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with acknowledgment to Larry Johnson

A Mingling of Voices Tracing the Development of Beginning Teachers Through Dialogue Journals

November 6

Dear Students of Fourth Hour College Comp,

As you've probably guessed by now, teaching this class has been one of the greatest challenges of my student teaching experience. I came to class in September with eight years (and more) of wrestling with words under my belt; I had a deep understanding of how difficult writing can be, and how even the driest of research papers must be intimately tied to your soul and sense of self in order for it to really work. But I was entirely unprepared for how painful it would be to push others through the process of learning to write. Your frustration (expressed in so many ways—bitterness, complaining, anger, silent fuming and others) caught me by surprise. But now, looking back, I can really understand its roots.

When we write, we identify who we are with what appears on the page. We turn in any essay with the attitude, "This is all I've got; all the words that were inside of me are spilled out onto the pages and my writing reservoir is all dried up." Because we think that's all we've got, we also like to think it's engraved in stone—the be-all and end-all of our self-expression. "This is my gut," we think. "How can there possibly be anything more?"

But for those of us learning to write (meaning everyone), what appears on the page at first is just a glimpse of what we've got inside. To be told it's not good enough is crushing, but it's the truth: Our individual possibilities are endless, and the only way to get closer to our potential is through endless writing and rewriting. If writing is, as I see it, an aid to us in the process of discovering what we are about as human beings, then our struggle with writing is also our struggle with self-understanding. And, painful as it is, that makes writing a worthwhile struggle.

So, in retrospect, the mess of frustration and fury that we have all experienced in this class makes perfect sense. Because of the nature of writing, we have brought the complexities of our individual lives right into the classroom. But I believe that we have all benefited from this struggle. Although it might not be obvious to you yet (especially since grades are not always a good reflection of growth), your writing has matured over the last ten weeks. You are each beginning to discover your own voice, and that's a big step. As for myself, I'd like to quote from the journal that Mrs. Gaustad and I have been keeping, in order to give you a sense of what I feel I have gained.

Despite all my agonizing, this class has given me a tremendous amount; it has given me a struggle, and you can only learn with a struggle. I remember you telling me, Sue, that your most difficult classes turned out to be the most rewarding

in the end. I interpreted "rewarding" to mean "successful," and was skeptical of that happening in College Comp. But in terms of what I will carry with me when I leave College Comp, yes, it has been rewarding—all my floundering, mistakes and triumphs make up my reward.

You have forced me to wrestle with writing and the way writing is usually taught in high schools (which is a far cry from what is expected in colleges). You have challenged me to reconsider why I value all aspects of writing, from the smallest bit of gender inclusive language or correctly spelled word to the underlying structure which gives an essay its shape. But, most importantly you have forced me to see the humanity behind all the writing, and, in doing so, have set me on the path toward becoming a better writing teacher. Like you, I am going to have to revise and revise until I get it right. Thank you for pointing me in the right direction.

My last assignment for you is twofold. First, I would like you to put your thoughts about this class into a page (or more) of writing. Respond to this letter: What has worked for you in College Comp? What have you struggled with? What have you learned? I'd especially appreciate hearing your opinion of my strengths and weaknesses as a writing teacher. What recommendations would you have me consider before I teach my next college writing class? Which of the activities I assigned were most helpful to you? What was a waste of time? I will save these letters until I have said good-bye to Red Wing (that is, long after I turn in your grades!), so feel free to be honest.

Lastly, continue to struggle with your writing. I know Mrs. Gaustad will present you with many more challenges before the semester is up, but I am certain you can meet those challenges—with a lot of stress and sweat. I can promise you this: It will pay off in the end, if not before.

Best of all luck,

Ms. Andrew

P.S. I wrote the introduction to this letter last!!

