in doing so returns to wholeness himself.

In the next chapter I will return to the individual cases, examining what results

are found within their process.  Additionally, I will address each of the research

questions, seeking out if this study shed new light on any question and what the data

revealed about the overall topic. Of course, I will delineate the major conclusions and

implications from this research as well as providing potential impact of writing to heal

for educators.  Finally, the chapter will look at the study's limitations as well as possible

research pathways concerning writing as healing.

Chapter 5: Results & Synthesis

Experience of each case
    Robin
    Mei-Zhen
    Francis
    Nisha
    Kent
    Naoto
Examination of each research question
    Topics                Modes of Expression
    Previous experience    Audience
    Attitudes            Motivating Factors
Major conclusions/implications
Impact for educators
Limitations
Suggestions for further research

      As stated in several chapters, writing as healing is as individualistic as the people who use it.  Thus, trying to draw these six unique experiences into one comprehensive and comprehensible description has proved challenging.  While some aspects may have been found in several of the cases, the one unifying characteristic for each case is the context, the course that promoted these compositions of words and images.  Each written composition and each visual image created has its foundations in the assignment that spurred it.  However, despite this common well-spring, each composition, no matter whether in written form or composed of some visual medium, deviates from the others due to the students creating these pieces being unique individuals, having their own specialized backgrounds and needs.

      So, in attempting to create a unified picture from these disparate elements, I have attempted to braid the individual strands into one cohesive plait, knowing all the while that the distinctive threads will continue to reveal themselves amid the

interwoven construct.  Starting with a discussion, each case and each research question

is explored before the entire situation is discussed, the conclusions, and implications of

this study.  As an educator, I also looked for what this study had to say about writing as

healing in the classroom and, thus, have included a section discussing the implications

for educators.   And finally, this treatise will end with an examination of the study's

limitations as well as ideas for future research relative to writing as healing.

Experience of each case

        Each case subject addressed in this writing seemed to approach "Writing to

Heal" from his or her own unique experience.  While none of the cases presented here

admitted a first-hand experience using writing to heal from a trauma or less severe

difficulty, most admitted to having seen some type of writing to heal in their

professional lives, typically in students using class writing assignments to address some

personal issue.  Additionally, Nisha admitted that a close friend had used writing as part

of professional counseling.

        Because each student came to class with a different well-spring of experiences

and knowledge, the way that they approached writing as healing was equally varied.

Thus, looking at each case separately to see what it reveals about the topic may prove

beneficial.  While some of the material here may seem repetitive from the previous

chapter, I will attempt to focus instead on how each case illuminates different elements

of the writing as healing methodology and effect.

        Robin. As with most of the other cases, semantics plays a large role both in how

Robin became and stayed, to use Johnson's (1946) term, maladjusted, and also how he

came out of his quandary.  First, when Robin experienced his crisis of faith, he had gone

through a series of quandary-inspiring stages: he identified himself as a Catholic

teetotaler who spurned alcohol, an ideal person.  Part of this idealism stage was Robin's

two-valued orientation: he saw alcohol as "bad" and that Catholicism was the only

belief system for him.  When these tenets did not live up to his ideal, he moved from

frustration to demoralization.  Once in the demoralization stage, Robin, though

functioning and seemingly resolved to his state, was stuck:  stuck in how he considered

his belief system, stuck in how he viewed those events leading up to his crisis of faith,

stuck.

Part of the purpose of writing as healing is to help semantically "stuck" people to

come "unstuck."  How did the process help him?  First, he had been using high level

abstractions to keep from confronting his issue—because confronting any issue is

difficult, painful, and can open old and new hurts.  He used metaphors, ironically

religiously laden metaphors, to keep him from seeing the issue.  As stated in Chapter 4,

people in quandaries often use high level abstractions, like metaphors, to blind them to

their problems.  By writing about his issues and using images to either start his thinking

or illustrate his points, he had to confront the concrete, the "low-level" abstraction, he

had to see the thing and not the euphemistic version he'd projected/protected all these

years.

Once he opened himself to the process, he saw that he'd had a two-valued

orientation of events and his situation.  He began to see that perhaps there were other

perspectives, other versions of belief that could still embrace elements of Catholicism

and would be based on a firmer foundation than his earlier, unequivocal trust in

Catholicism.  He opens to a more multi-valued orientation:

> Even though I'm not necessarily feeling it right now, but this idea of maybe there
>
> is some hope out there, maybe it's not as dead as I think it is, and maybe that's
>
> what this whole process has pulled out. Maybe it's just redefining what religion
>
> is for me. This idea that there is some spirituality out there and we survive this
>
> and something new has grown from it. (interview, August 26, 2010)

Through the use of multiple perspectives in the assignments—writing about events from

multiple viewpoints, manipulating images to reflect different viewpoints—Robin's

understanding of the situation broadens to encompass more than his narrow version of

events.  Now, with time, reflection, and assignments requiring he confront what

happened and his interpretation of events from numerous standpoints, he has released

his limited stance and embraced a fuller understanding of himself and what happened.

Another semantic dimension of Robin's "healing" rests in his word usage.  First,

he uses "you" frequently when he really is discussing himself.  For instance, in that

looped freewrite when he asked whether the writing as healing process will "get you"

even if you aren't open to it, he is really asking, will it "get me."  He distances himself

from not only his issue but also the process that may lead him out of that quandary by

his use of pronouns.

Another of semantic characteristic of Robin's word usage is in what he discloses

subconsciously even when he doesn't want to reveal anything.   He states assertively

that he has nothing to "heal" from, that he is fine, no trauma, no issue.  Yet, within that

short piece, he mentions both subjects that comprise the rest of his assignments, the subjects that still prey upon his mind and feelings, remaining unresolved. However, he also is subconsciously self-revelatory in other places. One instance, in an interview after the Synesthesia Assignment, he says that the topic of his crisis of faith would be a matter he could keep "unpacking." Semantics are essentially the ways in which words reveal our thought processes, so this comment could be especially illuminating. With the use of "unpack," he could be referring to meaning such as parsing, a taking apart, like one would parse a sentence. However, the connotation here is that the issue is a "load," something heavy that he's been carrying around. By "unpacking" it, by confronting the issue as a whole as well as its myriad parts, he will essentially "lighten" his burden so that it rests easier on his shoulders.

Robin's case describes two other elements of the writing as healing experience: connections. Expressly for Robin those connections include his witnessing his student's need to share, to connect, with Robin about his traumatic past, and Robin's need to connect images with words, "to use both symbol sets." Though Pennebaker (1997), the leading researcher on writing to heal, emphasizes writers looking for healing should only write for themselves, not as a practice to share with others, some researchers (Anderson &MacCurdy, 2000; DeSalvo, 1999) and practitioners (Antzoulis, 2003; Moran, 2004; Nugent, 1994) point out that sharing this writing can prove helpful to both the writer and the reader. This appears to be the case for Robin and his student. While Robin indicates that his student seems helped by the catharsis of venting his situation and knowing that Robin has a fuller understanding of the student's past, further,

through writing about his experiences the student is "transcending" the cathartic modes of writing to embrace a the more academic elements of his writing assignments, enabling his writing to become better through increased fluency as well as greater length of expression. So, Robin sees his student benefitting from this writing, and at the same time Robin makes breakthroughs of his own in his writing, letting down his guard, embracing the writing as healing experience, and more openly confronting his issue. So, while I can agree with Pennebaker (1997) that writing as healing should be founded in writing for the self, I also agree with the others (Anderson &MacCurdy, 2000; DeSalvo, 1999; Antzoulis, 2003; Moran, 2004; Nugent, 1994) that sharing this writing can also have its therapeutic effects as well.

Mei-Zhen. Like Robin, Mei-Zhen also experienced her own version of what Johnson (1946) named Idealism-Frustration-Demoralization (IFD). She begins with idealistic ideas of what her coursework at the university will be like but quickly falls into frustration and then demoralization as events do not neatly align with her prior conception. However, her understanding evolves, and as part of that evolution she illustrates how she is coming out of that oppression, drawing "happy" things, like flowers and a butterfly, scrawling the word "transformation" across the page.

The butterfly in that drawing becomes an important metaphor she uses to lift her out of her demoralization. Whereas Robin used metaphor to distance himself from his situation, Mei-Zhen uses metaphor to help her see different perspectives. Identifying with the butterfly, she says she sees herself as coming from a difficult experience, like the metamorphosis a caterpillar experiences to become a butterfly, in

order to move on, like a butterfly spreading its wings and flying.

Elsewhere, she's used the metaphor of the seed being planted in new soil and what it needs to thrive, an obvious analogy to her situation as a new student in a new land determining how she will be successful. In one of her final compositions, she uses the metaphor of herself as a seed and extends that metaphor to the various people in her life as metaphors of what will sustain her. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) state that metaphors are appropriate for writers because people use metaphors throughout their days, creating understanding through the associations they make of the new thing to an already known thing. By using metaphor, she gains another perspective on the situation through the connotations made by metaphor. In being a seed, she sees not only her own responsibility in her growth but also how her family, her friends, her professors, and so on contribute to her growth and eventually help her blossom. As Lakoff and Johnson (2003) theorized, metaphors have helped Mei-Zhen make sense of her life in her writing.

The metaphors help her gain new perspective, but working with images also helps her perceive those other perspectives. DeSalvo (1999) states that perspective shift is a key element to writing as healing's success in the individual. For instance, by manipulating images in the Great and Small Assignment, Mei-Zhen was able to see how each element—her culture shock, her friends, her family, her professors—influenced how she felt, how she thought, how she acted, and so much more. It helped her realize that by sticking only to her own perspective, she had become mired in a pattern of being very critical of herself, but when she broadened her scope to include these other

perspectives, she understood just how well she was doing.

Another element that impacted her healing from culture shock was her embrasure of multiple modes of expression in this course.  She used mainly poetry writing, movie-making images, and music to shift her perspective, pulling from model examples and amending them to fit her situation.  For instance, she drew strength from the story of Mozart creating "Air on G String," illustrating how out of difficulty comes triumph.  As discussed previously, she amended images of herself to relate her "real truth" (Taal and Krop, in Sheik, 2003) and came to new understanding of herself, and of course, she also used poetry for both these purposes, to see how triumph can come from adversity as well as communicating her "real truth."  This type of narrative integration helps Mei-Zhen become unstuck from her emotional, physical, mental quagmire (Siegel, 2007).

Francis. As a product of the Southern storytelling tradition, Francis is a highly verbal individual, often using stories to answer questions instead of direct answers. Thus, when his verbal narrative abilities broke down, I knew that something momentous was happening.  In both the first interview near the beginning of the course and the second interview conducted near the end of the course, Francis' language reflected what Barnes (1992) might call "working on understanding." This is akin to Barnes "exploratory talk" but without the social element. He used few complete sentences when discussing his "issue" and seemed to be using the interview to a certain extent as another layer of reflection, a characteristic several in the course used in describing the interviews.  However, by the last interview four months later, his speech about the

breakup with his first love, his high school girlfriend, has become fluid, more akin to what Barnes (1992) called "final draft speech."  Within that same time period, Francis had resolved his issues about that breakup, had confronted his role in the demise of the relationship, and has talked it out with his wife, a guilt/fear he'd been carrying throughout the writing process.  While Francis' writing did not reflect his speech patterns—he continually wrote fluidly about the situation—what did change in his writing was that he quit romanticizing the relationship and instead tackled it realistically.

This romanticizing of the relationship seems to be akin to Nisha's use of over-generalizing.  Here, Francis is casting a rosy, wide net of "romantic" over his recollection of his high school cheerleader and their liaison. Using such abstractions, such overgeneralizations, to label his early affiliation creates a semantic quagmire (Johnson, 1949).  The more abstract we consider a topic, the more distance we put between it and ourselves (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1991; Fox, personal communication, 2011) and the more likely we are to become entangled in the net, not addressing it, not dealing with it. Obviously, by the end of the writing experience, Francis has released himself from the net and is "calling a spade, a spade."

As is probably obvious, this journey was not easy.  Francis experienced unease to initially confronting his "lost-love" story and the story of his decision to okay his young son's surgery which had negative, lasting effects.  This initial unease is "normal" (Pennebaker, 1997 & 2007; DeSalvo, 1999).  To acknowledge and then confront a situation fraught with negative emotion is sure to cause early disquiet, but Francis

pushes through that discomfort and finds resolution with his mid-life crisis/lost-love story.  Unfortunately, he was unable to surmount his early unrest concerning the decision to give permission for his son's corrective surgery:  "That's a place too painful to go, and I pulled back. I can't deal with it. I can't tell you how bad I feel about that" (interview, April 28, 2010).  Like Nisha, which will be discussed next, he may need additional time before being able to confront this issue, but his withdrawal from examining Hart's surgery may be a place too painful to ever confront.  So, while writing about one experience has led Francis out of his semantic quagmire, it did not prove equally effective for all his problems.  As DeSalvo (1999) and Pennebaker (1997 & 2007) state, writing of this type is not a panacea for every ill or even every person.

Nisha. Because Nisha did not continue in the study, many of my conclusions about her experience are tenuous.  However, as the negative case (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and as a participant in the course, she does provide some elucidation on the phenomenon.  Primarily, her case demonstrates clearly that a certain "readiness" needs to be present in the individual for that person to receive the utmost benefit from writing to heal.  As I stated in Chapter 4, I believe that Nisha took tentative steps into the waters of Writing to Heal, but I also believe that her natural reticence kept her from diving in. She seems to be comfortable to be a passive witness to others and does not appear to have much experience self-reflecting, so asking her to suddenly take an active role in examining her life and her "issue" is akin to asking a zebra to whinny on command—a condition that will take time, patience, and much training.

Her tacit links to her professed topic, as I said in Chapter 4, may be reflective that

her true topic is not her sister's death but rather the fracturing of her nuclear family. However, I firmly believe that these links are an indication that Nisha is in a semantics quagmire, using generalizations to retreat further into what Johnson (1946) calls a "cocoon," a protective mental state that keeps her from confronting her issues. However, I also believe that as stated previously, time may play a major factor in her ability to confront her subject. Perhaps she needs time to think, to mull what she's so far uncovered. Nisha's reticence to fully engage in her topic may result from her not being ready yet to address her topic or it may be an indication that she needed more time than the course's schedule allowed.

Kent. As stated in Chapter 4, Kent had three interlinking issues that comprised the larger subject he examined: being an outsider, guilt, and secret-keeping. Both feeling like an outsider and secret-keeping can be located within a broader term: isolation. Once Kent realized that he is part of a family that experienced this situation together, he started to see more clearly the state of affairs. Plus, once he also realized that the censure he anticipated from Finn's drug use being revealed was not as severe as he had anticipated, his sense of isolation further lessened. Foehr (in Anderson &MacCurdy, 2000) found that fear of censure creates the need to keep secrets; once the secrets are exposed and fear of censure is either removed or mitigated, the person's perspective of events changed: "As students gain control of the experience—the fears— through facing them, they gain further control by paradoxing and reframing them as values. In [doing so]...they can change not just how they view the experience, but how they experience it" (Foehr, in Anderson &MacCurdy, 2000, p. 342). Thus, Kent's

perspective has changed which alters how he experiences his memories and future

related situations.

