

# Appendix B.4 - Allowing Space for Not-Knowing: What My Journal Teaches Me, Part 4

Marné Isakson

## Implications and Conclusion

Why tell this story? First, for me to find out why I keep a teaching journal is a timeconsuming task. The act of writing this report of my inquiry has been another “write to learn” experience. Second, to share its values with other professionals, who thereby might come to view the time it takes as well spent and inquire into and reflect upon their own practice.

My results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that \_\_\_\_\_ their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries (Peshkin, 1985, p.280).

Keep a reflective journal. “Just try,” Judith Newman says. Before long we can be a voice of support to our colleagues who are trying to risk a learner stance in their classrooms. We can nurture in surprisingly effective ways those we care about, our students.

A transactional theory of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978; Goodman, 1984; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Siegel, 1984) has strong parallels to what my journals do for me as a teacher. Just as readers transact with texts and both are changed in the process, I am changed by my transactions with the participants in the teaching situation and so are they. “The inferential processes we use to interpret the text/situation simultaneously change it and us” (Mayher, 1990, p.283). Change is what reflective journals help us do. Robert Boody (1992) says that teacher reflection has to do with change: “change of heart, change of being, change of actions” (p.157). It also has to do with keeping what is good and knowing why.

We teachers need to stop the “unquestioning compliance with curriculum guides, blind faith in instructional materials, impotence in the face of government and administrative edicts, guilt and anger about innovation, and lack of confidence as decision makers” (Nielsen, 1991, p.1). Journal keeping seems to be powerful way to get in touch with our professional selves, learn from our experiences, and struggle to make sense of the anomalies that surface daily.

Analyzing these journals has made it clear that I will always have something happening in the classroom that I will find unsettling and puzzling. This goes for things I think I have figured out, too. I suppose those “sure things” change inevitably as my awareness deepens and expands. But I can find my own way, just as Frank Smith told me in 1982, as can all of us who ask questions of our practice and replace the continuum from apathy to frustration and burn-out with an inquiring, observant, reflective and rejuvenating fascination for what goes on in our classrooms. Levine (1979) suggests a

non-fluttered approach to all this thinking:

We're constantly building a new image of ourselves and wondering what's next. We have allowed ourselves very little space for not-knowing. Very seldom do we have the wisdom not-to-know, to lay the mind open to deeper understanding. When confusion occurs in the mind, we identify with it and say we are confused; we hold onto it. Confusion arises because we fight against our not-knowing, which experiences each moment afresh without preconceptions or expectations. We are so full of ways of seeing and ideas of how things should be, we leave no room for wisdom to arise. We desire to know in only a certain way, a way which will corroborate our image of a rational, separate, autonomous self. When we open our minds, our hearts, not *trying* to understand, but simply allowing understanding to occur, we find more than was expected. When we let go of our ignorance and confusion, we allow our knowing mind to arise (Levine, 1979, pp. 38-39).

Jane Birch (1992) puts forth the hard reality that we must face in order to be the kind of teachers we want to be:

Could there be something in the kind of thought that compels us to "pause to ask" that we are afraid may require more of us as people than we are willing to give? By pausing to ask are we not in danger of hearing something we may not want to hear? Something that may call on us to give—not just our time—but our souls: our care, our concern, our passion? And perhaps even more than this, our willingness to change in the face of those things we might see in ourselves—those realizations we might come to when we pause long enough, not just to still our bodies, but to also still our minds and hearts? Are we perhaps afraid of something within ourselves, something we are not sure we are ready to give up and so are not sure we want to face? If so, then the problem with reflection is not technical at all, but spiritual (p.2).

If we are willing to be teachers as learners, we all too soon will come to the realization that "discovering who we are is to confront who we are not" (Julie Preece, personal communication, October 7, 1992). But then that is where learning begins. "Too often we find ourselves running away from something that we can't progress without. To sit still long enough, and listen close enough, and care enough to "hear" the problem is to already be reaching into the solution" (Birch, 1992, p.3).

