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*An Autobiography of the Creative Writing Experience:
How Metacognition in the Five Meta-Learning Domains
Informs Creative Writing*

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AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE CREATIVE WRITING EXPERIENCE:
HOW METACOGNITION IN THE FIVE META-LEARNING DOMAINS
INFORMS CREATIVE WRITING

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a self-analysis of my own creative writing through an autobiographical process (Bruner, 1993) in the context of the process, post-process and related theories of writing. In a (modified) think-aloud protocol (Emig, 1971), I metacognitively reflected upon my own act of writing as I wrote three rhetorical forms of writing: 1) a poem (imaginative); 2) a journal entry (expressive); and 3) an article (transactional). I also triangulated some of my own experiential research in these areas of writing with the words of published writers/educators who reflected upon their own writing experiences.

During this research, I developed the concept of “meta-processing” in order to expand meta-cognition into four meta-learning domains: (meta-conative [motivational], metacognitive [thinking], meta-affective [feeling], and meta-spiritual [inspirational]). I later included a fifth meta-learning domain which I referred to as the meta-kinaesthetic [body connection]) as its importance in my writing surfaced in the research.

Through a constant-comparison method, I refined the concepts of writing, identified the properties within various writing experiences and explored the relationships between them and my own act of writing (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As emerging themes became well-defined, I interpreted them. I oriented my findings in relation to existing and emerging theories. In my explorations of the concepts of “writing experience-process” (Robinson, 2005/2006), “meta-processing” (Robinson,

2005/2006); “enlightenment” (Fowler, 1995) and “authentic engagement” (Schlechty, 2003), there were more commonalities than there were differences about my creative writing experiences in all of my modes of writing and how they compared to other writers.

As well, there appeared to be ideas about writing that were representative of both process and post-process writing (and related) theories. In other words, these contrasting schools of thought about writing appeared not to be mutually exclusive in my encounters with text and in the writing and reflections of other published writers. Therefore, this research is not about the act of writing in support of one theory or another. This research is a work that considers many theories of writing and may resonate with other writers and further evolve as they (writers-teachers-researchers) adapt it to consider their own writing and in turn their teaching/mentoring of writing.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research paper to my mother who I referenced frequently within it. She was instrumental in saving all of my earlier writing from childhood until I moved away from home. As well, she was my music theory, harmony, counterpoint, history, and analysis teacher. She taught me all of the fundamental and secondary skills and techniques of music composition, and told me how important it was to “know the rules before I break the rules”. This important idea about creating text (musical or otherwise) has translated successfully into many areas of my creative life.

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He who knows others is wise;
He who knows himself is enlightened.

Lao-tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF MY WRITING FROM PAST TO PRESENT:

RECAPTURING MY FIRST INSTINCT

Writing History Project 1993-1994

Before participating in this writing research by composing text in various forms and interpreting my writing experience-process, I found it important to look back again at my writing past to discover where I have been in my writing journey and what might still continue to positively and negatively influence my creative writing. In 1993-1994, in my first graduate course in the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary, I re-examined my writing past as a full year project (Robinson, 1994). My focus at the time of this project which I entitled *Looking Back, Looking Forward and Writing in Between: Reflections on My Writing Development and its Implications for Me as a Teacher of Writing* was to better understand how I had learned to write considering some cognitive process theories of writing as well as some perspectives of the post-process theory that helped and/or hindered my writing development in and out of school. My mother had saved all of my writing from childhood to the end of high school, and I saved most of my significant fiction and non-fiction writing from that point forward to the end of my undergraduate work which I completed in 1987. When I first began, it was like going through a chaotic time capsule as I sorted through paintings, drawings and scribbled first writing efforts. I also had samples of my poetry, short stories and essays that showed an evolution of my thinking and writing processes from kindergarten through to and including my undergraduate work at the University of Calgary. While analyzing my work at that time, I turned to reputable researchers of the writing process and writers

(Applebee, 1991; Atwell, 1991; Calkins, 1986; Clay, 1975; D'arcy, 1989; Faigley, 1986; Flowers, 1981; Hairston, 1982; Kantor, 1990; Rosenblatt, 1989; Silberman, 1989; Straw, 1990) to help better understand this massive amount of writing data stored in my basement.