Naoto. Initially, Naoto wandered from topic to topic. Like Nisha, he tip-toed

toward his topic, such as writing about an email from a friend without mentioning that

the friend was dying of cancer.  Since Naoto spoke often in our interviews about trust,

his small steps toward discussing Hiroshi's condition may have resulted from not

knowing many in the class and therefore not trusting the class members, a component

necessary for disclosure, as discussed in Chapter 2.  Once he did feel comfortable

exposing this sorrow, he no longer held back.

At the outset, Naoto saw this writing as an outlet, that venting type of catharsis

so many people employ. However, over the course of several assignments, he saw each

composition as a way to make an abstract idea or situation into something more

tangible.  Giving him this concrete "thing" to focus on, the writing allowed him to direct

all his energy, each stage of grief toward an object.  Like Edson (2008) stated, writing

gives the author an object toward which they can direct their emotions but also a

stationary thing that can be set aside or even walked away from, if only briefly.

Naoto's situation is much different from the rest of the cases presented here.

Whereas the other cases had time to distance themselves from the events (except for

Mei-Zhen, who once she found a kindred-spirit in a professor at the university, her

culture shock began to wane before the course started) centered around their "issue,"

Naoto was writing in the midst of his situation.  Pennebaker (1997, 2007) suggests that

time may be needed between the inciting situation and the person's use of writing to

heal, which seems to be true for most of the participants. However, Naoto's situation

may prove Pennebaker's suggestion inapplicable, as Naoto uses the written and visual

compositions to work through the stages of grief (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). In fact,

his friend Hiroshi dies mid-way through the semester, making Naoto's grief even more

immediate, if possible.

Synthesis of Findings for Each Research Question

The research questions driving this study have been enumerated in Chapter 3.

However, revisiting them now in a discussion of results from this study may bring these

marked cases into more symmetry and help make them more understandable.

Topics. The first question(s) asked: what topics do the participants choose to

write about? How does the topic and the severity of the trauma it expresses influence

the quality of healing experienced through writing? Very few participants overlapped in

writing topics, and of the main topics used for writing to heal purposes none were

exactly the same among the six cases. Topics ranged from a crisis of faith to culture

shock to lost love/mid-life crisis to a sister's death to a brother's guilt at keeping secrets

to a friend's death. Yes, two participants chose a loved-one's death to examine, but one

was the death of a close family member while the other, no less important, was of a

good friend. Likewise, the crisis of faith was influenced by a slight culture shock, but the

crisis had begun before Robin left the United States to study overseas.

The second part of the question scrutinizing how the severity of the trauma

affects the quality of the healing, frankly, should not have been asked. It illustrates

more than anything the naïveté of this researcher, as well as my bias. As literacy

professional and graduate students, most of the writing was exemplary. And, quality of writing did not in any way seem to be influenced either positively or negatively by the severity of the trauma experienced. While first drafts may have been grammatically or mechanically "rough" due to the author getting caught up in the "flow" of emotion, the original venting, final drafts, with few exceptions that were more endemic to the quality of the writer overall, were good quality.

The topics of writing to heal should not be examined within "severity levels." To do so, invalidates to a certain extent the validity of the individual's feelings, setting up a "my trauma is more valid than your trauma" mentality. Participants wrote on topics that troubled them, topics that they required a certain kind of resolution. Just because Naoto was writing about his friend's severe illness and eventual death did not negate the real pain that Kent experienced from examining his role concerning his brother's drug usage and eventual arrest. The two are dissimilar, yes, but not unequal in emotional impact.

Previous experience. The next question(s) proved equally troublesome: what other writing as healing events have participants experienced? How does having experience with writing to heal influence the quality of the current writing to heal experience? When asked about former writing as healing events, participants stated that they either had never experienced a writing to heal event or were unwilling to classify their experience as "writing to heal." This reservation may result from the terminology. As Robin stated, many did not feel that they needed "healing," that nothing was "that bad" in their lives. Most, when pressed, admitted that they learned

many times from writing they had completed, understanding a situation or gaining insight into a troubling matter.

However, as the course progressed, the tension around "writing to heal" dissolved, seemingly from the participants' greater understanding of what "writing to heal" encompasses, such as those writing to understand or writing for greater insight. As they came to know that writers did not need a "great trauma" in order to practice this type of writing, they appeared to recognize the method more in their lives. For instance, Robin, who explicitly stated, "You see, I know me; I listened to that Delphian know-it-all and checked it off the list some time ago" (Mirror assignment, February 2, 2010, emphasis in original), encountered this type of writing within his secondary classroom. Robin, who had "been there, done that" concerning self-reflection, who spent an entire writing assignment resisting his need to write about his issue, had a spontaneous example of writing to heal drop into his lap. A student in his class began writing about his traumatic past and wanted to share it with Robin—seemingly wanting to understand his past and have his teacher understand this student's experience. And, as the semester progressed, more participants began to share where they had seen writing to heal being used by students or others in their lives.

Of course, since most were unwilling to acknowledge their previous writing as healing experiences, discerning how prior experience affected their current quality of writing proved impossible. Nonetheless, Lindemann (2003) stated that writing, like any skill set, improves with practice, which would indicate that the writing before this course would have positively improved the quality of the writing for this course—practice

makes perfect, after all. Using a syllogism, an imperfect form of logic, I may be able to deduce that if more practice writing improves later writings, then more practice writing to heal may improve later writing to heal experiences. Certainly having familiarity and rehearsals in this form of writing should improve the writing to heal experience, but unfortunately, this research could not prove or disprove that assumption.

Attitudes. With Writing as Healing, the mindset that writers bring to this type of writing appears to determine is potential benefits; if writers are open to writing to heal, it seems likely that they will be able to use the writing more effectively to reach some measure of healing, but if they aren't receptive to this process, then that attitude may inhibit the outcome of the writings. Thus, I asked: what attitudes do the participants bring to the writing to heal experience—and how do these attitudes influence the outcome of the writing to heal experience? However, that question did not seem enough. I felt like I needed to clarify, specify more: if writers resist, what forms does that resistance take? And, further, if participants resist writing and its abilities as a healing art, what occurs that moves them beyond that boundary? What is the motivation—internal, external, or something that the instructor or classmates do?

Beginning attitudes. As with everything else concerning writing to heal, the attitudes brought to it are as individualistic as the participants. Some participants were open, diving right in from almost the first class. Kent, for instance, found his overarching topic, where he "fits in" with his family from nearly the first writing event. The first night, he listed his brother's drug arrest, but he also listed several other items that related to Kent's role in his family. During the first formal assignment, the Mirror

Assignment, he compared various facial features to other members in his nuclear family,

which was all part of the activity, to examine himself and record what came to mind.

And, as discussed in Chapter 4, Kent also happened to sit in front of a wall of posters

visually depicting what constituted "family."  So, he had ample inspiration to determine

his subject.  This openness to the experience and his willingness to confront painful

subjects seems to have helped him resolve his issues with what happened:  "I think I

probably gained in understanding of the way my mind works...I can really see more

clearly the situation and be less harsh on the way I did things there" (interview,

September 28, 2010).  He was open to the process and gained understanding.  But he

could have ignored these elements that inspired him, he could have closed himself off

from the process.

        Nisha, who sat next to Kent that night and who openly admitted she wanted to

focus on family for all her writings and composed a piece similar to Kent's that evening,

did not continue a deep reflection of her topic throughout the semester, in fact,

abandoned it periodically and only tip-toed around the subject.  As discussed in the

previous chapter, she exhibited resistance.   She avowed that her sister's death was her

chosen topic, but when she actually had to complete the writings, she shied away from

it, admitting that when she tried, she just couldn't do it.  Attitude does not appear to be

the problem, if Nisha is taken at her word, but rather, willingness to confront pain may

be the key component.  Even though Nisha's sister died several years ago, Nisha appears

to be still too close to the pain to address the events and emotions.  Perhaps she needs

more time before returning to this topic in writing, and with time the effect of her

writing, because of her new willingness to explore her sister's death and her own feelings, she may benefit more from the experience than the limited amount she did in this class.

By far the most vocal person to resist was Robin, and again, the attitude was not negative about the type of writing but rather that he did not feel he had need of it. And, he had company. A few others expressed that they too did not feel like they necessarily needed to "heal." Augusto Boal, when bringing his Theatre of the Oppressed to the United States, at first quailed, thinking that Americans had nothing to be oppressed about. However, like Robin and others in this course, he quickly realized that Americans' problems were just different, that the "healing" needed was different from what others needed, that oppression—or in this course's case trauma/issues—and its healing vary from place to place and people to people. Robin, for instance, figure out that "writing to heal" for him meant coming to understand; it was a change in his attitude not toward the process but toward his comprehension of what he could gain from the process.

Robin, and perhaps a few others in the course, obviously needed to come to this conclusion on his own. Dr Fox spoke at length the first two nights about how "healing" is a misnomer, that there is no "correct" term for what the students would be doing. He related that he used "transitional" in his IRB proposal to describe the work students would be doing but that the course itself describes the work as "Therapeutic." He also spoke at times throughout the sixteen weeks about the "continuum of trauma severity," that individuals cannot compare their trauma to others and find it "less" in any manner.

Each person's trauma is important to that person and, thus, "worthy" of examination. Robin, like a few others in the course, chose to discount those ideas or become deliberately deaf to them. Perhaps this is another form of resistance: the idea that individuals have to internalize not only their understanding of writing as healing but also that they are in need of it themselves, that their topic is "worthy" of the process.

Francis, conversely, approached the process with an open mind, having already experienced a form of writing to heal when he collapsed with hepatitis several years ago. Though he continued to write about his first love throughout the semester and the following summer, he chose different topics for the various assignments. His attitude about the writing is receptive; instead, Francis' attitude that causes him to change from week to week deals more with audience than with the process, which will be discussed later. However, even though he didn't share his on-going, largely out-of-class composition with his peers, he still resolves some of his issues, admitting in our final interview that his true problem being addressed was not lost first love but rather his own mid-life crisis.

Naoto, also, appeared to be honestly interested in this writing process, but he fluctuated in topic from, I believe, a certain incomprehension or lack of insight into what topics might be best for this process. His bouncing from one topic to another at the beginning of the semester resulted more from misunderstanding the general purpose of the course and this style of writing rather than a lack of interest or acceptance of the process. While Naoto comes from a region associated with a certain reserve in countenance and emotion, he seemed genuinely interested both from a personal stance

and a professional stance in writing as healing.  And, once he hit upon his true topic, the fatal illness and death of his dear friend, he dove into the subject without restraint.  As a result, he benefits in several ways:

>  I believe that the best, most premium thing I learned from the writings is to look at things in a different way, different perspective.  Instead of seeing things in one angle, I should try to see them in different positions, so I have a better judgment and a better view of the thing I'm living.  In all it helped me to come up with a better strategy. (interview, September 6, 2010)

The implication here is that he has experienced some healing in relation to his friend's illness and death, that by looking at the issue from multiple perspectives, he is more understanding of the situation and why the family, who Naoto blamed for his friend's worsening condition, acted how they did.  However, Naoto also gained from learning about his own reactions to situations; he sees that in the future he must not only recognize his own perception but also seek out other perspectives to have a fuller grasp of each situation.

Similarly, Mei-Zhen experienced a little trouble adjusting to the course and writing to heal.  Part of this transition seems to reside in her understandings of the course.  In other graduate classes, topics are discussed from a theoretical standpoint without actually being put into practice.  While Mei-Zhen has taken other courses with Dr. Fox and has experienced his philosophy of graduate classes which includes not only the theoretical discussion of the topic but also the students' practical application of it as well, she still seemed a bit stymied that she was being asked to expose some "trauma"

or hurt and examine it.  When she chose to examine her culture shock, the topic gave her a measure of guardedness while still examining a very real issue.  I believe that this course and the writing completed for it are probably one cog in the machine of Mei-Zhen gaining confidence in this new culture.  Knowing from her writing that she has had support from her family as well as professors and peers at the university who have encouraged her poetry writing, her self-expression, before entering this course and that she continues to have that support long after the course ended, I believe she will only continue to gain more confidence in herself and her abilities, in her place in this loud American culture.

Forms of resistance. As mentioned previously, some of the cases wandered from subject to subject, which could be a form of resistance.  Surely, Nisha's touching upon subjects relative to her sister without explicitly discussing her sister or her sister's death is a prime example of this form of resistance.  As stated earlier, keeping distance semantically, either by the words used or by the subjects chosen to explore, allows Nisha to leave her topic unexamined and herself still mired in the quandary of her sister's death.  However, I have hope that this first tentative foray into writing as healing as well as the examples she witnessed in the university classroom as well as her own classroom and further the model of her friend using writing as part of her therapy will encourage Nisha to continue approaching her topic in written composition and eventually enable her to find some kind of resolution for her on-going pain.

While Nisha's case is a more extreme illustration of resistance, other forms were just as interesting.  Mei-Zhen, for instance, exhibited bits of resistance in her first

interview.  Whether this was resistance to the process, which I doubt, or resistance to

being questioned, which is the more probable scenario, her range of passive to more

aggressive resistance is worth assessing.  In that interview, she shows passive resistance,

akin to Bartleby's "I prefer not to," by stating she doesn't want to answer certain

questions.  But she also dons a more aggressive stance by turning the questioning on

the interviewer, "why are you asking that?" and making assertive comments, "you've

already asked that."  She dodges questions when she can and pushes back when she can

no longer evade them.

Robin resists in a sly, mischievous fashion.  Like his namesake, Robin Goodfellow

or Puck, he injects humor to deflect the attention.  While this feint is entirely consistent

with Robin's personality—he often interjects humor into his writing or uses his wit to

satirically expound upon a topic—it remains a form of resistance.  He still does not

willingly want to confront his issues, at least at first.  With time, exposure to models in

his reading, in the course, and in his own secondary classroom, Robin begins to see the

worth of the process and begins to understand its implications on his life and his

personal experiences.  Eventually, Robin lets go his struggle to accept and buys-in.

Culture. As stated in the literature review, culture can influence a person's

attitude toward disclosing emotions.  While Mei-Zhen and Naoto obviously are products

of cultures different from the American students, I cannot discount the cultures within

America that may also influence disclosure.  Mei-Zhen and Naoto are products of a

culture that promotes living in states of equanimity, of avoiding strong emotion

(Wellencamp, in Pennebaker, 2007).  Thus, I should have expected them to be resistant

to disclosing, as that is diametrically opposed to what their societies teach. The same could be said of Nisha's culture. Not knowing her full background and unable to ask any further questions to clarify her withdrawal from the study and from writing about her sister directly, I can only surmise.

However, another social aspect relative to culture may also be at play in the participants' reactions: gender. As a male in a Chinese-related culture, it may be more understandable that Naoto would feel more comfortable assimilating into the American way of sharing emotions, of talking through emotion. Whereas, Mei-Zhen as a female in another Chinese-related society may not feel she has that latitude. Likewise, the societal stereotyping gender issues may also have played a role in Robin's initial resistance, as traditionally American males are supposed to be "the strong, silent" gender, the "I'm fine—just a scratch" gender. All of these issues and others lurking under the surface may have been motivation for what I observed as "resistance" in this study.