## References

- Atwell, N. (1987). *In the middle: Writing, reading, and learning with adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Birch, J. (1992). *Reflecting on reflection*. Unpublished manuscript. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University.
- Blue, T.W. (1981). *The teaching and learning process*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association. Quoted in S. Kaplan. (1987). *The teacher as learner*. In G. L. Bissex and R. H. Bullock (Eds.), *Seeing for ourselves: Case-study research by teachers of writing* (pp. 41-58). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. 56.
- Boody, R.M. (1992). *An examination of the philosophic grounding of teacher reflection and one teacher's experience*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University.
- Calkins, L.M. (1983). *Lessons from a child*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Calkins, L.M. (1986). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cooper, J.E. (1991). *Telling our own stories: The reading and writing of journals or diaries*. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education* (pp. 96-112). New York: Teachers College.
- Goodman, K. (1984). *Unity in reading*. In H. Singer & R.B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (3rd Ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association. 813-840.
- Goodman, Y. (1978). *Kid watching: An alternative to testing*. *National Elementary School Principal*, 57: 41-45.
- Goodman, Y. & Burke, C. (1972). *Reading Miscue Inventory Manual: Procedure for Diagnosis and Evaluation*. New York: Macmillan.
- Graves, D.H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Grumet, M. (1988). *Bitter milk: Women and teaching*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts.
- Harste, J. C., Woodward, V. A., & Burke, C. (1984). *Language stories and literacy lessons*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways with Words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Henke, L. (1990). quoted in C. Weaver. *Understanding whole language: From principles to practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. p. 283.
- Howe, F. (1984). *Myths of coeducation*. Bloomington: Indiana University.
- Huntsman, R. (1990). *Questioning and responding*. In D. Stephens (Ed.) *What matters? A primer for teaching reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Isakson, M. (1991). *Learning about reluctant readers through their letters*. *Journal of Reading*, 34, 632-637.
- Jones, N.K. (1990). *Getting started: Creating a literate classroom environment*. In D. Stephens (Ed.) *What matters? A primer for teaching reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Levine, S. (1979). *A gradual awakening*. Anchor Press.
- Mayher, J.S. (1990). *Uncommon sense: Theoretical practice in language education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Melville, H. (1959). *Moby Dick*. New York: Dell. (Original work published in 1851)
- Murray, D.M. (1990). *Shoptalk: Learning to write with writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Nielsen, A. (1991). *Reading and writing our professional lives: Critical reflection on practice*. Course announcement. Mount Saint Vincent University.

Newman, J. (1988) Journals: Mirrors for seeing ourselves as learners, writers and teachers. *English Education*, 20, 134-156.

Newman, J. (1991) *Interwoven connections*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California.

Peshkin, A. (1985). Virtuous subjectivity: in the participant-observer's eyes. In D.Berg & K.Smith (Eds.), *Exploring clinical methods for social research*. Beverly Hills: Sage. pp.267-281.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University.

Schon, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.

Siegel, M.G. (1984). *Reading as signification*. Unpublished dissertation. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University.

Smith F. (1990). *to think*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Snow, M. (1990). quoted in C. Weaver. *Understanding whole language: From principles to practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. p. 276-277.

Spradley, J.P. (1980). *Participant observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Voss, M.M. (1988). The light at the end of the journal: A teacher learns about learning. *Language Arts*, 65 (7), 669-674.

Weaver, C. (1990). *Understanding whole language: From principles to practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Williams, D.D. (1992). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Unpublished manuscript. Brigham Young University.

## **Appendix A**

AUDIT TRAIL, Summarized

June 23, 1992: Thought of several ideas to study.

June 24, 1992: Fleshed out three ideas.

June 28, 1992: Thought of six more ideas.

June 30, 1992: Listened to others ideas, talked to David about two ideas. He liked the second best: look at my journals. I listed three reasons why I like that idea also.

July 1, 1992: Read a naturalistic inquiry study. Decided what to look for as I read the journals. Read how to make fieldnotes and listed questions I want answered.