Introduction

Toward the end of her student teaching experience at Red Wing High School in Red Wing, Minnesota, Elizabeth Andrew distributed this letter to her advanced writing class called "College Composition," which was designed for college bound seniors. For ten weeks the students in the class had challenged Elizabeth in the relentless and sometimes cruel way that student teachers are often challenged. In her letter, Elizabeth reveals that her commitment to both writing and teaching writing to adolescents triumphed over the daily obstacles of classroom management. She also demonstrates how far she had traveled on that difficult journey from college student, to student teacher, to teacher.

Not insignificantly, in her letter to her students Elizabeth quotes from a journal she kept during her student teacher experience. It was a dialogue journal—a "trialogue" journal really—that Elizabeth exchanged with her two cooperating teachers, Susan Gaustad and Larry Johnson. Guided by the beliefs that writing teachers should be writers themselves and that journals provide, for both adolescents and adults, a powerful means to record, analyze and interpret experience, Elizabeth and her two supervising teachers exchanged an unpretentious black spiral notebook

throughout her ten weeks at Red Wing High School, until it was faded and worn on the outside and filled on the inside with questions, advice, descriptions of class hours and individual students, and teaching philosophies. More importantly for us today, it provides a record, written by eye-witnesses and participants, of Elizabeth's remarkable journey from student to teacher.

What follows are some excerpts from that journal as well as some of our retrospective comments. We believe that while much of what is chronicled is, of course, unique to Elizabeth's particular student teaching experience, many of her doubts, fears, milestones, and accomplishments are relevant to all of those who take part in the development of future teachers. To maintain the conversation that was begun in the journals, we present here our voices. We have combined the voices of the two supervising high school teachers, Larry Johnson and Sue Gaustad and the university supervisor, Deborah Appleman. We have kept Elizabeth's voice and perspective distinct and note the change in voice with a change in typeface. Excerpts from the journal are framed and italicized.

The Journal

More than simply a chronicle of a student teaching experience, this is also a story of journal-keeping. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle point out, journals can "become pivotal to our work in classrooms." Cochran-Smith and Lytle found that journals can link teachers to other teachers, to students, and to curriculum decision making. We found that the journal linked us during Elizabeth's student teaching, ensuring continuing connections and conversations between too-busy teachers who have little time to talk together. The journal also gave each of us an opportunity to reflect on that experience as it was occurring.

After a few weeks of talking before school, between classes, and after school, Elizabeth, Larry and Sue found it more and more difficult to find time to discuss Elizabeth's student teaching experience. On an especially busy morning when Larry, Elizabeth, and Sue keenly felt the restraint of no time for talk, Sue pulled an empty small black-covered notebook out of her desk drawer. She suggested that the three of them keep journal of questions, concerns, and information. The black notebook became their journal, town square, and meeting ground. The journal held and still holds the voices of three particular teachers speaking to each other and to those who open its pages.

Elizabeth: Now, when I read back through the pages of our journal, I see a messy chronicle of an even messier process. I remember my first excitement over that empty black notebook, because I knew as soon as Susan dug it out of her desk it would be a rich forum for a dialogue. While my teaching voice was still developing and new, my writing voice had been practiced my entire life; I knew I could use it comfortably with Larry and Sue, who otherwise intimidated me with their teaching

experience. The first week I was so thrilled with our lively, three-way discussion that I showed up at Deborah's student-teaching seminar bursting at the seams. I recognized that the journal could provide any new teacher with a place for reflection on the evolution from student to teacher and wanted to share that experience. Little did I know that four years later I would still be returning to that same journal for insights into this mysterious process.

The journal facilitated reflection for Sue and Larry as well. They heard their own voices, long-ago young-teacher voices, in hers. They saw that my questions invited them to question and discuss and "think aloud" in the paradoxical safety and freedom of the journal pages. It became a true conversation, since they were not only addressing me but each other as well.

What follows is a characteristic exchange:

September 19

Elizabeth: We definitely need a map in this classroom, or even better, a large globe. These kids are really opening up to the idea of reading a variety of authors from around the world—they're very curious. And if we can teach them a little geography, a little population and statistics, a little history, etc. on the way, all the better.