Motivation to surmount resistance. While I do not have physical proof of motivation in any instances, most occasions are self-evident or can be logically processed. As just alluded to, of the instances where participants were initially resistant and eventually seemed to surmount their internal barriers to writing to heal, the prevailing indication of change is buy-in. As Robin stated in his Mirror Assignment, writing to heal "gets you"—or, at least, it "got" him. More than that, it worked for him because he eventually lowered his guard, assumed that there was worth in the process, and trusted not only the professor but also himself. He trusted that the process would

work for him, that he had something to explore and gain from.  He trusted that the

professor, and others who read his work, would ascribe meaningful responses to it,

responses that would further the gains Robin achieved by writing each piece.  And, he

trusted that his issue was "worthy" enough to be explored, that though he hadn't

experienced the level of trauma he read about in the literature, his issue was just as

valid, just as necessary of exploration.  His motivation was not external but came more

from his brain and his heart.

I believe that others in the course who approached writing as healing either

immediately open to it or, at least, seemingly interested are due from two conditions:

peer pressure or the tradition of following the lead of a respected instructor into a new

academic course.  No matter the age of individuals, peer pressure can always be

assumed as part of any action.  It is human nature to want to belong and act as one with

the group.  So, logic determines that in part the actions of some students to write and

follow along in the coursework could result from observing the rest of the class.

Certainly the night of the Mirror Assignment activity, when all the participants sat in a

room and looked into a mirror for twenty minutes would have been enough to make

anyone feel awkward and not want to participate, but for the most part, everyone stuck

to the directions and completed their part, due to some degree because everyone else

was doing as told.  Likewise, most of the students knew and respected Dr. Fox and had

probably taken at least one course with him.  After over sixteen years of attending

courses, initially placing their trust in the instructors and being rewarded for that trust

by learning something meaningful, tradition or habit may have acculturated the

students to complete their activities, assignments, etc.  Tradition or habit may have

superseded any natural resistance students might have felt.

Modes of expression. The modes of expression may be one element of this

study that proved the most individualistic. When addressing the question, what effect

do other modes of expression play upon writing as healing, I found that while all

participants were exposed to or composed in multiple modes, some embraced them

and found huge benefits from doing so, while others viewed the modes as a chore that

they must complete as part of each assignment and did not find much "healing" from

them, and a final group ranged somewhere between these two extremes.

Francis, for instance categorically denied finding "healing" in using visual images.

He clung to the writing.  For instance, during the synesthesia activity when participants

were listening to music and recording on butcher paper any words or images entering

through their heads, he stated that the music had little effect on what he did and, in

fact, he rejected drawing images, choosing instead to write passages, each passage

overlapping those logged previously.  This reaction may be a reflection of Gardner's

(1993) multiple intelligences, as Francis may prefer a more linguistic expression of

learning.  However, it may also be a reflection of personality, since Francis comes from a

highly musical background and would be expected to connect strongly with the music

playing that evening, but he wasn't.  In his first interview, I asked why he chose writing

instead of drawing: "I'm not a drawer.  I'm a musician.  I'm a writer.  I'm just not,"

adding upon being asked about the layer upon layer of writing that night, "[I was] being

obstinate" (interview, March 4, 2010).  Further, Francis may have been influenced and

not be cognizant of how the modes affected his progress—or the situation could result

from a combination of conditions: his obstinacy, his perceived lack of drawing abilities,

his desire to just spew words, and so on.

Kent, however, was one of those individuals who seemed to lean more heavily

toward the writing but stayed open to these other modes of expression:

> I would probably say writing in narrative form was probably the best. I'm not
>
> very good with Power Point or technology as a whole. Those became tough,
>
> even if I got stuff out of them, usually more of my frustration [rested] with just
>
> creating it than anything else. (interview, September 28, 2010)

His Connections Paper as part of the portfolio has few images inserted—a reflection of

this stance toward the modes. However, earlier in the semester he seemed to draw

greater understanding both from the image manipulation and from sharing it with

others in class. Sharing his image manipulation, wherein he took a photo of he and his

brothers and shaded out the "outsider" brother and added a halo and wings to the

paradigmatic brother, he seemed to hit on his "real truth" that Taal and Krop (in Sheik,

2003) discuss, not the historical truth but the truth that makes sense to his thinking.

Yet, when another class member points out a detail, the "idealized" brother is standing

under a star wall ornament, even further emphasizing Kent's point, it seems to jolt him,

further opening his eyes to new perspectives (video, February 23, 2010).

Like Kent, Robin seems to gain more from the writing, but unlike Kent, he

appears to find much more worth in the modes. In his Photo Fix Assignment, he

incorporates the required photographic images, but he also attempts to use music as a

further connotation point, and applies the abilities of PowerPoint to best effect. To

clarify, he tries to overlap a song, "The Thunder Rolls," over his discussion of how the

wet and cloudy weather contributed to his depression in England. Also, in showing the

choice that he had, to continue on with his beliefs and break up with his girlfriend or to

abandon his beliefs and stay with his girlfriend, he gives the reader the option to see

where each choice would have taken him, alone in a grey-filled sky or together with his

now wife who fills the space where once was grey-filled sky.

Mei-Zhen, as discussed earlier, embraces the modes, using music, visual

expressions, and writing to find new perspective and to adjust her mental map.

However, Naoto is probably the best example of a participant interweaving image and

writing to find the most healing effect. Throughout his process, he uses words and

images together to gain new perspective on the situation, to resolve his anger at himself

and his friend's family, and to resolve his own guilt feelings that he could not do more to

save his friend. The best instance of words and image coming together for Naoto is in

the Monster Assignment. In this, he created a metaphor for cancer: a mythological

being composed of a hyena head, skull and crossed bones, and the body and tentacles

of an octopus. As part of the assignment, he was to amend that image to a positive one,

which he does, literally tearing the image into pieces and refashioning them into a star

with the letter "H" in the center. Beyond the Morenian catharsis, the type of catharsis

that involves immediate release of emotion, that Boal (1999) defines, this radical

revision of the image also forces Naoto to see the positives that exist within the

negative, an utterly new perspective of his topic. Then, he explains in writing all the

symbolism imbued in each image—the use of colors, the choice of objects, etc.—and

acknowledges further the positives amidst the negative, such as choosing blue and

purple, symbolizing peace, hope, and courage, even throughout a painful, debilitating

illness.   He finds that having an object or person to visualize, to project those feelings

toward, helped him resolve his emotions: "When we are really, really frustrated with

something, the best way is to physically punch it or curse it, something like that…The

letter is kind of the outlet, one means of the outlet for emotion" (interview, September

6, 2010).  Like Edson (2008) believes, writing about trauma gives authors a physical

representation to direct their emotions toward as well as a physical object that they can

set down and walk, metaphorically and perhaps literally, away from.

Audience. As stated in Chapter 2, experts in writing as healing somewhat

disagree about audience.  Pennebaker (1997) states that this type of writing must be

complete with oneself as audience, that it is writing done solely for oneself.  Allen's (in

Anderson &MacCurdy, 2000) work somewhat agrees, finding one student who iterated

that the writing was for herself alone.  However, other researchers and theorists

(DeSalvo, 1999; Anderson &MacCurdy, 2000; Wright, 2002 & 2005) as well as

practitioners (Antzoulis, 2003; Edson, 2008; Wooldridge, 1997 & 2007;  & Zimmerman,

2002) either explicitly state or imply through their own actions that sharing writing

about difficulties in one's life contributes to its healing effects.  Thus, I felt it important

within this study's context to examine how audience affects the healing aspect of

writing: How does knowing (face-to-face) the audience affect the writer's healing

through writing?

What I found reflects the essential nature of writing as healing:  it is individualistic to each person.  Some found audience to be a helpful element in the healing nature of the writing process or just helpful overall in improving their writing, while others found that audience was unnecessary since they were primarily writing for themselves and actually preferred either no audience for their pieces or a relatively unknown audience.

As suggested earlier, Nisha's pulling back from writing about intimate situations may have resulted from her interaction with one or more of her audiences or may have nothing to do with audience at all.  However, since audience can play a huge role in the author's willingness to share writing, it is important to keep audience—especially trust in one's audience—firmly in mind in relation to Nisha's decisions concerning the class, the writings, and this study. And, if audience or trust kept her from sharing, she certainly was not alone.  Mei-Zhen indicated that she self-censors her writing depending upon whether it will have an audience other than herself and who that audience is composed of:  "If I'm aware of the audience, I don't tell everything...Some things are just too personal" (interview, September 14, 2010).  So, audience influenced what she wrote and shared as well as when she wrote and shared.

Francis seems to feel the same.  He began his primary topic, the dissolution with his first love, for an in-class assignment and shared it with his group and the instructor, but then, though he revisited it for another assignment, he did not share the "tough stuff" with his peers, turning it in with his portfolio to the instructor and sharing a final copy with me.  Alluding to why he made such choices, he stated, "When you're writing

for someone who you think will read it and is bright enough to get it—that's a terrible

way to put it—but having a sympathetic reader who is also sophisticated is a real

stimulation. It is" (interview, September 1, 2010). This statement came amidst

discussion of the other members of his writing group seeming "more inhibited" than

Francis and therefore perhaps not as able to "handle" it, even though the group had

"bonded." So, while Mei-Zhen self-censors out of privacy, not wanting to reveal all of

herself to others, Francis censors what he shares due to his perceived understanding of

what the audience is capable of, his lack of trust in their understanding.

Likewise, Kent indicated that not knowing the audience initially helped, "I think it

helped for me in the first few things I turned in; it was good that I don't know these

people" (interview, May 5, 2010). The implication here is that in "finding his feet" with

the course and his topic, it was better that he was writing for himself. However, after

time, his group "gelled," which he found helpful because each person was familiar with

his topic and he had less back-story to fill in. Robin also found the anonymity within the

group helpful, but not necessarily in a healing way:

> I was very relieved to know that they were essentially strangers. I didn't know
>
> them before reading their papers, even having had them in class, and not having
>
> that community time to get to know them. I think that helped in a lot of ways.
>
> It's certainly influenced the way I've treated it in that I don't really think about
>
> the subjective response, it's just about the writing. (interview, March 12, 2010)

While Robin did not find a healing type of help from his group, he did feel he benefitted

from them through having a "sounding board" (interview, April 23, 2010) in developing

his writing.  His later statements about the group's influence on healing reflects what

Pennebaker (1997) espoused, that writing is foremost for the person:  "I'm not really

writing it for my group.  I'm not really writing it for publication.  I'm writing it for me"

(interview, March 12, 2010).

Naoto also sees his group as a sounding board to improve his writing: "The

writing conference...helps me to look at my mistakes and weaknesses in content and in

form...At first I write to me, but I read it again and again in revision, but then somebody

reads it, and I may have a look at that writing in their own thinking" (interview,

September 6, 2010).  And, as an English Language Learner (ELL), that focus is only

natural, an instilled desire to improve his knowledge of the language through writing

proficiency.  However, gaining in writing skill is not the only benefit he sees:

> I [am] usually not going to share a lot of writings because I really want to write
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> for myself.   I can be my first audience, but for this particular case, my friend's
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> cancer case, I said I want to write it down, I want to share, I want get it exposed
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> as partial fulfillment for the class assignments, but I want to release what I'm
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> thinking—I'm a little bit guilty about that.  That's what I learned this story....Now
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> I'm going to share more.  I want to share more. For example, if I got another
>
> friend who has the disease or has problem, and they haven't tried enough to get
>
> the way out, I may push them, kind of looking more, finding more ways, more
>
> solution.  I've got courage now.  If I can do anything, I try my best to do that.
>
> (interview, April 23, 2010)

Obviously, in sharing his story, Naoto has experienced a measure of healing.  Despite his

natural reserve and his understanding that first he is writing this for himself, he also

sees how sharing with others improved his own understanding.  Through this writing

and sharing his experience, he has been emboldened; through the writing and sharing,

he feels he can take action.

Likewise, Mei-Zhen sees where having an audience can help her emotionally:

"Sharing in a group helped to see how they think about that, and also I learned

something from their writing.  I see everyone has an issue, a trouble.  We are not only

sharing and talking about our own issues, but we hear other's issues" (interview,

September 14, 2010).  Here, she poses a key element of sharing writing as healing that

often goes implied or overlooked: sharing this type of writing can break down the walls

of isolation, helping the authors see that they are not alone in their experience, that

what they are feeling and/or experiencing is also being felt or experienced by others.  It

creates a community which strengthens.

Kent perhaps best verbalizes this quality of sharing writing as healing:

It's something that I feel people can connect to, so I feel that's a greater

purpose.  Another audience is going to read it; I want it to be something they can

relate to or understand or at least gain something off of.  Maybe it helps them

get a better understanding of their situation or with someone that they know,

especially for this class.  It's more selfishly for me, but I think someone else might

be able to pull out from it things that would affect them individually or relate to

them.(interview, May 5, 2010)

While the writing may begin as a way for the author to work through a situation, to gain

better understanding, or some other measure of healing, when sharing this writing, the

creation can take on what Kent calls "a greater purpose." As seen with Mei-Zhen, it can

resolve feelings of isolation, knowing that one is not alone in experiencing troubles, but

Kent also feels that it can help others who are experiencing a similar issue. Thus, the

writing experience becomes a two-fold healing: the writer gains from the process

illuminating new understanding of a situation and then gains again from sensing that

others are also benefiting from reading it. As I stated earlier, this type of writing can

create community, a community of greater understanding.

Motivating factors. Perhaps another naïve question, considering that this study

examines writing as healing as the topic of a graduate course at a major university, my

final research question looks at motivation: What factors encourage the use of writing

to heal? Of course, as participants are literacy teachers and students, they have a

natural affinity to use writing for many of life's tasks. Additionally, since this study

examined writing's healing properties within a graduate level course, the students all

willingly enrolled in this course with some understanding of what would be expected of

them and were able to drop the course and/or the study after finding out more details

about the course and study the first night of class. None did. Thus, I must assume that

the prevalent motivation was already an inherent condition within each participant;

each person wanted to be there and to do this type of writing, to learn more about this

type of writing.

As discussed elsewhere, the tenor of a university class predisposes students to

be engaged; students are used to being expected to complete assignments and to be

active within the class through writing, discussion, and other tasks. Additionally, the implied condition of wanting to please or gain the respect of the professor, an authority figure within the college and on this subject, contributed to participants pushing beyond their natural resistance. And finally, this course used writing groups to help students not only improve their writing but also to help them see different perspectives by immediately hearing their writing group's perceptions of events when sharing pieces. So, a measure of peer pressure was subtly inflicted to ensure students were honorably fulfilling the tenets of the assignments. With this in mind, what other factors contributed to participants writing to heal? To use Robin's term, what reached out and "got" those who were reluctant?

For Robin, it seems, several factors motivated him. First, he witnessed how one of his own students spontaneously began to use writing to help the student, Adam, to understand and cope with his own traumatic past and to help Adam reveal more about himself to Robin, with the implication that the more Robin knew about Adam, the better relationship as teacher-student they could build. However, foremost for Robin to self-motivate to do this type of writing was a broader understanding of "writing to heal," namely that "healing" is a misnomer, as discussed elsewhere, and that even if he did not have a "trauma" per se, he still has at least one issue that he needed to "unpack." Once Robin understood that there was no issue too small or less severe and that "healing" could stand for "understanding" or "uncovering" or just "coping," he bought into the process and revealed his own measure of healing.