July 7<sup>th</sup> 1992: Read four pages of 1985 journal, was confused about what to look for, listed possibilities that I would find interesting, wrote for four pages trying to find a focus. Read the entire

year's entries for 4th period in 1985-86. Then started to read 1989. Expressed my fears about doing this, "I am afraid to read these journals. Approach/Avoidance. I'm afraid of seeing the teacher in those journals. Was my first year my best year? Has it been downhill since then?"

July 8, 1992: Made decisions about how to organize the data, set up a coding system. Thought about my focus again for two pages.

July 9, 1992: Entered 14 ideas for focus onto the computer.

July 10, 1992: Decided to go into journals with no focus, but just to see what I could see. After one hour, I was surprised to see that my reflections about the entries were substantially longer than descriptions of them. I spent five hours and twenty minutes making fieldnotes. I narrowed the project from all journals to two journals then from whole journals to one month each.

July 11, 1992: Worked on the 1989 journal for five hours and covered only first two days of school! Decided to stop taking fieldnotes.

July 13, 1992: Made an appointment to interview my department chairperson about me as an example of teacher change.

July 14, 1992: Printed out fieldnotes-17 pages single-spaced. Talked to Rob as Peer Debriefing about Tom in 1985 journal, trying to understand dramatic change in him in seven days. Told David about my frustration in doing Domain Analysis-doing fieldnotes of fieldnotes!

July 16, 1992: We helped Rick find domains: this greatly helped me. Determined that I could do domain analysis.

July 19, 1992: I read and reread chapters on domain analysis and focused observations. Interviewed my husband about me changing as a teacher.

July 20, 1992: Appointment with department chair fell through.

July 21, 1992: Reread my fieldnotes and listed a question for focus. Decided I was not ready for a focus yet. First I should do a domain analysis.

July 22, 1992: Went back to fieldnotes and inserted the actual journal entry before the fieldnotes about it. I added more fieldnotes to several. I worked 5 1/2 hours on fieldnotes. Started domain analysis, easier than I thought-eight pages in one hour!

July 23, 1992: Worked one hour on domain analysis. This is fun.

July 25, 1992: Finished domain analysis for 1985 journal in 1 hour 40 minutes. Finished domain analysis of pages 14-19 of 1989 journal in 1 hour 15 minutes. Finally understand "focused questions." Selected four.

July 27, 1992: Finished 1989 domain analysis to page 25 in 55 minutes. Did the focused questions and added to the domains for the four selected. 3 hours, 27 minutes. Used only the actual journal entries, note my 1992 fieldnotes for these focused observations. Studied how to do taxonomic and componential analysis. Reread and made notes. Finally decided the best way to learn it is to try it.

July 28, 1992: Selected a focus, then changed my mind. Decided to go with "Uses of the Journals for

Me." Read through items under this domain, sorting them into groups. Hardest part was giving labels to the categories. A semantic map helped me do this. Created inclusive domains by asking "What is 'the uses of my journal' a subset of?" Asked dyadic and triadic contrast questions.

July 29, 1992: Worked on componential analysis 1 1/2 hours. Generated six dimensions of contrast. Looked at terms that matched other terms in these six ways and asked dyadic questions again. Generated five more dimensions of contrast. Redid the analysis- another 1 1/2 hours. I really enjoyed doing this. Read how to do theme analysis. Listed a plan for doing so. Changed my mind and decided to type up the three analyses completed and to percolate on themes while doing so. Listed some ideas for themes. Read about how to write the ethnographic report. Decided I needed more models. Decided on an audience for my report- inservice teachers considering becoming researchers in their own classrooms. Came up with two major themes. Worked on tentative outline. Stayed up until 2:52 A.M. July 30. "William Andrews has been executed. I'm going to bed." I put in over 17 hours on this project today!

July 30, 1992: Reread what a quality report should include.