Sue: After reading "The Censors" today (finally) one of my questions is how, especially in a world literature class, to open up the kids' understanding of other cultures. For instance, how can these kids begin to understand the historical and cultural base these characters and authors emerge from? Short of taking a quick field trip to Argentina or Venezuela, what are the options? In short, how can this powerful literature be made meaningful to the kids?

Larry: May I? Sue, this world lit. is a good follow-up to our Braided Lives anthology—and it should make the multicultural/gender fair folks in the administration happy. Oh, how we continue to change/grow!—I like it; Elizabeth is a great conduit for us.

This early exchange, one of the first full three-way conversations that appear in the journal, exemplifies the character of the dialogue in several ways. All three teachers are keenly focused on the student's learning experience. Even this early into her student teaching experience, Elizabeth was able to look beyond her own anxiety to the larger context of the curriculum. This early exchange also conveys a tone of collegiality—three teachers discussing how to make literature from other cultures come alive for their river town Minnesota students. The small-town-Minnesota-is-the-world-mindset" was a theme to which Larry, Sue and Elizabeth would return, again and again. This issue was heightened as all three teachers

sought to diversify their curriculum by including multicultural and international literature. Their enthusiasm for this literature didn't cloud their knowledge that their students' particular educational experiences might not have prepared them for the "powerful literature" to which Sue alludes. All three are also avid readers, true lovers of literature, and use the journal to record the proceedings of a kind of pedagogical book club. Many entries begin with "Have you read . . ." and include recommendations from both class inclusion and personal pleasure reading. Most exchanges include a sort of "metacomment" about the student teaching experience itself and how positive an influence it is for the cooperating teachers.

(Larry: "Elizabeth is a great conduit for us.") Finally, nearly every entry ends, as does this one, with a comment by someone about growth and change, hallmarks of every successful student teaching experience.

The Struggle

Although Elizabeth's student teaching experience was indeed a successful one, she also, like most student teachers, struggled through ten sometimes exhilarating, often trying weeks. She struggled with issues of confidence, authority, and control. She struggled with long-term issues such as her philosophy of teaching and her purpose in teaching writing and literature, and she struggled with daily challenges such as the mercurial moods of her sometimes reluctant adolescent charges. Elizabeth's moods, too, shifted dramatically as she alternately struggled and triumphed as a teacher. When she charted her progression through student teaching (see Appendix 1), it resembled a precarious roller coaster ride.

It was in College Composition class, a fourth period full of defiant and unmotivated high school seniors, that Elizabeth's voice was alone. A gifted writer herself, Elizabeth had felt fairly confident in the first couple weeks of teaching, that her knowledge and experience in writing could overcome the lack of harmony in the group. Elizabeth filled pages of the journal with questions about the College Composition class. Sue's frustration was high as well. She could not intervene. It was Elizabeth's time to experiment; raising her voice, lowering her voice, teasing, reciting, reading aloud, whispering, confronting silence. Elizabeth's cooperating teachers knew that a fully-developed teacher voice might, by semester's end, succeed in creating a community of learners. We also knew something that Elizabeth did not—that the best of experience and effort sometimes fails.

Elizabeth: "So much of teaching is not the subject matter. Certainly knowledge is the core of any class, but in order to get at that knowledge, teachers have to work hard at getting involved with the nature of kids (human beings)." When Sue first wrote these words to me in our journal, I couldn't heed them. It took me a good two months before I could put aside my preoccupation with the next hour's prep and actually enjoy the company of my students. Unfortunately, I never did relax in College Composition, where I had mostly sullen seniors who were resentful of a strict student teacher. I had the nasty job of showing these kids, some of whom could barely write a complex sentence the form and substance their essays should

acquire for college writing. I had to demand revisions and then somehow evaluate and grade what seemed impossible to evaluate and grade—their writing.