While Robin resisted because he was not fully cognizant of what "healing"

meant, Kent jumped right in, no quavering.  He knew almost from the first what his

topic would be, and his motivation seemed to derive from that topic, from a genuine

desire to rectify his lingering emotions concerning his brother's drug possession arrest.

As long as he was still gaining insights into the situation or his experience, he continued

writing about it for assignments.  Likewise, Francis seemed to be driven by an internal

motivation, writing on his topic briefly for a couple of class assignments but continuing

to work on it outside of class.  His innate yearning to resolve his own actions in that

long-ago relationship and to uncover why after decades he still thinks of the girl and

how their association ended makes him return time and again to his writings.

However, others seem to need outside support, from either their writing groups

or the professor or others in the class.  For instance, when Naoto shared his first

writings about his friend with cancer, he sat in the chair, rather hunched over, but as his

group made comments, his gaze seemed to sharpen and he sat up straighter, almost as

if coming to attention (video, March 2, 2010).  While I can only surmise what is

happening at that moment, pairing the video with his discussion of his group at that

stage provides contradiction:  "At the moment, I don't think it has a very strong impact

on my thinking and the way I'm thinking.  I myself believe that it has a lot of influence"

(interview, March 5, 2010).  While his body language indicates engagement and

stimulation on his topic, he states that their comments do not influence him, rather

their writings affect how he views the world.  However, his viewpoint about the group

changes by the fall:

I [am] usually not going to share a lot of writings because I really want to write

for myself.   I can be my first audience, but for this particular case, my friend's

cancer case, I said I want to write it down, I want to share, I want get it exposed

as partial fulfillment for the class assignments, but I want to release what I'm

thinking—I'm a little bit guilty about that.  That's what I learned this story....Now

I'm going to share more.  I want to share more. (interview, April 23, 2010)

By fall, he seems to recognize the impact his group has had on his outlook through

discussing his writing and how his story impacted others.  His motivation, like his

understanding of his friend's cancer, has moved from a self-focused event to one that

encompasses others; he now wants to help others as he has been helped.  His

motivation now comes from seeing the benefits of action.

And finally, I believe that Mei-Zhen and Nisha's motivations are somewhat the

same, though I have little concrete evidence to support that.  Both women appear to be

encouraged to do this writing mainly because it is assigned.  While Mei-Zhen did see

some aspect of healing in that she realized she had been too critical of herself and in

that she understood that she was not alone in feeling some measure of culture shock,

Nisha seems to have only gain minute element of healing, mainly because she only

minutely examined her subject, staying on the periphery of it in nearly all the

assignments.

Thus, like most other elements associated with writing as healing, the motivation

is as unique as the individual.  While some appeared encouraged from seeing personal

gains, such as new understanding or some kind of resolution, others were extrinsically

motivated, completing the assignments as tasks associated with gaining course credit.  I

am not satisfied with my limited understanding of the motivation behind beginning

writing as healing in this course and continuing to work on pieces relative to a topic. In

future research, this element will be of more focus than I made it in this study.

Major conclusions/implications

"Writing as healing" or "writing as therapy" is a misnomer. It gives participants

in this study the impression that in order to perform this type of writing, people must

first have some kind of trauma in their past, that they must have some critical illness or

some disastrous experience, like death or war or natural disaster, in their past. That is

not the case. This style of writing can be used for assistance in healing from illness or

severe psychological disturbances, yes, but it can also be used to understand a problem,

to resolve issues, or any number of other "healing" functions. The term was first

applied to this writing because it was primarily being studied in conjunction with major

life illnesses or as part of research into general health improvement (Pennebaker, 1997).

Since then, though, its functions have changed, and thus, its label must also change.

Current researchers are doing just that, using "writing as transformation" or "writing as

transition" instead. These labels are better but do not fully capture the process'

essence. Then again, alternative labels are not as satisfying either. "Writing as

resolution" sounds like a peace process, and "Writing as change" gives a more social

action dimension than is present in the subject. Until someone derives a more suitable

name for this process, "writing as healing" will have to do, but as people discuss it and

practice it, perhaps they should keep in mind that "writing as healing" is a general term

for an action that has far more consequences than "healing."

And what are the authors in this study healing from?  No matter that each participant's "issue" is individualistic, all participants' issues share one trait:  the writers are preoccupied with their issue, some to the extent that it affects their daily actions, their relationships, their schoolwork, and other aspects of their lives. Pennebaker, the guru of writing as healing, also found this sense of preoccupation or rumination on events in his early studies of college students (1997, 2007, 2011). In this case study, Mei-Zhen's situation, for example, impacted her entire first year of doctoral studies, negatively shaping her emotional and physical wellbeing.  She was visibly sad—stoop shouldered, unsmiling, etc.—and pale with bloodshot eyes.  Whereas, Francis' preoccupation with the ending of his first relationship and his thinking about that first girlfriend was in some jeopardy of damaging his marriage—no wife wants her husband thinking again and again of a previous liaison.  Each participant had been thinking about their topic for months—if not years or decades—and needed some form of catharsis to lead to a resolution.

The course itself was designed to do just that—give students a medium to vent their emotions, be reflective on the situation and themselves, and to reach some kind of closure about the problem.  Fox, a researcher and practitioner of writing to heal, drew from his considerable knowledge to craft assignments that honed the critical elements of writing to heal, referring to many researchers cited in this study:  Pennebaker, DeSalvo, Anderson and MacCurdy, as just a few. Further, he called upon his own writing as healing experiences as well as a previous graduate level course which focused on writing as healing and workshops he had conducted with various populations, such as

veterans groups.  Many of the assignments show a marked reference to semantics, the work of Hayakawa and Hayakawa as well as Johnson being primary sources.  The way in which individuals use language plays heavily in writing as healing, especially the ways in which writers make meaning through word choice.

Foremost, the assignments were designed in such a way that participants could vent their emotions, what Boal (1999) terms Morenian catharsis. However, several of the assignments created a disequilibrium, an unsettling within the writer as they asked students to look at the situation from other people's points of view, to step away from their own safe, standard viewpoint of the situation and take in how others view it, what Boal (1999) calls a Theatre of the Oppressed version of catharsis.  As Pennebaker (2011) notes, it is not enough for people to vent their emotions unless they reform them; by destabilizing participants' view of their situation, the compositions knock them out of their preoccupation, their "cocoon" (Johnson, 1946), and open their view to a new, more whole version of events.

And, the assignments gave students a way to view their issue in a concrete form, rather than as the abstract version they had been dealing with.  Edson (2008) states that making issues tangible helps individuals deal with the problems better because it gives them a focus for their emotions and helps them feel in control, that it is something to be dealt with or set aside.  Naoto's case is perhaps the best example of how concretizing an abstract can aid the person.  His personification of cancer as well as his making it into an octopus with a hyena's head provided him with something to direct his emotions toward: "We're scared of something invisible, but when something's in front of you, I

think we have strategies to deal with that, if it's an enemy. I visualize things" (interview, September 6, 2010). By creating a visual, he can channel his grief toward that object, yet the concrete also gives participants a measure of control; when the emotions grow too strong or they need to set it aside—literally and metaphorically—they can literally do so. Francis, to a certain extent does this.  He begins his piece on his first love, goes to another topic for the next assignment, and then returns to his lost-love piece in place of fulfilling the following assignment, a scenario he replicates over the summer, setting the lost-love piece aside, only to return to it once more.

Fox also deliberately crafted assignments to draw upon writing as healing's chief characteristics, such as gaining multiple or new perspectives.  DeSalvo (1999) and Pennebaker (1997 & 2007) both state that looking at the issue from a new viewpoint will encourage healing.  The "Mama" assignments explicitly draw upon multiple perspectives.  First, the assignment requires writers to craft an objective narrative, told from 3$^{rd}$ person point of view.  Then, in the second version, writers are to revisit the piece, making it more subjective and crafting a positive ending.  The final version is to incorporate research into the piece.  Each version calls upon a different point of view: the objective witness, the subjective author, and outside, objective sources.  Kent's story shows this assignment to good effect.  He begins with the objective recording of events.  Then, in the second version, where the assignment asks the writer to make it subjective and to craft a positive ending, he begins to broaden his view.  In making the ending more positive, he lets in another viewpoint, his mother's concept of what was happening, and turns the gaze of the reader onto his brother's feelings as he sits in jail.

No longer is Kent wallowing in his own sorrow, but he has expanded his vision to encompass how his and his brother's actions/non-actions have affected their parents and themselves.  The story is no longer about just Kent; it encompasses the entire family. No longer does he use a two-valued orientation (i.e. it was this way) but employs a multi-valued orientation in that he sees it from many angles: his mother's reading of the situation, his brother's understanding of what happened, and his own interpretation.

Another assignment that opened perspectives was the "Entrance into another world" assignment, which asked students to creep into another plane of existence relative to their topic and see what new meanings were uncovered.  Kent continues looking at familial relationships in comparison to his own by examining a fictional farmer in his hometown and how that man relates to his own son.  Additionally, Kent has the farmer hear about Finn's arrest and comment upon the drug bust.  In Kent's hands, this assignment becomes almost an extension of the "Mama" assignments in that he chooses to find just one more viewpoint to consider: the fictional farmer as a representative of how he thinks most of the townspeople considered the drug bust and Finn's involvement—not quite objective, but not subjective in the manner Kent started out viewing this situation.

In Kent's dealings of these four assignments, another aspect of writing as healing is used, especially in the second version of the "Mama" assignment: moving from negative to positive understandings of events.  As stated previously, Pennebaker (1997, 2007, 2011) suggests that it is not enough just to record the events, to keep chronicling

the same story again and again; rather, the author must step from rumination into a more reflective, organized narrative that also addresses the positive points of the event, because no situation is ever all negative or all positive.  Breaking free of that preoccupation of the issue, the writer needs to see that there were also benefits from what happened.  For instance, Francis obviously, lost his first love and has in some fashion being grieving that relationship for decades.  However, through writing about this breakup and his role in it, he figures out that it was a well-needed lesson, one that led him to have a decades-long marriage:

> The point of it was ultimately to show how, at least in my case, I got to this wonderful place, this relationship with another person, this woman, that seems as durable as a thing can be and is in every respect wonderful...Forty years later, I feel really glad what happened happened.  (interview, September 1, 2010)

However, he admits that he had already been inching toward that revelation.  His true eye-opening understanding, which resolved his situation and effectively ended his rumination on that long-ago failed relationship, was that this harkening back to his first love was really just an ordinary mid-life crisis, nothing romantic or earth-shattering. Without the change in perspective, without looking at what positives arose from this horribly crushing moment, Francis may never have arrived at this understanding; he may have kept ruminating and rhapsodizing over that young cheerleader, perhaps even to the detriment of his current relationship.

Francis chose to share his finished piece with his wife, a risky proposition in any relationship, and of course, his wife was upset at first.  After talking it out, though, they

came to a new and stronger understanding of each other and their relationship.

Pennebaker (1997, 2007) does not encourage sharing of writing as healing, stating that

the writing an author does should be for himself alone, that to interject an audience is

to chance weakening the healing powers of writing for fear of self-censoring or for

writing to please the audience.  However, other researchers (DeSalvo, 1999; Anderson

&MacCurdy, 2000; Wright, 2002 & 2005) and practitioners (Antzoulis, 2003; Edson,

2008; Wooldridge, 1997 & 2007;  & Zimmerman, 2002) state or imply that sharing can

be beneficial, which seems to be the case for several in this study.  Naoto, for example,

eventually combines his various writings about Hiroshi into the "Connections"

assignment in the portfolio, but he also states that he plans to use it as a eulogy to share

with his and Hiroshi's friends to honor Hiroshi's life.  Likewise, Mei-Zhen finds that

sharing has helped her see that she is not alone in her feelings of culture shock and that

she grows more confident when she shares her writings and they are received well.

        These traits all encompass the already documented findings of previous

researchers, but new indications also arose within this study.  While some findings have

bearings on previous research, they present in this study in new, sometimes subtle

ways.  A principal characteristic of writing to heal that may be referred to in literature

but seldom is presented in an actual case is the attributes of the writer.  In this study,

the presumption might be that since all are literacy experts, they may all quickly and

easily accept writing as healing and eagerly dive into trying to practice some of its

tenets.  Further supposition may include that if a student was uninterested the implied

force of pleasing authority (the instructor) or bowing to peer pressure from other

students seemingly taking its assignments on easily would compel a resistant subject to quit holding back and to dive right in. That is not the case here or, I believe, elsewhere. Writing as healing cannot be forced. If a person is not ready, no amount of cajoling will coerce her to try it. In this study, Nisha, obviously, was either not ready to deal with her issues or unwilling to expose them in such a setting. She crept into writing as healing as far as she felt comfortable, but her own disinclination kept her from fully embracing the process. While it has been several years since her sister died, not enough time for her to confront that issue may have passed, but then again, she also may be unwilling to reveal a personal trauma to so many people mostly unknown to her previous to this class. No matter the reason, she could not be forced—and should not be forced—to perform such writing. By encouraging reflection without pushing her too hard, she may one day in the future take up the pen to examine her sister's death and finally find some closure.

Another avenue that specifically researchers of writing to heal do not address but that researchers of writing sometimes tackle is resistance. However, I believe it is an important component of writing to heal, because without confronting their issue and reaching some kind of resolution, the people who could be helped with this process are doomed to continue in their rumination fashion, preoccupied with events that still hurt them in some manner and still caught in their self-defensive modes which can have serious mental and physical health effects long-term (Pennebaker, 1997, 2007). Classes such as this one and one-to-one counseling that includes a measure of writing are good avenues for people to no longer put off acknowledging they have an issue. For instance,

without this course, Robin may never have sat down with his topic and fully resolved his

understanding of what happened so long ago.  He may have continued in that "there's

nothing wrong with me" stance and been happy but not fully accepting of how events

then determined much about the path his life took.  Likewise, Kent may have continued

observing his relationship with his family and his brother's relationship with family and

wondered how Finn's drug use and arrest affected the family dynamics today.  But he

took this course, and he chose to confront those issues.  While he still may feel a bit of

guilt in what happened, he also understands the responsibility everyone involved

played, that he did not hold sole responsibility for what transpired, that he is not his

brother's keeper, per se.

The forms that resistance took were as varied as the people using them and bore

some reflection on those individuals' personalities.  Robin, who is a bit of a wit and

tends to write humorously even about serious subjects, managed to continue using

humor to deflect having to confront his issue.  His comic riff on Alcoholics Anonymous

and upon the rite of confession within the Catholic church in his mirror assignment

piece is at once reflective of his usual writing style—slightly satiric and wholly

entertaining—while also subtly revealing his issues (crisis of faith and alcohol) but at the

same time deflecting any real reflection, any serious confrontation of his issue.  In fact,

without him taking up his topic and acknowledging head-on his issue, this mirror

assignment piece may have been just another thorough avoidance of topic.  However,

reading his later writings, one sees that alcohol and the Catholic Church at one time

factor heavily in how he viewed the world and determined many of his actions, until he

experienced his crisis.