It seems that much of my graduate and post-graduate work has been inadvertently and then more purposefully focussed on the analysis and evolution of my writing. I have considered some of the initial 1993-1994 cognitively process-oriented perceptions of my writing, and in this thesis have expanded on these initial ideas with my new research foci, and new academic insights on the topic of writing. The following excerpt from this 1993-1994 research encapsulates some salient passages from this work and helps to introduce some of my writing history from childhood to present:

... [M]y first instinct was to write (Silberman, 1989). I loved to write and did so frequently...My first recollection of writing at school is very clear. I remember being shown how to hold my first large blue pencil and told to draw funny shapes all over my page. Slowly, over time, I was taught to put those shapes on to double spaced lines...My [early] assignments indicate that I was allowed some freedom to write about topics that mattered to me which usually included egocentric themes based on my first hand experiences. The acceptance of my topic choices by my parents, teachers and friends had an obvious impact on my writing output because my elementary years were my most prolific...

In elementary school I also started writing music. I had a very encouraging music teacher and a music teacher mother. They were forever showing off my music compositions. My mother often acted as a scribe in the

beginning because my musical performance and reading capabilities were in advance of what I was able to do theoretically...After much one-to-one nurturing with my mother and teacher, I developed the ability to write my own compositions with accuracy and fluency...

In later elementary, although my creative output and enthusiasm was high, my writing in school did not seem to be improving to the same extent that I was improving in my music compositions. It is my honest opinion that I was as interested and capable in both; however, ...I remember feeling fewer reasons from my school teachers to improve stylistically. I even found less support at home. My parents felt that it was nice that I could write stories and reports, but I was really meant to devote my time to what they perceived was my true talent, music. So, in later elementary I continued to write literature, enjoying the writing freedom and warm pats on the back that I received, [lacking in] what I now view as effective teacher and parent direction...

Junior high school became a time for me where writing was no longer enjoyable. I seemed to lose my identity as a writer and became one in the large mass of devoiced students...The slow dissolution of my love of writing was not rescued...The boredom factor started to hit me in grade nine when I started to feel the purposelessness of my language arts lessons...I became so beside myself with my frustration with the program that I stood up in the middle of my class and declared how useless I felt it to be. I told my teacher that I was learning nothing...

In both junior and senior high, my writing was graded with a single grade, sparse comments and no verbal explanation. I had one teacher in senior high who

continually gave me a 72% grade. When I pursued the matter...he gave me no explanation as to the criteria for the grade, and encouraged me to read the comments and try harder next time...I was never really shown how to revise effectively; rather, I was merely told to look my work over. This became a process of recopying rather than revision. I viewed doing a good copy to be a tremendous waste of time because it had hardly changed from my rough draft; so I was not certain of the point...

Also, sharing writing was just not done. It was viewed as a secretive process. When writing assignments were handed back after being graded, I had developed a sense of guilt from somewhere, for wanting to know how others did and if they received a higher mark than I did, why? I never truly knew what made “a good one” as Gere (1991) describes referring to an actual piece of writing or model which allows students to determine the criteria for what makes a good assignment. It was instead pure guesswork on my part...

I went to university immediately following senior high school...Right from the beginning of my post-secondary education, I had something to prove. Writing was something that I wanted to do as a career and not just as a hobby...Whether I had developed a greater capacity for mastering the writing experience...or whether I had finally decided to take a critical look at my writing skills, I view this as one of my biggest periods of development as a critical essay writer. I adhered to the stylistic conventions required by my professors with little or no guidance from most of them except for their occasional references to essay guides, such as *A Student's Guide to the Presentation of Essay* (Department of English: The

University of Calgary, 1983).