It was a struggle I took very seriously. But I vividly remember a picnic lunch conversation about college comp with Deborah and Sue; while I sat with consternation carved into my face, the two of them literally danced around me singing, "Teaching is fun" and thrashing their arms in the sunshine as they modeled how fun it could be. Larry also reprimanded me for not treating my subject matter with a light heart. When I asked, "How do I keep the momentum going through the grueling work of reading poetry?" he wrote back, "No, no! Poetry is fun; relax and enjoy this 'stuff' we call poetry. Teaching must be joyful if you expect to last for decades."

Later I wrote, "I know it's true—if I'm not having fun, overtly or otherwise, certainly the kids won't be. What prevents me from having fun (even in college comp) are mostly internal hurdles . . ." These hurdles were my natural shyness, my adolescent fear of high school jocks, my terrific need to have my students like me, and my discomfort at hearing my own voice so prominent in the classroom; they were the fear of confronting the overwhelming complexity of relating to kids—all hurdles which are not uncommon among new teachers. My journal provides testimony to these frustrations:

October 2

Elizabeth: Deborah's comment about having fun in the classroom hit home. I know it's true—if I'm not having fun, overtly or otherwise, certainly the kids won't be. What prevents me from having fun (even in college comp) are mostly internal hurdles—I get so uptight about college comp, I can't imagine having fun (unless, of course, I scheduled it in). That's the kind of problem that feeds on itself. So now the question is, how do I lighten up while at the same time keeping hold of the reigns?

The other comment she made (or was it you, Sue?) that I'm still puzzling over was that teaching is like an intimate conversation/relationship with 30 people. Intimate conversations are my specialty, but I know them late at night on the phone or Saturday morning over coffee—not with many people and certainly not in public places like the classroom. What does it mean to have an intimate classroom relationship, and how do I reconcile that with the fact that "teaching is a performance art"? How can I be personal, honest, straightforward, "intimate" AND effective?

Larry: As far as having fun—I think I have more fun in College comp than in the lit. classes—I am not sure why that is—perhaps we are dealing with the more concrete? "real" writing as opposed to "unreal" fiction? I don't know. Then there is much I don't know—nor will ever know.

An actor on the stage practices being intimate with his audience. No, he doesn't practice—on a good night he is "personal, honest, straightforward, intimate and effective"—but that does not come immediately. And in a sense it is easier. His audience wants to be there; his script is rehearsal; he knows exactly what he is going to do—all of the time—but he is "intimate"—and he is performing—

You will get the “hang” of this job called teaching—in many ways you have the “hang” of it now. In many ways you are a natural—and once you have your own classroom—if it is ever possible to “have your own classroom”—everything else will fall into place—

October 5

Elizabeth: I ought to be having fun in College comp. It’s the one thing I know, the one thing I’m good at. I love writing (even college essays) & I’ve always enjoyed tutoring others in their writing. WHAT’S GONE WRONG?!! Why does it feel like such a chore to read these papers, to get them to write in class, to even make them think about the writing process? We’ve come up with all these theories—strange dynamics in class, a dysfunctional group, lack of respect for student teacher, artificial setting for motivated writing my own lack of self-confidence in managing this bunch . . . But I’ve yet to come up with a plan to make concrete changes. I’m really floundering here.

Deborah suggested I change my goals, move them into the affective domain. Instead of focusing on what I want them to accomplish academically, I ought to focus on my own (& consequently their) feelings about the class. The academics will follow in suit. So if I strive to enjoy class rather than dreading it, the end result may be a more enjoyable class (teaching is so damn commonsensical, it frustrates me!). I was shocked when she suggested watching a movie and having them write reactions or reviews—a movie in College Comp? NEVER. Too serious business, here. But, in fact, kids write well about movies, especially those that evoke strong emotional responses. So why not?

Larry: Deborah’s suggestions to move them into the “affective domain” (don’t you just love the “teacher speak”) is good. After you have been in this business of teaching for a while, you will be able to sense when you should do that. An in teaching English it is easy to do—good videos usually work for me—but then my conception of good does not always coincide with their conception of good. I must always remember that teaching, like life, is a process—there is really no end, really no answers—but oh those wonderful questions that keep coming up!