Others avoided their topic by wandering from topic to topic, dancing around their true issue, and either peripherally touching on their topic or ignoring it altogether. Nisha, for instance, rubs against her topic without ever directly confronting. At the start of the semester she explicitly stated that she wanted to examine her sister's death, but she quickly backs off. Instead, she explores topics that are minutely related to her sister, such as in her discussion of clutter, her sister is the "neat-freak" in comparison to Nisha's more relaxed view of organization. This tendency to stay on the fringe of her issue may be a result of her preoccupation with her sister's death. While she's decided to pull back, her rumination on it will not let her pull entirely out of range. Likewise, Naoto at first wanders from topic to topic, either resistant to open the emotional powder-keg surrounding his friends death or honestly unsure what issue to make his focus. After a few assignments, though, he touches on his issue: his friend's cancer diagnosis and eventual death. The first inkling of this may be in the first assignment, the Mirror piece, where he wonders if a person's eyes record the last image they see at the moment of death, but he definitely gets his feet wet with the Fixing the photo assignment when he discusses Hiroshi's email that encourages him to live every day, to not stress over inconsequential things. Once he opens that gate, even just the small bit he did, Naoto seems to accept that his friend's life-altering situation is the topic he must confront, and he lets the gate open wide to release every emotion, thought, action, etc. that surrounds and consumes him.

Once the participants who allowed themselves to experience writing as healing

lowered their barriers, they found that the process was the healing element—and that

that process was not always just the composition but could also include sharing their

pieces.  The healing aspect of process is implied throughout the literature but easily

seen in instances all over this study.  The many examples of the "Mama" assignments

making individuals look at their issues from several different perspectives, the use of

words with images crafting a comparison of objective verses subjective remembering,

personifying their issue and writing a letter directly confronting the problem, making it

concrete instead of abstract, all of these created a step-by-step process lead each writer

into a new consciousness.  Plus, several participants admitted that sharing their pieces

with their group members or with others outside of class helped them as well, showing

them that they weren't alone or adding a new perspective the writing did not offer.

Naoto, for instance, plans to continue his healing by sharing his final composition with

his friends to help them remember and celebrate the great man Hiroshi was instead of

the frail and sickly person he had become before his death. Likewise, Mei-Zhen realized

from writing these pieces and sharing them in the class and at a conference that she

was not alone in her situation, that many international students have experienced or

are still experiencing culture shock, which allowed her to grow increasingly confident in

her abilities and stature in academia and in the American community she briefly called

home.

Many scholars of writing as healing imply that time should be a factor in using

this process, namely that individuals should let a period of time occur before attempting

writing about their issue (Pennebaker, 1997 & 2007; DeSalvo, 1999; Anderson

&MacCurdy, 2000). However, examples of people using writing while experiencing their

trauma also exist, notably Antzoulis' (2003) school children using writing to help them

cope with the terrorist attacks in their neighborhood of New York on 9/11. And, while

most of the participants of this study chose topics well removed chronologically, one

wrote while in the midst of his trauma. Naoto's process of coming to grips with his

friend's illness and then experiencing Hiroshi's death and finding closure remains an

exemplar of how this process can "heal" even while still living through the situation.

Naoto started his process examining events that had occurred well before he came to

America to study: meeting Hiroshi, his friend's initial diagnosis, the failing treatments

Hiroshi underwent, and the reaction/in-action of Hiroshi's parents. However,

approximately half-way through the semester, Naoto learned that his friend had

succumbed to his throat cancer. So, while Naoto was exploring events that had

happened in the past, after some time had progressed, he took on the added, sorrow-

filled, and immediate situation of Hiroshi's death. Naoto knew that Hiroshi's death was

imminent and unavoidable, but through using writing and visual representations, he was

able to work through his grief and find a measure of closure.

     Images were also a significant part of this process; "writing to heal" was not

writing alone in this course. Fox also included visual compositions with most all the

assignments. Participants seemed to view these visual elements according to their own

learning styles and preferences. For instance, Francis for the most part ignored the

visual in favor of writing. This was best seen in the Synesthesia activity where

participants were asked to draw what the music connoted to them; Francis, instead of

drawing, wrote long passages, layering them over each other and using different colors of crayons. Kent, likewise, seemed to view the visuals as a hoop to jump, admitting to preferring to write about his experiences instead of crafting some visual. However, he did admit that the Fixing the Photo assignment, where he took a picture of he and his three brothers and shaded out Finn while adding a halo and wings to their oldest brother, was a helpful visual to show the family dynamic as he perceived it. Plus, sharing it with the class in a short, informal presentation (required of each student) did also help expand his understanding as one person in class pointed out the star seemingly hanging over his "angelic" brother's head, further confirmation of his basic understanding of the family.

Other participants saw the visuals as a way to brainstorm ideas. Robin, used the Synesthesia activity to help him gain a visual for what he was feeling, drawing castles and figures and word bubbles and more, that were in themselves abstract in meaning. However, for Robin, they were visual representations of his feelings that then helped him express them in words. But Robin did not use visual compositions just to brainstorm ideas. A self-professed visual learner who loves graphic novels, comics, and other visual representations of meaning, he used PowerPoint in the Fixing the photo assignment to give his readers a simulation of the choice he once had made and let them see the repercussions of that choice, no matter which path was chosen. The visuals in this instance became not only part of his own process of understanding but also the manner in which he tried to project that same understanding to his reader.

Perhaps the most impressive element that arose from this study is the level of

"buy-in" attained.  While several participants did resist writing about their troubles and

perhaps censored themselves in one manner or another, most everyone wrote to heal

on some level. As discussed elsewhere, this was a university course, which brings with it

many layers of pressure to perform and authority to encourage one to participate.

However, the issues that these cases present are authentic to the individuals and the

writing done eventually lead to some elucidation for the subject concerning his or her

issue.  People swim through trouble without acknowledging or embracing or

confronting their issues.  We move on because we have responsibilities or it's too

painful or whatever other reason we offer.  But these cases set those excuses aside, for

the most part, and challenged their thinking, their concepts of themselves and events,

and learned, perhaps even healed.  I find that extraordinary.

Impact for educators

As a high school English teacher, I often would assign writing, intending to use it

as an assessment or as a way for students to practice skills discussed in class.  Equally

often, I would receive back just what I intended, but in that stack of student work

usually one piece would be different from the others.  Filled with emotion and searching

for understanding or seeking solace, that one piece would be a student's use of my

innocuous writing assignment for that student's spontaneous attempt at writing to heal.

I've received poems about not fitting in, essays about being gay and unable to share

that knowledge because of small town prejudice, narratives about mothers with cancer,

and journal entries about fathers arrested for meth manufacture, usage, and

distribution.  Our students—no matter their ages—have lives filled with pain and in

need of understanding.  So, while the university course examined here focused on how individuals can deliberately use writing to heal from situations, it also holds implications for educators, namely how these writing events can be dual-purpose, meeting both curricular needs as well as personal/emotional needs.

Foremost, the assignments which spurred the writing as healing events are not unlike most composition assignments in any level of schooling.  They all included elements of the writing process, asked for the writer to tell a story or convey some kind of understanding to a reader, and included a measure of reflection.  Any of these assignments could and may have been assigned in a high school.  The only difference is that the instructor intentionally asked students to use their compositions to examine a "tough time" in their lives, a trauma, an unresolved issue.  However, many college and scholarship applications do the same thing:  recall a challenging moment in your life and discuss how it impacted you and your goals for the future. Further, some of the skills are ones frequently tested at some level during schooling; most notably, the letter format has been a constant in Missouri's MAP testing at both the eighth and eleventh grade levels; this format was chosen by many in the class as their way to communicate with their issue for the "monster" assignment.  Naoto, for example, uses the letter to personify cancer directly addressing the disease, throwing angry barbs its way, and finally telling it to leave (monster assignment, April 20, 2010).  Likewise, the narrative is currently one of two types of essays listed for secondary students in the Common Core State Standards (the other is argumentative writing, which some assignments in this course could easily become).  Students were purposely asked to create narratives, most

notably in the "mama" assignments, which could equally become instructional

assessments concerning point of view and objectivity/subjectivity.

Further links to standards are through use of figurative language, another caveat

of the English classroom that is often tested.  Lakoff and Johnson (2003) state that

people think in metaphors.  They are the foundational building blocks of our

understanding, probably because of their close link with imagery.  And, while metaphors

are a required element to be learned in the k-12 classroom, they also are a fundamental

aid to helping in writing to heal.  Metaphors help individuals view experiences from

multiple perspectives.  Lakoff and Johnson (2003) state that metaphors are imbued with

our subjective perceptions, but that by refashioning or composing new metaphors, we

come to a fresh understanding: "New metaphors have the power to create a new

reality.  This can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms

of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it" (pg.

145).

Another key feature in education, especially writing instruction, is development

of image.  Teachers ask their struggling readers to try to picture what they read as they

read as a comprehension strategy.  Often in brainstorming events or prewriting events

we ask our students to draw their ideas, to visually compose before they verbally

compose.  Image, too, can be a key feature in writing as healing.  When difficult or

traumatic events occur, we tend to remember them in images (Shiek, 2003).In creating

an internal image, the mind draws upon previously recorded perceptions to construct

the image, thus the person essentially 'perceives' the object again (Baer, Hoffman, &

Shiek, 2003).

However, what may be the most important educational concept about these writing as healing events is how students used the writing and various media to learn about themselves and others.  True, Francis did not stray far from his writing comfort zone, but he did complete multi-media projects when required.  And, he did find out his "truth," that the relationship he had been idealizing was actually rather ordinary and that he was in reality experiencing a commonplace mid-life crisis.  This "truth" is probably not one that he would have reached otherwise.  Through writing about the beginnings of the relationship, setting it aside for a while to reflect, writing a little more about the relationship, setting it aside to reflect, and then finally describing how the relationship ended, he realized that the girl and their liaison was really quite mundane, though fraught with emotional connotations.  And, through writing about their association, he also finally saw how that relationship, and others throughout his life, lead him to accept and appreciate the wonderful marriage he currently has.

Likewise, Mei-Zhen's writing helped her see that her situation of culture shock was not uncommon among international students, providing her a measure of "healing."  However, Mei-Zhen's compositions also help with her writing skills.  Lindemann (2001) stated that the more one writes, the better one's writing skills become, and this is true of all the students.   As an English Language Learner, Mei-Zhen's writing progress is more easily pinpointed than that of her American contemporaries, if not in the actual style itself, then in the content.  For example, her synesthesia assignment depicts her inability to communicate with Wal-Mart workers when she is

asking where the seeds are sold and they keep directing her to the furniture department

for "seats" (February 16, 2010). The reader perceives her frustration and despair at not

being able to communicate effectively with native Americans. By the palindrome poem,

though, she has gathered a measure of confidence, becoming conscious of her growing

abilities, and she has become emboldened to take risks, trying a poetic form challenging

to even native speakers. Mei-Zhen has a subject she feels passionately about and wants

to understand better, which as Zinsser (2006) states, "One way to generate confidence

is to write about subjects that interest you and that you care about" (pg. 244). Similarly,

she has noticed that this confidence has made her more animated—she knows she

speaks louder and with more confidence in English than she does in her native language

(observation journal, June, 2010). While this may be part of her assimilation into the

American culture, I believe it is also her growing confidence based on her

communication skills' improvement. Like all writers, the more she writes, the better she

writes (Lindamann, 2001)—and, I'll add, the more confident she feels about herself and

her abilities.

Educators, especially writing instructors, must be prepared to respond to this

more "self-expressive" type of writing. As I found in my teaching career and as

numerous other writing teachers, have seen, students will use our assignments to vent

their emotions or to try to deal with their emotional traumas. Milner (2005), for

instance, saw innocuous prompts from National Writing Project workshops, such as the

"writing toward home" assignment asking students to craft a map of their

home/hometown/neighborhood as a brainstorming device, generate very personal,

very emotionally volatile pieces. As Milner's participants expressed and I've seen in this course as well as others, writing teachers must give sensitive responses to these types of writing as well as be lenient in grading, because, as Milner states, trauma paralyzes the writer but also help the author grow into more fluid expression and action, eventually.

Much has been written about writing to learn, usually focusing on writing's academic purposes:

> Writing is a tool that enables people in every discipline to wrestle with facts and ideas. It's a physical activity, unlike reading. Writing requires us to operate some kind of mechanism—pencil, pen, typewriter, word processor—for getting out thoughts on paper. It compels us by the repeated effort of language to go after those thoughts and to organize them and present them clearly. (Zinsser, 1988, pg. 49)

But what of the more personal ways we write to learn? Looking at the six cases presented in Chapter 4, each one shows how they used writing as a learning tool, both for a practical understanding of the theories concerning writing as healing but also for understanding themselves and their unique situations better. Perhaps "writing as healing" should just be one more element housed under the umbrella "writing to learn."

Limitations

Being a participant observer and a peer to the participants in this study was both a helpful characteristic and a hindrance to conducting this research. Foremost, having a previous peer relationship with each participant eliminated the need to build trust with

nearly every student.  Usually researchers have to establish some type of rapport with their participants to ensure that study subjects will share readily with the researcher. This connection helps subjects divulge elements—some quite sensitive—from their lives.  As I had been in classes with most of the subjects, we had already developed a certain amount of trust and affinity.

However, being seen as "one of us" can also undercut authority, giving rise to challenging behaviors. Hatch (2002) warns that coming from an insider perspective may hinder the researcher from observing objectively, that the research coming from an insider stance may bring to the study preconceptions of the participants. While I do not believe my previous knowledge of the participants colored unduly the recording of the data or its analysis, this situation, of course, may be at play in the study.  Still, I believe my "insider" stance may have undermined participants' reactions to me, having them regard me as another student rather than as a researcher.  This situation was most readily seen with Mei-Zhen's contesting the line of questions, asking why I was asking about her inspiration and her creative process, refusing to reassess when I restated a previously asked question.  Previously unknown (to the subjects) researchers may have been afforded a "measure of trust" that they were experts in their field and therefore were given certain lee-way in their questioning and practices, whereas as a somewhat "known quantity," and specifically as a fellow student, I am not seen as necessarily "expert," especially in comparison to the teacher of the course who is a known specialist in the topic with experience leading such as course and presenting on this topic.

Further, Robin alludes to another drawback of being "known" by the participants

before the study.  In being asked about his small writing group for the course, he said

that sharing this type of writing is easier when he did not know the individuals

comprising his audience.  He added that he would have written much differently,

perhaps censoring himself, if he'd written pieces for people he knew well.  The

implication here is clear: because I know Robin and the other participants quite well,

they may have withheld information they did not want me, a peer in the graduate

program, to know.  Additionally, with a previously unknown researcher, it was highly

probable that they may not see that person again once the study concluded.  However,

as a peer in the program, they were assured that I would be present on campus for at

least a year and that it was highly probable they would encounter me in town, on

campus, in the program's offices, or elsewhere.  As is often seen with internet

communication, the status of being "faceless" or unidentifiable can make people be

more honest or more self-revelatory than if they will confront their audience or

recipient face-to-face later.