I found my classes to be sink or swim situations. I decided to stay above water by researching the how-to's of proper essay writing in the library. I suspect that what Hairston (1982) describes to be true of college writing professors in the United States was also true of many of my professors in Canada:

[They] are not professional writing teachers. They do not do research or publish on rhetoric or composition, and they do not know the scholarship in the field; they do not read the professional journals and they do not attend professional meetings...They are trained as literary critics first and as teachers of literature second. Yet out of necessity most of them are doing half or more of their teaching in composition. And they teach it by the traditional paradigm, just as they did when they were untrained teaching assistants...(p. 79)

One of my first year English professors spent time going through many of the writing basics that I feel should have been introduced to me in secondary school. I learned a tremendous amount from her about writing conventional essays...and was quite impressed that she taught these skills in relation to our own assignments. My most vivid memory of this class was of her marching in, throwing our assignments on her front table, and saying that most of us had failed...

Another professor that I had in my second year, taught me about communication and rhetoric. She "red inked" our essays to the point that many of us felt like there was no point in writing because there were too many possibilities

for error. Whether it was my writing ability or her teaching style, I became very intimidated. Flowers (1981) who wrote the article “Madman, Architect, Carpenter, Judge: Roles and the Writing Process” explains that “If you let the judge with his intimidating carping come too close to the madman and his playful, creative energies, the ideas which form the basis of your writing will never have a chance to surface” (p. 835). Nearing fourth year university, I began to feel very confident about my writing. I was receiving reasonable grades by the English Department’s standards, and could roll off essays with efficiency and ease. I realize now that I felt that I had achieved what Hairston (1982) describes as the “literary scholar’s vision of good writing”.

It wasn’t until my fourth year methods class taught by Anni Adams (named with permission) that was designed to instruct teachers how to teach language arts to others, that I realized I knew very little about writing. In fact, my writing was not very good at all. It was stiff and voiceless and sounded like any other university student’s writing. I took few risks and felt unable to express myself naturally. I had lost the ability to say what I wanted to say over the course of my schooling... (pp. 9-21)

My analysis essentially ended there. It was this first research essay that I wrote for Dr. Hunsberger at the University of Calgary (named throughout with her permission) and her feedback about it (1993-1994) that prompted me to continue developing my love of writing regardless of the hidden family and cultural messages or overt educational challenges that I had experienced in my first twenty-five years of writing.

A Second Look at My Writing History

Looking back, I believe that I chose this project for this program with Dr. Hunsberger back in 1993-1994 at a difficult personal and professional time. I chose this specific research in order to do what Palmer (2000) suggested: “When we lose track of true self, how can we pick up the trail? One way is to seek clues in stories from our younger years, years when we lived closer to our birthright gifts...” (p. 13). Perhaps another motivation for doing so then and now is that what Lao Tzu (2005) spoke of several centuries ago in his *Tao Te Ching* “Becoming attuned to one’s own original nature/ is eternal harmonious light” (p. 23). I wanted to find out who I was and, in turn, where I was going. Now, taking a second look back into my writing history in my forties with a different research focus, and sifting through my more recent writing as well as twenty-four journals from childhood to present (which I did not reference in the 1993-1994 research project), I have made an interesting discovery: My innate writing abilities and interests have been considerably impacted by the significant mentors in my life and, in turn, my beliefs about myself and my abilities. As well, my writing has changed the way that I think and operate in my world. There has been an intricately woven evolution of *self* through my writing experiences and products.