As Elizabeth moved through her student teaching experience, the journal reflected her changing concerns. The journal helped Elizabeth focus on her concerns and gave Sue and Larry a chance to extend their praise with specific suggestions. Elizabeth, then, could receive both praise and advice when she was ready to read it. She could also review both her own and her cooperating teachers’ comments to reflect on issues that seemed to be resolved and issues that continued to arise. The conversation did not always retain three partners, as specific and divergent issues arose in the classes she was teaching for Larry and the classes she was teaching for

Sue. The following exchanges between Elizabeth and Sue and then Elizabeth and Larry exemplify the dialogues that frequently occurred within the larger three-way conversation. It is interesting to note that the journal is used not only to reflect on lessons already taught but to anticipate future issues that range from revision evaluation to small group effectiveness to dealing with sensitive material in the classroom.

Sue: Elizabeth, reading excerpts from the yesterday’s journals as an intro to today’s class serves 2 positive purposes -one- the kids know you’re reading the journals and valuing their opinions -two- it’s a nifty tool to continue yesterday’s work w/ today’s. This technique shows the kids the theme of the work you’re trying to accomplish. Small groups—the hum in the class was energetic. Leaders emerged in all the groups.

Elizabeth: Leaders emerged in the small groups, but others used them as crutches. How do you avoid this? (e.g., Lee, doing all the work-thinking and writing-while the other 3 coast). It was frustrating that they all took so much time to get rolling . . . I don’t think my expectations were very clear. An awful lot of kids hadn’t read it either. I was pleased that several people participated in the large group discussion who are usually pretty quiet.

Sue, what do you think of my idea of grading their revisions on the amount of “re-visioning”? While I’m doing it, it feels rather arbitrary. But hopefully it will encourage them to focus on the thinking and writing process more, and less on the final result. It also saves me from having to evaluate their work while it’s still in draft form—I’m trying to avoid that impossible task!

Sue: Yes! It’s much more hands-on, lets-roll-up-our-sleeves-and-do-the-dirty-work-of-writing than Donald Hall is. I like it.

September 17

Larry: Great essay you wrote and read to the class! Who said, “I wish I could write like that?” Don’t ignore these comments; respond to them. These kids can write like that, and it is important for you to tell them that. And important to reinforce their journals.

Elizabeth: I’m not yet sure how to “reinforce” their journals without responding to them individually. Perhaps once in a while I ought to read them out loud, or at least sections of them. What’s ideal is when the journal is relevant to the next day’s class and they can use it to aid the discussion. I’m going to try that for both World and American Lit.

Larry: This going around the room turned out much better than I had hoped. And you are aware of time, and the students learned, and bonded with each other and

you. What did you learn from this exchange?

Elizabeth: This was an eye-opener. When you said this morning that we could compare the events in our early childhood to the Writes', I was skeptical—his memories are so traumatic, so heart-wrenching and life shaking. I didn't think there would be any comparison. But now I wish we'd had more time to place them side by side, and show how similar they really are . . . To let the kids see how powerful and poignant their own memories are. I wasn't prepared to respond to these serious issues (diverse, death). I hope that I didn't take anything too lightly as I was pushing to get through the class on time. Perhaps a follow-up in the journal would be appropriate.

Larry: May I respond? When children in a class are willing to share "private stuff," accept it as a "kind of gift" to you—it shows you their acceptance and trust in you! Hooray!

The Transformation: Finding A Teaching Voice

What does it mean to become a teacher? How does one move, with confidence and grace, from one side of the teacher's desk to another? Perhaps it is a gradual process of becoming, begun in an undergraduate education course, undergoing false stops and starts through a series of all-too-brief clinical experiences and tested in the baptismal waters of student teaching. Despite decades of research and observation, and transformation of college students into critical practitioners is still largely mysterious, even (perhaps especially) to teacher educators.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, even though we were watching all the time, Elizabeth, by the end of her student teaching, made the transformation from student to teacher. She literally moved from the edges of the classroom to front and center. Her cooperating teachers became strangers in their own classrooms as Elizabeth, gently, yet firmly, claimed her classroom space.