Of course, another like limitation rests in that this dissertation will be available

for anyone to read, a copy being housed in the departmental office, accessible to any

student or faculty member, as well in the university's library.  Participants may not have

disclosed as fully, knowing that whatever they shared could be included in this public

document for any of our other peers to read.  While I don't believe this to be the case, it

remains a logical possibility.

The study was also limited in part because of my role as a "GTA Volunteer," as

stated in the syllabus.  This additional role to participant-observer led me to feel

conflicted at times what ethical role I should take at a given moment.  For instance, as a

GTA Volunteer, Dr Fox has expressed that he may have seen me as a co-instructor for

the course (email, March 19, 2011), which led him to share information, such as Mei-

Zhen's financial situation during her first year at the university, which I did not think was

in my purview as either a student or a researcher since she had not shared that with me

herself.  Unfortunately, this sense of awkwardness, of feeling I was navigating a

tightrope, also led to other missed opportunities.

Because I felt awkward in my triple role as participant/observer/GTA volunteer, I

chose not to interview Dr Fox or include information from some of our conversations

about the class in this study.  Additionally, as he is my advisor, the lead member of my

doctoral committee, and the first reader of this dissertation, I eliminated one of my

questions from this study which explored the role of the teacher and his instruction and

approach in/to the course as a component in this study.  As an educator, this strand of

inquiry would have been important to understanding how teachers can encourage their

students to use writing to heal, but because I did not want to strain the relationship

between Dr Fox as my mentor and me, I opted to remove this line of inquiry which, in

turn, limited the scope of what I found.

As stated in Chapter 4, language barriers may have posed certain limitations.  As

nearly half the participants in the total study population and two of the six cases

presented here are international students, misunderstandings in both directions may

have occurred and affected the quality of this study.  While all the students are graduate

students and all the international students have passed rigorous testing of their

language abilities in order to study in the United States, issues with the complexity of the language may have arisen that I was unaware of.  Additionally, though an objective third party spot checked all transcripts and paid particular attention to the transcripts of the international students for accuracy, incorrect transcribing because of accent may still have occurred.  With any study, recordings of conversations are inherently flawed because of numerous reasons; in this case background noise proved a challenge to accurate transcribing, accents of international students and one American student inhibited transcribing, and of course, sheer human error is always a factor, despite precautions.

A further limitation to this study is the lack of data from the instructor.  As discussed earlier, I chose to limit the discussions with the instructor of this course. While I believe my reasons are valid, I also recognize that omitting conversations with the instructor may have negatively affected the study, avoiding a further perspective of events and outcomes.  While the instructor may have added dimension, as I stated earlier, I feared that interviewing him—knowing that he was not only the instructor of this course but also my advisor and first reader of this dissertation—would have influenced how I conducted the research, how I analyzed the data, and a numerous other facets of the study.  And, honestly, asking sometimes pointed questions of this authority figure in my professional life made me feel awkward and vulnerable in this final step of my education.  I did not want our relationship as advisor-student to be marred by this study.  I prioritized the long-term relationship I have with my mentor over potential negative repercussions derived from possible interactions of him being a

participant/data source in this time-bound study.

Suggestions for further research

Having a population of literacy-minded graduate students may be the ideal pool

of subjects for this type of study and this topic.  However, examining this same

environment, a class exploring how writing can help individuals gain new understanding

or appreciation of events, with a different population may prove insightful.  Studies in

the United Kingdom of this type of writing with individuals in Palliative care has proven

informative, but those studies have been rather limited in scope.  For instance, instead

of looking at writing to heal with people experiencing terminal illness, examining how

writing to heal can help the elderly transition into the latter stages of life may be

beneficial. In Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs, self-actualization can determine

whether older adults experience satisfying retirements or not.  Examining if writing to

heal can lead those people without a level of self-actualization into a happier later life

may benefit quality and perhaps longevity of life.  And, along this same line, as more

researchers are noting the correlation between mindset and health, helping the elderly

transition into retirement may lead to better health—but that would take more

research.

Similarly, taking this type of writing to younger participants may also expand our

knowledge of its affects.  While I am not advocating using this course, as is, with middle

or high school students, I do believe that tailoring existing assignments in their

curriculum, for instance the narrative essay, in the manner illustrated in this study may

provide insight into writing to heal.  Plus, continuing to follow those students into

adulthood to see if they still apply the concepts of writing to heal as they encounter new and potentially more complex issues could offer awareness of writing to heal's long-term effects.

Another direction further research could take is to combine writing as healing with bibliotherapy, the use of reading particular texts to encourage self-reflection and "healing." Greinke (2007) examined bibliotherapy within a juvenile justice program to encourage better choices among that age group. Using a mentor text, like those chosen for Greineke's study and incorporating self-reflective writing spawned from those texts may boost both practices' healing effects. I would surmise that bringing together the two modes for healing may also significantly improve participants' literacy skills as well, perhaps serving dual purposes by meeting curriculum needs as well as providing a measure of remediation of behavior. Wouldn't this scenario prove more advantageous than the current practices of In-School-Suspension and Out-of-School-Suspension, which typically feature students sitting in idle isolation in the former and "playing school-sanctioned hooky" in the latter?

In further research, I may also want to add another element to the writing and imagery dimensions seen in this course. Including a meditational element which incorporated visualization may present new facets of writing to heal. Practicing meditation which embraces visualization, I have found that my meditation practice often boosts my writing life, helping me more easily create a "mind's image" of my topic and making my approach to difficult topics smoother as I've gained a measure of control of my "inner speech," as Moffet (1981) calls it. Through meditation, I have improved my

ability to focus, to still the chaotic rabble that occurs in the mind.  This practice, with the addition of visualization, I believe could have significant impact on writing to heal's characteristics as well as benefits.  Again, though, that finding would take more research.

And finally, after interviewing Kent and hearing how many of his themes are present in his fiction writing in addition to the self-reflective non-fiction seen in this study, I wonder what measure of healing fiction writing can provide.  The adage to "write what you know" has some foundational truth, as many writers start their fiction writings through inspiration derived from their personal lives, but can an author excise guilt or other feelings, come to some new understanding of a situation, by writing a fictional story relative to it?  For instance, do works like Stephen King's Carrie help the author resolve issues lingering from high school?  Or, more recently, did John Green's young adult novel, The Fault in Our Stars, help him resolve his brief time at a children's hospital where he not only comforted children with life-threatening illnesses and their families but also had to cope with his own emotions when some of those children lost their battle with cancer or other fatal conditions?  These are the questions that linger.

**APPENDIX A**

Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study to examine how writing to heal functions in an educational setting. As such, you have the right to be informed concerning the procedures in order to decide whether or not to participate. This document may include words that are unfamiliar; if so, please ask the researcher to explain them or any information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do before deciding to participate in the study. Your participation is voluntary; you do not have to take part in this research. You may refuse to participate without repercussion. You may stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to examine the role of transformational writing within an educational setting, observing the various forms transformational writing takes as well as both the teacher and students' responsibilities in its use.

Time Span
The bulk of this study will span the spring 2010 semester with one follow up in the fall. There are three components to this project. The first component involves a short survey administered at three separate occasions, averaging approximately 10 minutes each time. The second component involves video-recording of class sessions and small group collaborations within those class sessions, approximately 16 video-recorded sessions. Each of these will take 2.5 hours, the length of each class session. The third component involves individual audio-recorded interviews, occurring on three separate occasions. These will take approximately one hour each.

Your Role
You will be asked to participate as you would typically in any class. You will also be asked to complete a short survey and contribute your answers within interviews. Additionally, you will be asked to allow yourself to be video-recorded during class sessions and to allow your writing related to the course content be used within the study.

Participants of This Study
There will be around 15 people in the study, the students enrolled within C&I 8640 with Dr. Roy Fox.

Benefits
Your participation will add to the knowledge of transformational writing, especially within the educational setting context. You may benefit from witnessing research in action as well as perhaps gaining a new dimension to transformational writing in one's own life.

Risks
Your participation in this study is not expected to cause you any risks greater than those encountered in everyday life.  However, you may experience feelings of sadness or anxiety.  If that occurs, the instructor of the course has included contact information within the syllabus for avenues to help you address those concerns.  Additionally, concern about privacy may arise from this study.  The researcher will take steps to cloak each participant's identity from public attention, through use of pseudonyms and changing various personal characteristics that do not influence the findings of the study.

As you are a student within the university course, please be reassured that your decision to participate and your actions within this study will not impact your grade for this course.   Should you decide to withdraw from the study at any point, you will experience no adverse consequences.  There are no alternatives in participation beyond the decision to participate or not.

Your identity and participation will remain confidential.  Other than the research team (Dr. Roy Fox, Debbie Holland, and Rebecca Dierking), no one else will have access to each individual's identity.
The researcher will cloak each participant's identity through use of pseudonyms and alteration of personal details that do not directly influence the findings of the study.  All data will be kept locked away from persons outside the research team.  Upon analysis, data which has been cloaked to insure anonymity will be disseminated through the researcher's dissertation and potential journals.

Additional Benefits
No additional incentives will be offered for participation in this study.  Additionally, you will incur no monetary costs as a result of participation in this study.

In Case of Injury
The University of Missouri, in fulfilling its public responsibility, has provided medical, professional and general liability insurance coverage for any injury in the event such injury is caused by the negligence of the University of Missouri, its faculty and staff.  The University of Missouri also provides, within the limitations of the laws of the State of Missouri, facilities and medical attention to subjects who suffer injuries while participating in the research projects of the University of Missouri.  In the event you have suffered injury as the result of participation in this research program, you are to contact the Risk Management Officer, telephone number 573.882.1181, at the Health Sciences Center, who can review the matter and provide further information.  This

statement is not to be considered as an admission of liability.  If you do not understand this statement please contact the investigator listed below.

Communication
Informed consent is an ongoing process that requires communication between the researcher and participants.  Participants should understand what they are being asked to do so that they can make an informed decision about whether they will participate in the research study.  You will be informed of any new information discovered during the course of this study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to be in this study.

Additional Research Opportunities
The Campus Institutional Review Board offers educational opportunities to research participants, prospective participants, or their communities to enhance their understanding of research involving human participants, the IRB process, the responsibilities of the investigator and the IRB.  You may access the Campus IRB website to learn more about the human subject research process at http://www.research.missouri.edu.

Please contact the researcher if you have questions about the research.  Additionally, you may ask questions, voice concerns or complaints to the research team.

Investigator Contact Information
Rebecca Dierking, 303 Townsend (mailbox), 573.881.5130, rebeccadierking@yahoo.com

Contact IRB
The Campus Institutional Review Board approved this research study.  You may contact CIRB if you have questions about your rights, concerns, complaints or comments as a research participant.  They may be reached by telephone or email to hear any concerns, questions, input or complaints about the research.

Campus Institutional Review Board
483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, MO  65211, 573.882.9585,
umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu
Website: http://www.research.missouri.edu

ESL
If English is an additional language, the researcher will locate translators so that subjects are assured of comprehending the Informed Consent Process.  Please let the research know if you are requiring such a service.

A copy of this Informed Consent form will be give to you before you participate in the research.

Signatures
I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered.  My signature below means that I do want to be in the study.  I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion.


_____
        _____
Your Signature                                                                Date

**APPENDIX B**

Course Syllabus

Dr. Roy F. Fox
Professor of English Education

English Education GRA Volunteers
Rebecca Dierking and Leah
211 Townsend Hall
Email: rcd5k7@mail.mizzou.edu;

*Teaching Therapeutic Language, Literature, & Media*

*Studies in English Education, C&I 8640:*

Winter, 2010
Tuesdays, 5-7:30 pm

*Give sorrow words.*

  --William Shakespeare

Everything we name enters the circle of language, and therefore the circle of meaning.
The world is a sphere of meanings, a language.

  --Octavio Paz

**COURSE DESCRIPTION***:*

What do we mean when we speak of "composing as a way of healing" and the
"therapeutic uses of language and other symbols"? New fields of inquiry are emerging,
but with inconsistent names (e.g., "Resilience"; "Emotional Literacy"; "Spiritual
Studies"). How should we use words, images, music, and other symbols in such ways--
whether it be temporary academic or personal problems, psychological trauma, or
disease? How is "writing to heal" similar to "writing to learn" and "writing to
communicate"? What roles do other literacy activities and symbol systems—especially
reading and viewing—play in using therapeutic language?

How can writing processes and strategies that are based in the cognitive view—one that values linearity, sequence, cause-effect, logic, and propositional thinking—and those that are rooted in "other ways of knowing"—ways which value emotion, images, silence, intuition, spirituality, chaos, and the unconscious—be integrated or reconciled to assist people who engage in writing as healing? How do the therapeutic uses of symbol systems address professional standards for English and Language Arts professionals? This graduate seminar will explore these thorny (but endlessly fascinating) issues. Please note that Dr. Glenn Good, MU Professor of Counseling Psychology, will serve as a course consultant for your instructor or GRAs. Please consult us first! As well, contact information for MU Student Counseling Services is http://counseling.missouri.edu; Phone: 573.882.6601; 119 Parker Hall, MU Campus; M-F 8 am – 5 pm.

**REQUIRED BOOKS:**

1. *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. DeSalvo, 1999.

2. *Finding a Voice: The Practice of Changing Lives through Literature*, Trounstine and Waxler, 2008.

**MAJOR COURSE PRINCIPLES/CONCEPTS:**

- Using evidence-based and standards-based teaching to *also* enhance students' wellness.
- Using a variety of writing prompts and literature to elicit and develop oral and written language to explore major life events.
- Revising writing as a means of increasing one's control over major life events.
- Employing specific elements of general semantics to explore major life events in rational, grounded ways.
- Employing specific rhetorical and semiotic elements (such as specificity, objectivity, word-choice, metaphor, imagery, humor, receptivity, audience-awareness, freewriting, metalanguage, graphics and design, music, and sound) to create messages that promote wellness.

<div align="center">*     *     *</div>

*Meaning is not 'already there,' waiting for you—complete, defined, clear. Rather, you must create it for yourself, from part-to-whole, from whole-to-part.*

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Below are the main course requirements. Note that they assume consistent attendance and thoughtful participation in class activities.

1.  **Final *Collage* Project.** Using Peter Elbow's chapter, "Your Cheatin' Art... as a guide, assemble *all of the weekly assignments* into a "collage" project. This project will likely consist of two closely-related parts: a visual- media component and a written component. Your collage project should be titled (thematically or in terms of your "conclusion" about the total pieces). Your main goal should be to make as many connections as you can: a) between the verbal and visual messages—those that were created together, as well as those from different assignments; between your verbal and visual messages and the theories and research read in class; c) between your verbal and visual messages and professional teaching standards. An appendix should include all "process" materials, such as notes, prewritings, revisions, etc. Another appendix should consist of a writing explaining what you believe to be your 3-4 strongest pieces, with an explanation of how they fulfill the rubric for the weekly assignments.