Despite my maturity, creative awakening, and greater artistic confidence in my later writing years, these earlier voices still dialogue in my head and influence me while I write, if/where I let them enter. For example, earlier in my life, my parents predisposed me to the belief that writing was not really a *practical* academic pursuit, although they indulged me this creative outlet in my elementary years; whereas, music and music teaching, like the talents of my successful music teacher mother, were deemed valuable and *profitable* skills. As a result of some of my natural musical ability and interest, as well

as positive reinforcement about it from my mother and my community, it was not long before I found talent and praise in performing and writing music. Therefore, I excelled at it and lost some of my voice and skill in my other creative passions such as writing poetry, short stories, and articles. However, my disillusionment with writing was truly squelched in secondary school as the teachers turned to focussing on analyzing literature rather than trusting students, such as myself, to create text in their own style and voice. Emig (1971) referred to the two types of writing that students are typically exposed to in grade school as being “extensive writing occurring chiefly as the *school-sponsored* mode; and with reflexive writing occurring chiefly as a *self-sponsored* activity of students” (p. 4). She chose the reflective and extensive terms over the frequently used definitions for modes of discourse (the poetic and communicative) because she found them to be looser and more accurately representative of the categories of writing done in a school setting.

The terms *reflexive* and *extensive* have the virtue of relative unfamiliarity in discussions of modes of discourse. Second, they suggest two general kinds of relations between the writing self and the field of discourse—the *reflexive*, a basically contemplative role: “What does this experience mean?”; the *extensive*, a basically active role: “How, because of this experience, do I interact with my environment?” (p. 37)

As a result of my lack of formative training and real encouragement in either of these modes of writing, I did less and less “reflexive” writing as I progressed into my middle and late twenties, although I acquired (later in my undergraduate years at the university) the ability to compose “extensive” writing for academic purposes to meet the writing criteria and standards of the University of Calgary.

I learned to compose essays on demand. Like one of the participants in Emig's (1971) student think-aloud research study, I learned to write whether I felt like it or not. I did not have the luxury of endless hours of contemplation and reflection because I was also working at the time to pay for my tuition; therefore, "there [was] no time for mooning or moping or any form of temperament. Writing is a task to be done like any other, and one simply gets on with it" (Emig, 1971, p. 56). I was of the mindset of this quotation by Buck (Quotable women: A collection of shared thoughts, 1994) "I don't wait for moods. You accomplish nothing if you do that. Your mind must know it has got to get down to earth" and write. I was educated in various process models stemming from or in addition to Murray's (1971/2003) writing model of pre-writing, writing and re-writing. For example, Helmholtz and Wallace's (1926, as cited by Emig, 1971) model aptly described how I proceeded in and out of class to create writing assignments for my teachers: 1) Preparation (investigation); 2) Incubation (not consciously thinking about the problem; 3) Illumination (ideas emerge); and 4) Verification (validity of idea is tested and put into form). Cowley (1967) also referred to the *stages* of the composing process that also ring true of some of my approach to writing:

First comes the germ of the story, then the period of more or less conscious meditation, then the first draft, and finally the revision, which may be simply "pencil work," as John O'Hara calls it—that is, minor changes in wording—or may lead to writing several drafts and what amounts to a new work. (as cited by Emig, 1971, p. 17)

Fitting into a prescribed writing process and schema may have initially proven to be an obstacle to real creative thought as I was learning to write well for the first time in

university, but it was/is a skill that I benefit from to this day. When I was a child and would rebel against my mother's disciplined music composition instruction in harmony and counterpoint, she often told me, "Shelley, you have to know the rules before you can break the rules!" Perhaps, as in music composition, I had to learn this writing process to appreciate it before I could deviate from it in order to learn my own creative way.

However, to this day, I still have to be careful not to fall into the "I've-gotta-get-it-done-in-a-certain-way" mode. Instead, I have learned with some creative maturity, to allow time to be *contemplative* about my writing. I do so by writing several drafts and allowing time to digest my ideas and let them percolate a bit in what I call my *passive writing* (walking and doing other things). I also need to find the right time to do my *active writing* (sitting in front of the computer on task) in order to bring out my best ideas. By doing so, I have learned to not only enjoy the process of writing, but to roll in the satisfaction of a completed piece because I have taken the right amount of time to pull it forward into a polished product. Emig (1971) found that all eight of her young grade twelve participants that had been inundated by a traditional academic system had no "*aesthetic vocabulary*, no words to express joy or satisfaction in completion. Or, if they [did], they [did] not regard their own writings as artistic work enough to elicit these words. For inquiry-sponsored, like school-sponsored, writing, they [were] dutiful enough to want to please-minimally; no more" (p. 87). Her observations of these high school students matched my own experiences in my secondary and early university schooling. I had lost the *love* of writing as I endeavoured to write in a linear process with a prescribed product purpose for my teacher as my only audience. However, eventually I learned to find my own way as I was exposed to different creative opportunities.