For all of us involved in Elizabeth's student teaching, the question of voice became both a real and metaphorical issue. On a literal level, Elizabeth knew she need to transform her initially tentative and small speaking voice into the sure and measured tones of a teacher. That quest for "voice" began to symbolize, for all of us, a much more internal metamorphosis. Voice, after all, was only an audible indication of Elizabeth's sense of self as a teacher.

Elizabeth: Finding one's teaching voice is a process—a process that is very similar to what I tell my students a writer must go through before he or she can speak clearly and effectively across the page. Both require growth in self-awareness and the struggle to present that self to an audience. And yet, unlike the process of finding one's writing voice, the transition from

student-to-teacher-voice cannot be done in the closet. The transition must take place in public, at tremendous risk. Teachers learn their trade by dancing naked—in front of adolescents at that!

Again and again, Larry wrote in the journal, buried among his other scrawled notes to me, "Voice projection is helpful in establishing a presence." I struggled to make my trembling voice fill the classroom, that expanse of occupied, impatient, disinterested space. My voice was still that of a student and not a teacher; how could I project it so that everybody could not only hear my words of tenuous wisdom, but also be awe-struck by my ability to confidently maneuver their attention and learning toward mutually respected goals? Projecting my voice meant asserting my personality, my ideas, and yes, even my authority, into a space filled with other human beings, albeit younger. The task was formidable, and my words came out weak and tentative: "Okay, class, why don't you pull out your journal entries and pass them forward?"

In retrospect, the transformation from student to teacher seems miraculous, like at some point a magic ruler was waved and the change occurred instantly, and so I understand the incredulity and, unfortunately, scorn, most experienced teachers show toward the fumbling and struggle of inexperienced teachers (and substitutes). But now I flip back in the pages of our journal and I read my voice wavering, testing the waters. What is now a swift action to split up a group of talkative boys was then a "battle plan": "Okay, I'm asking the guys to split up first thing, and if disruptions continue I'll take Larry's advice and warn them I'm taking off points. I feel so evil!" Sue responded with, "No, no, only a firm angel!"—a wise response to one uncomfortable with authority and the 'power over people' that implies. At a time when all three of us were drowning in paperwork and the constant flood of student demands, the journal gave us the space to step back. I listened to my tentative teacher voice growing on the page, and Sue and Larry egged it on like firm angels.

In our final journal exchange, all three of us reflected on my transformation from a student teacher to teacher. . .

November 15

Elizabeth: I want to make some concluding comments, write down some thoughts that might pull this experience together, but I'm having trouble knowing where to start. I have grown so much over the last few months, in many ways not even obvious to me.

I remember last summer, in my frenzied preparation for student teaching, reading anything & everything I came across in the textbooks & teaching manuals and not having a clue how to put it together. Now, when I think about having my own classroom (knock wood), I know how to prepare—how to develop a grading system, how I should establish expectations, how I might pull together a curriculum. . . . And it's exciting, not frightening.

Which is perhaps the biggest leap I've made this past term – towards being self confident. Now I not only think but I know I can be a good teacher. That's largely due to your encouragement and reinforcement. It makes a world of difference when someone believes in you; it's infectious, and, slowly but surely, you come to believe in yourself. (This is something I need to remember for my own students.) I appreciate your support to no end; I couldn't have made it through without you two trusting in my ability.

I was really surprised, Larry, when you asked a week ago why I chose Red Wing to student teach in. I thought it was so obvious! My priorities in choosing a school were not location or student population or anything else; the most important thing was having strong cooperating teachers who could both model good teaching and instruct me in the art (I do think it's an art, don't you?). I couldn't have chosen better. I've been fortunate beyond belief for the opportunity to have this running dialogue with you, to watch you and work with you and talk through the struggles of teaching. You've been my first mentors and so, like it or not, strains of both of you and your teaching styles will always be with me. That's something I'm thankful for and very proud of. I'll always carry that image of my "braided teaching life" – strand of Sue, strand of Larry, strand of me.