    **NOTES  RE: WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:**  1) These 10 assignments will be given to you *one group at a time, each group consisting of three assignments*; 2) As these are composed over the semester, they will be collected and some pieces selected for sharing with the entire class, with author's names removed (optional). Nonetheless, please indicate on each piece if you would NOT like it shared with the class**.**

    3) Please include the following brief information on the back of each paper or on a separate paper: A) What is the issue in this piece; B) What did you think/believe/feel before completing this piece? C) What did you think/believe/feel after finishing this piece? D) On a scale of 1-10, with ten representing "significant change," and one representing "absolutely no change," indicate the extent of this change overall. If no change, please explain or speculate why.**50%**

2.  **Mini-Case Study.** This project should focus on 1-2 writers who employ writing (sometimes along with literature and media) as a way of healing. This person, preferably of student age, should complete *any two* of the brief assignments that you have completed in this course. For this report, complete these tasks: 1) **Interview** the writer about her or his experiences of completing the brief assignments, preferably after both are finished, and some time has elapsed. Ask the writer, which was most beneficial to her? Why? Which were least beneficial? Why? 2) **Compare and contrast** your writer's responses and written pieces to your own; and 3) **Analyze and *c*onnect** the most important information in #1 and #2 above to the course readings and other information from your instructor.

**Note:** You have the option of turning in a draft of this project well before its final due date (see schedule). Encourage your "subject" to dialogue with you on the course web site or through email, as well as through some face-to-face meetings, if at all possible.

*Be sure to save all writings, drafts, prewritings, notes, email correspondence, tapes, transcripts, etc.;* these should be placed into an appendix. Suggested length: 5-7 double-spaced pages. **30%**

3. ***Active* Participation in Socratic Seminars focused on assigned readings.** These discussions will often begin with a brief, informal writing over the readings (e.g., your response to 2-4 questions re: the assigned readings). They will often be evaluated with a check-plus, check, or check-minus. Each team of 2 members will have a turn in leading discussion, responding to and evaluating the discussion and writings, and returning them the following week for my review, before I return them to their authors**.** See the web or Blackboard site for additional information on Socratic Seminars. **20%**


**REQUIRED ARTICLES & CHAPTERS:**

Many of these will be available on the MU ERES system.

1. "Introduction" to *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Anderson & McCurdy(eds.), 2000.
2. "Suture, Stigma, and the Pages that Heal." Anderson, Holt, McGady. In *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Anderson & McCurdy(eds.), 2000.
3. "All Writing is Autobiography." Donald M. Murray.
4. "From Secrecy to Psychopathology." Wegner & Lane.
5. "The Other Side of Darkness: The Comedy in Chaos." In *Pain and Possibility…* Rico, 1991.
6. "A Personal View…: Four Cases of Student Depression." In *Student Depression: A Silent Crisis in Our Schools and Communities.* Lebrun, 2007.
7. "The Power of the Narrative: A Multiple Code Account." Bucci.
8. "The Place of Poetry Therapy in Psychology: Historical and Theoretical Foundations." Mazza. 2003.
9. "Metaphor and Therapy." In *Healing with Stories: Your Casebook Collection for Using Therapeutic Metaphors*. Burns (ed.), 2007.
10. "What Is *Changing Lives Through Literature*?"; "Can We Change Lives?"; "Where Does Literacy Fit In, and What Does Gender Have to Do with It?" and "CLTL Teaching Strategies" in *Finding a Voice…*

11. "A Strange Unaccountable Something: Historicizing Sexual Abuse Essays."
    Michelle Payne, in *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Anderson
    & McCurdy(eds.), 2000.
12. *Selections from Words and What They Do To You (Minteer) and from Language in
    Thought and Action (Hayakawa).*
13. "The Parallel Chart." In *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness.* Rita
    Charon, 2006.
14. "Pain Management." From *Etcetera: A Journal of General Semantics.* Russell.
15. "Burning Olivier." From *Harper's Magazine.* Foy
16. Excerpt from *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.* Csikszentmihalyi.
17. "Dog Day Literacy." From *English Education.* Fox.
18. "Your Cheatin' Art." From *Everyone Can Write.* Elbow


**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

*Note: Please be alert for any changes. When we don't have time to sufficiently discuss
some readings in class, I _may_ ask you to respond on the "Discussion Board" of the
course web site. These entries should be posted no later than 5 pm on the Friday
following their assignment in class on Tuesday night. Also note that underlined parts of
the following schedule denote writing due dates, responding to writing, etc.*

***JANUARY 19:***
   ❑ Introductions; overview of course; review of syllabus.
   ❑ Why academic work should *also* enhance wellness (ppt.)
   ❑ Brainstorm (p. 117, DeSalvo) 30 potential ideas for narrative and turn in
     (anonymous) before you leave.

***JANUARY 26:***
   ❑ Discuss "Introduction" to *Writing & Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*
     (Anderson and MacCurdy)
   ❑ Discuss "Suture, Stigma, and the Pages that Heal" in *Writing and Healing*
     (Anderson and MacCurdy)
   ❑ Discuss guidelines for small response groups.
   ❑ BEGIN PAPER #1 IN CLASS; BRING A HAND MIRROR WITH YOU.
   ❑ Briefly review some proposed topics for narratives.
   ❑ Why process and fluency are basic to WAH and academic writing; why Expressive
     Language is the matrix for all other forms of language/thinking

***FEBRUARY 2:***
- ❑ Discuss Chapters 1-4 (pp. 3-69) in *Writing as a Way of Healing* (DeSalvo)
- ❑ Parallels between Academic Writing and writing as healing, including state and professional standards.
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER  # 1; bring copies.</u>

**FEBRUARY 9:**
- ❑ Discuss Chapters 5-8 (pp. 69-178) in *Writing as a Way of Healing* (DeSalvo).
- ❑ <u>BEGIN PAPER # 2 in class!</u>(GRAs rule; Fox in Minnesota.*)*

FEBRUARY 16:
- ❑ Discuss Chapters 10-Epilogue (pp. 178-216) in *Writing as a Way of Healing* (DeSalvo)and "Dog Day Literacy" (Fox).
- ❑ <u>Large group response to selected anonymous narrative.</u>
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER  # 2, started in class, 2/9; bring copies.</u>

FEBRUARY 23:
- ❑ Discuss "Pain Management."
- ❑ Explore some Basic Principles of General Semantics: discuss excerpts from *Words and What They Do To You* (Minteer; on reserve) and excerpt from *Language in Thought and Action* (Hayakawa; on reserve).
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER  # 3; bring copies.</u>

MARCH 2:
- ❑ Discuss "The Power of the Narrative: A Multiple Code Account" (Bucci).
- ❑ <u>Continue response to selected anonymous papers.</u>
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER  # 4; bring copies.</u>

MARCH 9:
- ❑ Discuss "Burning Olivier: The Brief Private Burial of an Infant Son" (Foy).
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER  # 5; bring copies.</u>

***MARCH 16:***
- ❑ Discuss "A Strange Unaccountable Something: Historicizing Sexual Abuse Essays" (Payne in Anderson & MacCurdy).
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER  # 6; bring copies.</u>

***MARCH 23:***
- ❑ Discuss *"A Personal View…: Four Cases of Student Depression." In Student Depression: A Silent Crisis in Our Schools and Communities. Lebrun, 2007.*
- ❑ <u>CATCH UP ON SMALL GROUP RESPONSES TO PAPERS 1-6 if needed!</u>
- ❑ <u>Meet with small groups and/or GRAs re: Mini Case Study due 4-6.</u> GRAs rule. Fox leaves for TESOL Conference.

MARCH 27 – APRIL 5:  SPRING BREAK

APRIL 6:
- ❑ Discuss Chapters 1-3 and Chapter 10 in *Finding a Voice…:* ("What Is *Changing Lives Through Literature*?"; "Can We Change Lives?"; "Where Does Literacy Fit In, and What Does Gender Have to Do with It?" and "CLTL Teaching Strategies").
- ❑ <u>OPTIONAL: Turn in Mini Case Study--as "finished" as possible--for instructor feedback.</u>

***APRIL 13:***
- ❑ Discuss "The Place of Poetry Therapy in Psychology: Historical and Theoretical Foundations." In *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice.* Mazza, 2003.
- ❑ Discuss "Metaphor and Therapy." In *Healing with Stories: Your Casebook Collection for Using Therapeutic Metaphors*. Burns (ed.), 2007.
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER  # 7; bring copies.</u>

APRIL 20:
- ❑ Discuss "All Writing is Autobiography" by Donald Murray.
- ❑ Discuss "Your Cheatin' Art:" by P. Elbow, to assist you with Collage Projects.
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER  # 8; bring copies.</u>

***APRIL 27:***
- ❑ Complete course evaluations.
- ❑ Individual conferences with instructor.
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER # 9; bring copies.</u>

MAY 4:
- ❑ Informal oral reports on case studies and/or Collage Projects.
- ❑ <u>SMALL GROUP RESPONSE TO PAPER  # 10; bring copies.</u>

MAY 11:
- ❑ Read aloud and discuss one assignment in large group—your "best" or favorite one, for some reason.
- ❑ **Turn in polished draft of one writing-image(s) for Class Anthology, along with biographical paragraph and brief explanation of WHY you chose this piece**. Bring copies for everyone in class. I will have cover page, Contents page, etc. We will assemble them before we leave!
- ❑ **Turn in Collage Project and Final Mini Case Study.**


**APPENDIX A:**

**Basic Components or "Pre-Conditions"**
**for Composing Therapeutic Language, Literature, & Media**


- Trust in audience (depends upon feedback processes)

- Fluency (eye, hand, brain coordination; increase wpm via consistent practice)

- Thinking / Feeling

- Objectivity & Toughness

- Positive (includes humor) / Negative

- Rationale (includes clarifying connections for students between therapeutic assignments and academic writing, work)

- Emphasis on writing process, especially invention, fluency, revision, and reformulation

- Flow experiences

- Imagery

- Voice / Tone

- Organization and Form

- Framing / Naming (via imagining, objectifying, & reformulating)

- Expressive Language / Thinking

- Eventually externalizing the products through publication, performance, and/or public recognition

## APPENDIX B

## Rubric for Weekly Assignments

The following questions should assist you in responding to the therapeutic uses of written language by your colleagues, your students, and professional writers. ***Of course, not every completed assignment can demonstrate <u>all</u> of these qualities***. The criteria come from DeSalvo, your instructor, and other sources.

TOPIC:

1. Has the writer selected a topic that troubles, confuses, pains, or puzzles her (DeSalvo and Fox (Key image(s))?

2. Do you believe the writer may need professional support for writing about this topic (see DeSalvo, p. 161, 176)?

STRUCTURE, FORM:

1. Overall, do major sections or chunks of the narrative proceed from 1) physical sensations, to 2) a narrative of the events/sensations, to 3) distanced reflection of the sensations and events?

2. Does the wrier employ a clear form and sequence—one that reinforces a theme or meaning and not a mere chronology of events?

   a. Does the writer use subheadings?
   b. If so, which type of subheadings are most appropriate—those that refer to internal meaning (e.g., "The Rat Takes the Cheese") or those that employ external reference, such as "The Problem" and "The Solution"?
   c. Are the subheadings logical and parallel in form?
   d. Does the writer use transitions that refer to meaning?
   e. Does the writer use effective, brief subtitles and captions with images?

3.  Are feelings in the piece clearly connected to *events?*

4.  Does the writer often *connect* "then" with "now"?

5.  Are there any gaps in the writer's story? i.e., will readers become distracted because they are wondering about something omitted?

6.  If the writer does not want to write about an event, does she instead write about her choice not to write about it—why she cannot or will not? (DeSalvo, p. 169).

7.  What type of narrative would you label this one—the Chaos Narrative? The Restitution or Recovery Narrative? The Quest Narrative? Or some other type?

TONE, VOICE:

8.  Does the piece avoid "moaning and groaning" or too much telling and instead rely upon *showing*?

9.  Does the writer clearly *distinguish* between then and now, so that readers are not confused about what happened, when?

10. Does the writer use "the right words"—those that are precise, sharp, and economical? (This can include a brief explanation of why other words are rejected.)

11. Does the writer use visual, sound, and/or musical elements that are "right" for the message—that reinforce the message and not distract from it?

12. Does the writer inject some "balance" and "distance" into the piece by effectively using humor, verbally or visually?

13.  Does the writer use dialogue to create a sense of immediacy for important scenes, to sharpen contrast between then and now?

14. Does the writer use imagery, including "originating" and key images, in different forms—visuals, figurative language, metaphors, similes, detailed description focused on all senses, etc. (e.g., p. 141 DeSalvo).

15. Does the writer use "negative emotion words, images, etc." <u>and</u> "positive emotion words, images, etc."?

EVIDENCE, CONNECTIONS, & ANALYSIS:

16. Is the situation appropriately contextualized? Do readers know the larger picture (personal/local/regional/national/universal/natural)?

17. When appropriate, does the writer include some external or factual information (or secondary sources) to "ground" or augment the internal and subjective information?

18. Does the writer analyze some of her own and others' language and imagery by using principles of General Semantics (e.g., the uses of generalities and abstractions, the uses of concrete language that is "closer to reality," the either/or fallacy, the Is of Identity, and the map/territory analogy)?

19. When appropriate, does the writer explore issues by applying some principles from Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*?

20. Are contradictions and tensions adequately resolved within the piece? By the end of the narrative, is seemingly unrelated material brought together to make a kind of new sense?

21.  Does the writer communicate, in whatever form, what X looks like from the outside *and* what it feels like from the inside (p. 185, DeSalvo)?

**APPENDIX C:**

**Rubric for Analyzing &Reflecting on Weekly Assignments**

Consider these criteria when responding to assignments that request you to "explain, analyze, and reflect" on your work (which you will also apply to your colleagues' work).

1.  What stage of the verbal/visual composing process are you now involved in? Are your actions appropriate for this stage?

2.  What "healing benefits" do you think *might occur* when you finish this assignment?

3.  Are you working on two or more pieces simultaneously? How does one affect the other?

4. Are you following your instincts or intuition during this work? If not, why not?

5. If you don't have a clear idea of what you want to do, are you constructing and composing anyway and trusting yourself? If not, why not?

6. What kind of overall tone or "atmosphere" do you want your product to convey?

7. Are you seeking and/or following any strong images associated with your topic, even if you have no idea what they "mean" now? Especially important are "originating images" (DeSalvo, p. 126-132 and Fox, "Mental Imagery and Writing"). If not, why not?

8. This type of "process writing" should include many of the qualities described on the handout, "Characteristics of Expressive Language," such as repetition, language that qualifies statements, expressions of doubt, hypothesizing, etc.

**APPENDIX D:**

***Guidelines for Responding to Assignments in Small Groups***

***The following guidelines are adapted from DeSalvo's* Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives *(1999), pp. 210-212. Use these guidelines in addition to more generic ones often used in classrooms.***

Whomever we share our work with, while it's in process, we expect to be empathic.

Vicious criticism reinforces the writer's deep-seated fear that the story shouldn't be told, that the story isn't important, that the story won't be believed. Vicious criticism can silence stories that must be told.

We can suggest that our listeners not tell us whether they like our work or they don't, for whether they like it or not can't help us heal. It is impossible to "like" important survival narratives that nonetheless must be told. . . . We can say, "As you read, please tell me what you don't understand."