Finding My Own Voice

My parents and academic mentors innocently and with good intentions “hooked my attention” (Ruiz, 1997). First, they believed and they treated me accordingly, that my one real talent was music. Secondly, they (predominantly my teachers) helped me to understand the “right” way of writing for school, which according to Ruiz was part of my “domestication”:

Attention is the ability we have to discriminate and to focus only on that which we want to perceive...The adults around us hooked our attention and put information into our minds through repetition. That is the way we learned everything we know...

As children, we didn’t have the opportunity to choose our beliefs, but we *agreed* with the information that was passed to us from the dream of the planet via other humans...That’s how we learn as children. Children believe everything adults say. We agree with them, and our faith is so strong that the belief system controls our whole dream of life...We didn’t choose these beliefs, and we may have rebelled against them, but we were not strong enough to win the rebellion... [W]e start pretending to be what we are not, just to please others, just to be good enough for someone else. (pp. 3-7)

It took great courage for me to eventually set aside my belief system of the significant elders in my life in order to pursue my own authentic dreams even though they had fallen to the wayside over several years. I chose, upon the completion of my four music diplomas at the age of seventeen, to enter into the University Of Calgary Faculty Of Education. I wanted to teach English. This news was of tremendous disappointment to

my family especially in light of my previous success in music. I remember my father saying (although he has since admitted that he is very proud of me) that “English teachers are a dime a dozen”. As well, I remember telling my high school English teacher that I hoped to write and teach English and he shook his head doubtfully. He felt that I was not strong enough in my writing to be successful in the field of English. Palmer (2000) concluded that

[w]e arrive in this world with birthright gifts—then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning them or letting others disabuse us of them. As young people, we are surrounded by expectations that may have little to do with who we really are, expectations held by people who are not trying to discern our selfhood but to fit us into slots. In families, schools, workplaces, and religious communities, we are trained away from true self toward images of acceptability... We are disabused of original giftedness in the first half of our lives. Then—if we are awake, aware, and able to admit our loss—we spend the second half trying to recover and reclaim the gift we once possessed. (p. 12)

These hesitant reactions to my writing dreams by the significant mentors in my earlier life made me more determined to succeed in my new academic pursuits in university than ever.

...[W]e need a great deal of courage to challenge our own beliefs. Because even if we know we didn't choose all these beliefs, it is also true that we agreed to all of them. The agreement is so strong that even if we understand the concept of it not being true, we feel the blame, the guilt, and the shame that occur if we go against these rules. (Ruiz, 1997, p. 11)

Because my writing had not been properly mentored in secondary school, I did poorly at

much of it in my first term at university. However, I was still unwavering in my *need* to write and to do so well, and my strong desire to *teach* writing. Perhaps it was like Eleanor Roosevelt said, “You must do the thing you think you cannot do” (n.d.). I knew that I had talent somewhere inside of me, and I also knew that I wanted to help students (like myself) in secondary English programs learn to write well and to truly enjoy doing so. Ironically, I received a teaching appointment in a small rural community school teaching music in a band program. I only agreed to do so with the understanding that I would also have English Language Arts as part of my teaching assignment. They agreed, and although I ended up teaching music (somewhat enjoyably) as part of my teaching assignments in various schools until 1998, I eventually was able to abandon it in favour of my real love of teaching English and then becoming an English Curriculum Coordinator for a school division.