July 31, 1992: Worked on report for 2 hours 15 minutes: added more references to literature review, wrote three sections of methodology. "I don't know how specific to become in explaining what I did- I probably erred on the side of too much detail."

August 1, 1992: Read Spradley pages 130-139 on componential analysis. Discovered why it is called that: components of meaning discovered by systematic search for attributes associated with the categories.

August 10, 1992: Wrote rough draft most of the day, revising earlier sections and hammering out the theme section. Created meaning in the act of writing. Generated more insights concerning themes.

August 11, 1992: Randomly selected one event from each journal to use as an example to analyze in terms of each of the two overriding themes. Reminded self to be sure to change all the names of students.

August 21, 1992: Reread entire manuscript. Explained what I was learning from the componential analysis. Selected two items from the taxonomy that most interested me and looked up the stories that caused the formulation of these domains. Selected one of these, copied the fieldnotes into the body of the paper and proceeded to discuss the line of the componential analysis matrix. Strong insights evoked and had to rethink some of the contrasts. Added another component because in depth probing revealed inadequacies. Decided to do a cursory review of literature using only the sources I have at home. Worked on review for 4 hours. Is a conceptual piece acceptable in a review of literature? Found some relevant quotes but are they the "literature" I should be reviewing?

Sept. 3, 1992: Looked at literature again and was struck with how all my sources are comments, opinions, experiences; none are experimental or results of research. "So, is this a valuable 'review of literature'? I suspect not, but for me it is because it is helping me articulate what journals do for me."

Sept. 4, 1992: In reviewing Rob's dissertation, I realized an entire domain to add to taxonomy.

Sept. 17, 1992: Worked on rough draft.

Sept. 20, 1992: Worked on rough draft until 5 A.M. next day. Ugh! I am least pleased with theme synthesis and conclusions- needs lots of work yet.

Sept. 25, 1992: Worked on theme synthesis, review of literature, and discussion. Decided to arrange review according to taxonomy.

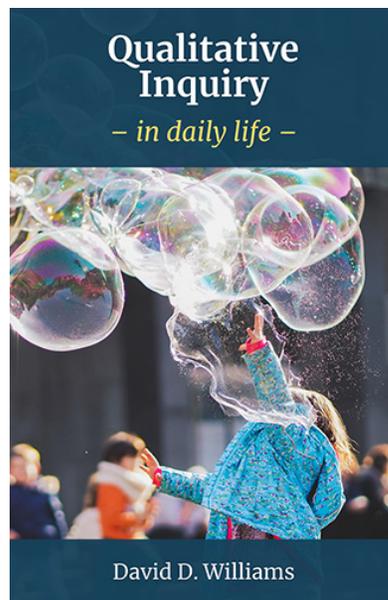
Sept. 26, 1992: Worked on revising entire report. Put references into APA format. Added more examples.

Sept. 28, 1992: Gave copy to David and Teresa for feedback. Gave copies to counseling interns as an example of learning by reflecting on classroom observations.

Oct. 3, 1992: Worked on editing the paper. Revisions occurred also.

Oct. 5, 1992: Received feedback from David and Teresa. Need to put in more examples and rewrite for audience. Don't worry about sounding so academic. The sections for a research report will probably turn off teachers. Write this article for them. Made lots of notes for changes. Sent a reminder to interns that I'd appreciate their feedback on the article. Typed up this summary of Audit Trail. Actual audit trail is 54 pages!

Oct. 6, 1992: Reread entire manuscript with audience in mind. Revised entire manuscript. Put in more examples. Rearranged sections. Gave more catchy titles to sections. Looked up some references I had questions about. Gave new draft to David.



Isakson, Marné (2018). Appendix B.4 - Allowing Space for Not-Knowing: What My Journal Teaches Me, Part 4. In D. D. Williams (Ed.), *Qualitative Inquiry in Daily Life*. EdTech Books. <https://edtechbooks.org/qualitativeinquiry/appendixb4>



**CC BY:** This work is released under a CC BY license, which means that you are free to do with it as you please as long as you properly attribute it.