Larry: I am glad, excited, proud, humbled, touched – so many feelings I have about working with you and then reading these kind things you said about "us" and your Red – and I especially like the metaphor of "braided teaching life" – I think that is what teaching becomes, a "braiding" of all the strands of everything and everybody and every story and every poem and every paper and every friend – all of this becomes part of what you, as a teacher, becomes – but "becomes" has a certain finality about it – "becoming" is a better word. Teaching, like life, is a process – There is no end, no beginning. I don't think a day goes by in a calendar year when I don't think of teaching, of being a teacher. And in spite of the papers, being an English teacher – a literature teacher, is the best kind of teaching – just think, Elizabeth, someday you will even get paid for this.

I, too, remember last August when I was wondering what I had gotten myself into by agreeing to work with a student teacher. I wondered what I could do to help someone become a teacher. I felt absolutely helpless – hadn't the faintest idea of how to approach this responsibility – and I am still not sure. I thought – and probably still think, that the best approach is to "give her a book, give her the class, see what happens" – what happened was we havAnd I learned from you, Elizabeth – you have opened my teaching life to new possibilities – for that I will always be thankful.

Thank you, Elizabeth, for all you have done for me, for us. Our lives shall remain braided in a way we have not yet uncovered. You will be missed –

Dear Elizabeth,

I have re-read our journal several times over the past weeks. The words you, Larry and I put to paper fashioned a record of community learning, mentoring, gift giving and voice making. It is a living text. The first weeks of teaching your voice was tentative, small, fragile. Remember those first few days, Elizabeth? I literally could hardly hear your voice from the back of that big any space – the classroom? Finding that voice took courage to risk, to get into the messiness of leaning about

kids, to play with the resonance tone and volume of your voice, your place as teacher in the classroom. There were days in October when I'd walk don't the hallway hearing your voice, clear and distinct, sometimes laughing high above the chorus of the kids in Room 220. Remember the day the kids asked you about your home in New York state? That question caught you. A surprise. The next day you brought a small photo of the Hudson River country – your home. Your voice was animated, relaxed, full of spirit and affection. That day you gave that community a gift – a glimpse of Elizabeth. The big space between you and the kids got smaller that day, your voice took on a distinct tone and yet your voice joined with them in a way that is the magic and passion of what it means to be called teacher. As I read the last pages of this haphazardly kept journal I hear three distinct voices – Larry's, Elizabeth's and Sue's. Laughing, exasperated, encouraging, sometimes pausing for solitude. Even discordant as only individual voices can be. I feel the frustration of your leaving my classroom, knowing that if you would be staying longer, you would begin to really enjoy the benefits of what you had begun – the beginnings of a working community, the beginnings of all kinds of kids learning in all kinds of ways. The beginnings of the great powers of gifts passes from one to another, the beginnings of voices joined together or voices speaking loudly and surely. Welcome, Teacher.

My love to you,

Sue

My teaching is now full and sure. In a unique way, I can hear myself think on the pages of the journal, and the closer I listen, the clearer I hear my voice as that of a teacher. The "maybe I should's" turn into "I will's" and end up "I do's". On the page and in the classroom, my voice has grown in its confidence and control; it is now the voice of a teacher with the ability to instill that same growth and confidence in the voices of others.

Yesterday I put my seventh graders into little groups and had them write letters in support of an environmental bill that will help save the dolphins. The noise in the room was atrocious. Had I wanted to, I'm not sure I could have quieted those writers in the heat of their composing. As I patrolled the room, twisting a few arms and praising a few well-written sentences, by voice seemed insignificant – only a minor contribution to the din. Yet I know this is how it should be: In the long run, my voice is merely one of the many to be challenged and developed in the classroom. This is my greatest privilege right now, to have the responsibility to encourage the growth of young voices. And that cacophony of composing is the surest sign to me that my own voice is secure and effective. It is not me but my students who have taken center stage.

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