1. Act as a caring presence to enable the writer to really hear what he or she has composed. As we read our words aloud and/or view the assignment, we often immediately know what else we need to do and what we need to change. Jot these ideas down quickly.

2.  Reflect back to the writer what she has composed—Peter Elbow calls this sharing "movies of your mind"—replaying exactly what happened as you heard the words and experience other symbols.

3.  Tell the writer what you like *in the work* or what is effective *for you*—this is different from telling the writer that you do or don't like the work as a whole. When we learn—specifically—what makes our readers respond positively, we can make more accurate judgments about our work.

4.  Work hard to help the writer achieve balance in all things—between positive and negative observations, between what happened and the current situation, between emotion and rationality, between subjectivity and objectivity.

5.  Tell the writer when you perceive "holes" or gaps in the message—those places where the writer is so close to the story that he doesn't realize readers and viewers cannot possibly understand something. Example: After a student read a piece describing her brother's violence, a listener asked, "Where were your parents while this was happening?" In time, the writer discovered this was the most significant, unanswered question in her narrative and in her life.

6.  Tell the writer where you would like to hear more. Writers whose voices have traditionally been silenced usually don't take much time in telling them. What merits many pagers is often described in a paragraph or two. Barry Lane advises "exploding a moment."

7.  Tell the writer about what you've observed about how she has survived—her victories, defeats, struggles. Focus on what you think the benefits of her reading and writing have been.

8.  Help the writer to see the patterns in his narrative and in his life. Help him to see the images and metaphors he uses, the form he's chosen to construct reality, since he may not yet "see" the connections among ideas, people, and places that you do.

9.  Act as a caring presence to enable the writer to really hear what he or she has written. As we read aloud our words aloud, we often immediately know what else we need to write and what we need to change. Jot these ideas down quickly.

10. Reflect back to the writer what she has written—Peter Elbow calls this sharing "movies of your mind"—replaying exactly what happened as you heard the words.

11. Tell the writer what you like *in the work* or what works *for you*—this is different from telling the writer that you do or don't like the work as a whole. When we learn—specifically—what makes our readers respond positively, we can make more accurate judgments about our work.

12. Tell the writer when you perceive "holes" or gaps in the narrative—those places where the writer is so close to the story that he doesn't realize readers cannot possibly understand something. Example: After a student read a piece describing her brother's violence, a listener asked, "Where were your parents while this was happening?" In time, the writer discovered this was the most significant, unanswered question in her narrative and in her life.

13. Tell the writer where you would like to hear more. Writers whose voices have traditionally been silenced usually don't take much time in telling them. What merits many pagers is often described in a paragraph or two. Barry Lane advises "exploding a moment."

14. Tell the writer about what you've observed about how she has survived—her victories, defeats, struggles. Focus on what you think the benefits of her reading and writing have been.

15. Help the writer to see the patterns in his narrative and in his life. Help him to see the images and metaphors he uses, the form he's chosen to construct reality, since he may not yet "see" the connections among ideas, people, and places that you do.

## APPENDIX E:

### Recommended Readings

In addition to Sections I-III below, please note the extensive lists of readings in the required books for this class!

I.     <u>Books & Articles:</u>

- *Pain and Possibility: Writing Your Way Through Personal Crisis*. Gabrielle Rico, 1991.
- *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with End-of-Life Issues* Janet Allen
- *Emotion, Disclosure, and Health*. Pennebaker (ed). 2002.

- *Bodily Discourses*: *When Students Write about Abuse and Eating Disorders*. Payne, 2000.
- *The Courage to Heal*: *A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*. Bass and Davis, 1994.
- *Presence of Mind*: *Writing and the Domain Beyond the Cognitive*. Brand and Graves, 1994.
- *Emotional Intelligence*. Goleman
- *Now and at the Hour*. Cormier
- *UpDrafts: Case Studies in Teacher Renewal*. Fox (ed.). 2001.
- *Stigma*: *Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.* Goffmann.
- *Presence of Mind*: *Writing and the Domain Beyond the Cognitive.* Brand and Graves (eds.).
- *Risky Writing*: *Self-Disclosure and Self-Transformation in the Classroom*. Berman.
- *Notes from the Heart: Affective Issues in the Writing Classroom*. McLeod.
- *Wrestling with the Angel: A Memoir of My Triumph over Illness*. Max Lerner
- *Darkness Visible*: *A Memoir of Madness*. William Styron
- *Writing Well*: *Creative Writing and Mental Health*. Phillips and Penman
- *Writing as Therapy*: *Motivational Activities for the Developmentally Delayed*. Stamatelos
- "Crossing Lines." Delentiner. *College English,* 54.7 (1992)
- *The Psychology of Writing*: *The Affective Experience*. Brand
- *Writing AIDS*: *Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis*. Ed. by Murphy and Poirier.
- *It's Never About What It's About: What We Learned about Living while Waiting to Die*. Kraus
- *Mind*: *An Essay on Human Feeling*. Langer

II.    <u>Journals and Web Sites:</u>

- *Poetry as Therapy* – [http://www.spcsb.org/advoc/poetrytx.html](http://www.spcsb.org/advoc/poetrytx.html)
- *A Brief Overview of Poetry as Therapy* – [http://www.poetrytherapy.org/articles/pt.htm](http://www.poetrytherapy.org/articles/pt.htm)
- *Poetry Therapy* – [http://www.mickleigh.com/Poetry-Therapy.asp](http://www.mickleigh.com/Poetry-Therapy.asp)
- *Arts as a Force of Healing, Building, and Empowerment* – http://www.artslynx.org/heal
- JAMA, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, [http://jama.ama.org/issues](http://jama.ama.org/issues)
- *Literature, Arts, and Medicine*  --  http://www.endeavor.med.nyu.edu
- *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*
- *Native American Healing Methods* – [http://www.thebody.com/wa/spring98/native.html](http://www.thebody.com/wa/spring98/native.html)

- *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability and Life Writing by G. Thomas Cousser* – http://brownalumnimagazine.com/story
- *Kathleen Adams Web Site* – http://www.journaltherapy.com/kathleen_adams.htm
- AIDS Community Research Initiative of America – http://www.criany.org/treatment_edu_summerupdate1999_resources.html
- *How Creativity Heals* – http://www.kporterfield.com/healing/Healing_Index.html

III.    <u>*Resilience*</u> <u>Sources:</u>

- This 6-page document was compiled by the McGrath, Satterlee, et al., of the Louisville Writing Project of the National Writing Project. See http://writingproject.org.

- For additional sources, please see *Resiliency in Schools: Making It Happen for Students and Educators*, by Henderson, Milstein, and Parker. Full text is available at http://books.google.com/books.

*Professional Standards:* This course follows the standards and criteria set forth by the National Council Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

*Special Needs*:  If you need accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform me immediately. Please see me privately after class, or at my office.


**WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS # 1 -- # 3:**

Please note that you will receive the weekly assignments in groups of 3-4 each. Also, please be alert for any changes.


**ASSIGNMENTS**
**Teaching Therapeutic Language, Literature, and Media**
R. Fox
University of Missouri – Spring 2010

*Note: Suggested length for written parts is 1page single-spaced or 2-3 pages double-spaced. Most or all papers should be shared in small groups. When you are asked to focus on "issues" in these assignments, it means the single issue re: "healing" you are using consistently—or, it can mean another such issue you want to "try out" for this particular assignment. Most assignments require PPT and images and manipulation. You may choose to add music, sound effects, etc.*

Note that certain elements of these assignments cannot be "given away" to you prematurely, though we will certainly discuss why at a future class meeting!

1. <u>The Mirror.</u> Please bring a hand mirror with you to class. We will do much of the assignment in class.

2. <u>Fixing the Photo.</u> See the example presented in class. Select a photo that is in some way related to your issue. The photo should include people and/or places that represent a relationship(s). Scan this photo into your computer and use Photoshop or other program to *manipulate it and change it* in a variety of ways (adding, subtracting, substituting, altering color, background, etc.). You can even draw on the electronic photo. Place the original photo and your altered photo into a PPT, along with your analysis and explanation of each photo re: why you chose the original and why you made the changes you did, especially, how and why does the photo better represent your perception? Include a brief reflection on both photos and the whole experience.

3. <u>Drawing Pictures & Words.</u> Completed in class. On a long sheet of butcher paper unrolled in class on the floor, find a place with plenty of room between you and others. Use markers and crayons to draw whatever images come to mind, especially those related to your issue. You should submit a reflection piece on this activity 4-5 days after completing it.

**APPENDIX C**
**ASSIGNMENTS**
**Teaching Therapeutic Language, Literature, and Media**
R. Fox
Spring 2010

*Note: These assignments will be "reeled out" as we get to them, pretty much in this order. Suggested length for written parts is one page, single-spaced or 1.5 spaces. Most or all papers should be shared in small groups. When students are directed to focus on "issues" in these assignments, it means the single issue re: "healing" they are using consistently—or, it can mean another such issue they want to "try out" for this particular assignment. Most assignments require PPT and images and manipulation. Students may choose to add music, sound effects, etc.*

1. <u>The Mirror.</u> At home (or in class; bring a hand mirror), for 15 minutes you should stare at yourself in the mirror. Do not look away from the mirror, except to make notes on what you are seeing, thinking, and feeling. When the music stops, you should stop. Next, write up your notes into a good paragraph or page. Next, count the total number of positive or benign comments or words; do the same for the negative comments or words. Finally, write a reflection on the whole experience. (Thanks to Dr. Sut Jhally for this idea.)

2. <u>Synesthesia.</u> Completed in class. On a long sheet of butcher paper unrolled in class on the floor, find a place with plenty of room between you and others. Use markers and crayons to draw whatever images come to mind, especially those related to your issue. You will hear music in the background, as you are sketching. It will switch about half-way through. The initial music for about 20 minutes will be "sad" or "bleak" such as portions of Verdi's *The Requiem.* The second portion of music will be upbeat and lively, such as a Benny Coleman saxophone piece or the Beatles' *Here Comes the Sun.* You should submit a reflection piece on this activity 4-5 days after completing it.

3. <u>Fixing the Photo.</u> See the example presented in class. Select a photo that is in some way related to your issue. The photo should include people and/or places that represent a relationship(s). Scan this photo into your computer and use Photoshop or other program to *manipulate it and change it* in a variety of ways (think adding, subtracting, substituting, altering color, background, etc.). You can even draw on the electronic photo. Place the original photo and your altered photo into a PPT, along with your analysis and explanation of each photo re: why you chose the original and why you made the changes you did, especially, how and why does the photo better represent your perception? Include a brief reflection on both photos and the whole experience.

4. <u>Imagining Mama, Part I</u>. Read the assigned chapter from Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,* recounting her childhood visit to Dentist Lincoln. First, write an objective, detailed narrative of your issue, no more than two pages. Exclude all thoughts, feelings, or any other subjective "colorings" of the event. That is, write of yourself in 3<sup>rd</sup> person, as if you are an objective reporter. Second, select 8-10 key images (created or found) to visually communicate your narrative. On each PPT. visual, place 1-3 key sentences from your narrative, to further help tell your story.

5. <u>Imagining Mama, Part II.</u> Change the ending of your written narrative and PPT narrative, so that the story ends in a neutral or positive manner, just as Angelou imagined a different response from Mama to Dentist Lincoln.

6. <u>Your Objectivity Plus Their Objectivity.</u> Return to your objective narrative from the Angelou assignment ("Angelou Imagining Mama, Part I"). Select 3, key quotes from this paper, and place them in the left-hand column of a page or screen (the page or screen should have a vertical line down the middle). Next, do some research on the topic of each of these key quotes, and select direct quotes to place into the right-hand column. These quotes must be data-driven information or "hard evidence" from experts that place your own quote into a larger or different context—or even refutes or disproves your quote; consider time and space factors. That is, try to refute your own quote in some way. If you are unable to do so, you may instead list *all possible factors entering into this situation and assign a percentage of influence to each.*

7. <u>Entrance into Another World.</u> Follow the written directions given in class, "Entrance into Another World Paper Guidelines." You will also hear or read an example in class. In short, you will "enter," in detail, a portion of a world different from yours. You will write about it in the present tense, as if you are there. You may choose to carry this world to absurd extremes. Because you are limited to two pages, you must be highly selective by focusing on a limited part of this other world. *The world you select should be somehow related to your issue, directly or indirectly*. You should also create a PPT (captions or other language optional) that visually depicts this other world. Use created or found images from popular media culture, etc. Note: You <u>may</u> find it easier to begin with the visual part.

8.  <u>The Monster and the Angel</u>. Following basic directions of a lesson (given in class) used by Leah, list all of your "monsters"—major issues that severely depress and frustrate you—or, you can use the list created on the first night of class. Next, select one of these and write a letter to this "monster" OR write a poem for this monster. Next, create or find an image of the monster you wrote to, and place it into a PPT slide. Then, take the image of the monster apart, piece by piece, and reassemble it to depict your new "angel"—or some other creature that is far more benign than your original critter. Physically and actually take apart the pieces and re-arrange them into something more friendly and positive. Finally, write a piece that explains, analyzes, and reflects on this experience.

9.  <u>All Issues Great & Small.</u> a) Create or find the absolute *single image* of your issue. Feel free to enhance it if you like, to make it as evil or scary as you think it should be; place it into a PPT slide so that it fills the entire space. b) Create or find 5 images that somehow represent the *best* elements in your life, past and/or present; place all 5 of these positive elements onto a single slide. c) Again on a single slide, place all 6 images, good and bad, but be sure that the *negative image is far larger* than the 5 positive ones. d) Place all 6 images onto a single slide (the 5 positive and the 1 negative image), making them *all the same size* and necessarily smaller; you may choose to place a photo or other representation of yourself in the center of the slide, with the 6 smaller images "orbiting" around it. e) Again on a single slide, make each of the 6 slides a different size: the most positive image should be largest; the second most positive should be the next-to-largest, and on down. Include and present the negative image in any way that you wish. f) Finally, several days later, write your analysis-reflection on the whole experience, highlighting why you chose these images and what happened as you went from slide to slide.

10. <u>Conversation across Time.</u> Create a conversation, dialogue, or Q&A session between the current you—and the you of 25-30 years from now. Label the speakers (e.g., "Me Now" and "Me Older"). Limit this dialogue to no more than 2 pages. Place all or selected portions onto PPT slides, that show a visual rendering of each of you on each slide containing bits of conversation. The slides need not be the same ones repeated (though that's fine). Finally, write a 1-page analysis-reflection on this experience.

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VITA

Rebecca Dierking is a life-long Missourian.  Born in Cameron, Missouri, she has lived in nearly ten different communities in the state.  The daughter of a Methodist minister and a homemaker, Rebecca entered education as a profession after working for several newspapers in central Missouri, both in the news and advertising departments. She taught for eight years in northwest Missouri before coming to Columbia and beginning her doctoral program.  She graduated with a Ph.D. in Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum (English Education, emphasis) in May 2012 and accepted a teaching position at Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri, that fall.

Rebecca's interest in how people use writing to understand and move beyond trauma results from when she used writing to deal with her father's deterioration from Alzheimer's Disease. She also witnessed writing's healing influence in her high school students' use of poetry and narrative to understand the daily hurts associated with being a teenager as well as the life-altering traumas of family illness and other issues.