In my early days of teaching, beginning in 1988, I was quiet in my creative writing, and did not write much, perhaps because I was busy, or did not see myself clearly yet. I had ideas that I wrote down from time to time, but nothing came to fruition. I am relieved to know that other well-known writers, such as Marilynne Robinson, have felt the same. “[T]here have been long periods in my life when I didn’t write fiction or poetry, and I sometimes wonder, looking back, why during all that time I never doubted that I was actually a writer, although I was very secretive about it” (Robinson, M., 1995, p. 79).

Heard (1995) talked about the phenomenon of the awakening writers that she had encountered:

Throughout the country I meet people like myself who at some point in their lives decided to stop speaking—to stop telling their stories, to remain silent. Now they

are writing in a workshop for the first time since college or high school, their voices shaky with beginning, angry with realized betrayals, or strong with defiance. As their writing teacher, my job is to try to help them speak again. To help them trust their own voice again. (p. 3)

I took some creative writing courses with the Continuing Education Department of the University of Calgary with some well-known Alberta authors such as C. Martini and E. Maltere, where we would share our writing with each other. As well, I became abundantly more confident when I received an “A” in my first graduate course with Dr. Hunsberger (1994). It was here where I turned a sparkly new leaf in my writing life and began composing with a new-found veracity that I had not experienced since childhood. As well, my maturity brought with it some discipline to write regularly regardless of the obstacles in my life. In another graduate writing course, my professor Mary Frampton (mentioned with permission), encouraged us to write a short story and create a class collection of our work. I had never truly celebrated writing in this way, and the idea of having us share our writing in this book format was exciting to me. It was here that I wrote my first short story in many years entitled “A Turning Tide” (see Exemplar 5.5). It was also by writing this story that I planted the seed in my own head to leave my marriage.

I started and completed some short stories, articles (1993 to present) and a novel *Missing Pieces* (1995-1997). I also began another novel *The Rebuilders* in 1997, but I could still feel myself developing as a writer each and every time I wrote. It was not until later in my thirties that I could rely on a consistent style and voice that I could call my own. In essence, I went from being a very undisciplined writer, to a suppressed writer to a thoughtful writer. As Lamott (1995) says, “[i]t is very hard to find [our] own voice and

it is tempting to assume someone else's" (p. 196), when our whole lives have been dedicated to learning writing by admiring and emulating other "real" writers.

Falling in Love with Writing Again

Until my thirties, writing had always been my passion in the small cracks of my life in school. I wrote journals in private, poetry in math class, short stories in bits and pieces all over the place, and articles in staff meetings. But in my thirties, I tentatively began making it a bigger part of my life experience, dedicating serious and committed time to improving my skills and towards the outcome of becoming a "real" published writer. I concur with Ruiz (1997) that "[d]eath is not the biggest fear we have; our biggest fear is taking the risk to be alive—the risk to be alive and express what we really are. Just being yourself is the biggest fear of humans" (p. 17). I am beginning to see more clearly through this re-analysis of my writing journey that there has always been a tentative part of me that has been trying to prove my prowess as a writer, but reluctant to publish and risk the rejection of my art. Even with my experience in English Language Arts education teaching in the classroom and serving the school division as an English Language Arts Consultant, the doubtful voices still lived in my head, spawning reluctant and hesitant moments within my writing process until very recently. Finally, I have come to a turning point and *finally believe* that I am on the right track. I want to tell the *truth* of my own life experiences in my own voice:

Truth seems to want expression. Unacknowledged truth saps your energy and keeps you and your characters wired and delusional. But when you open the closet door and let what was inside out, you can get a rush of liberation and even joy...

And the truth of your experience can only come through in your own voice. If it is wrapped in someone else's voice, we readers will feel suspicious, as if you are dressed up in someone else's clothes. You cannot write out of someone else's big dark place; you can only write out of your own. Sometimes wearing someone else's style is very comforting, warm and pretty and bright, and it can loosen you up, tune you into the joys of language and rhythm and concern. But what you say will be an abstraction because it will not have sprung from direct experience: when you try to capture the truth of your experience in some other person's voice or on that person's terms, you are removing yourself one step further from what you have seen and what you know. (Lamott, 1995, pp. 199-200)

I am writing, and writing with a new found confidence and enthusiasm that perhaps resonates in women in their forties as commented on by Andrus (2006) who has led many retreats for women. She believed that women can aspire to a higher calling, when they begin

... taming the beast, for once you begin to silence it, you'll begin to hear your true voice...that of your higher self. It's then that you must believe and truly trust in yourself, for when you do, you'll be able to start opening up and letting others see you for who you really are. By speaking *your* truth, you'll begin to set yourself free. This takes courage...it's the courage to give nobility to your life, to choose to be yourself above what other people want you to be, and to take the path that's right for you...(p. 83)

I am finding a new path as I prepare to publish some of my text selections now and into

the future. Throughout this research process for my dissertation, I have begun to find some of my worthwhile writing artefacts to polish and submit to potential publishers. I have also started gathering journals and lists of magazines that would be suitable starting points for this process. This is a good sign that I have achieved a new state of creative readiness and confidence after a long journey. As Rumi (1995) states:

...[U]nfold
 your own myth, without complicated explanation,
 so everyone will understand the passage...
 Start walking towards Shames. Your legs will get heavy
 and tired. Then comes a moment
 of feeling the wings you've grown,
 lifting. (p. 41)

However, it is important to note that it is at this same time in my life when I am feeling my creative writing wings lifting, that I have found a new type of love—a love of self and everything around me. Living in the present and recognizing this new warmth inside of me, allows me to see the world in all of its glistening wondrousness. I understand what Heard (1995) said about falling “in love at least three times a day”:

I'm in love with this light and everything the sun brushes. I look around for what else I can fall in love with...Falling in love each day expands the boundaries of love beyond my immediate family and close friends to strangers, trees, light, everything in the world, so that I can come to writing with more openness. (p. 60)

It is this new type of enlightened energy that feeds me to write, *share and think* about my writing like I have never done before.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

Curriculum Orientation

This thesis is a self-analysis of my own act of creative writing through autobiographical interpretive lenses in the context of the process, and post-process theories of writing and other theories that represent these differing schools of thought. While creative writing in three modes of writing (transactional [Britton, 1975], imaginative and expressive), I initially reflected on the importance of “meta-processing” (metacognition) in four meta-learning domains (meta-conative [motivational], metacognitive [thinking], meta-affective [feeling] and meta-spiritual [inspirational]) and how these types of reflexive lenses can inform creative writing. I triangulated some of my own “linguistic-experiential” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005) research with the words and works of published writers who had reflected on their own writing experiences, in order to identify commonalities and differences among us as writers. With these emerging research themes in my interpretation of the data, I was better able to express these understandings in the context of the *Program of Studies for Senior High School English Language Arts*. (2000). It became clearer how to support or develop ideas in connection with this provincial curriculum as it pertains to the act of writing and to expand the concept of metacognition. There seemed to be room in a big educational frontier of writing to allow me to explore how we consider our writing experience within the writing process and how we self-reflect in areas which, in addition to thinking, also include our emotions,

motivations, and spirituality.

“Since curriculum guidelines are usually non-negotiable, teachers need to provide students with strong ways to meet them” (Foster, Sawicki, Schaeffer, & Zelinski, 2002, p. 9). In my role as a curriculum facilitator, I had observed teachers becoming very interested in the new provincially developed English Language Arts curriculum which is rooted in relatively new inquiry-based language in the areas of writing and thinking about writing, and rising to the new pedagogical challenges within it. Reading and writing have always been a key focus of the English Language Arts Curriculum where the concern for composition has been overly product-centred, and in some cases, with an over emphasis on process:

Recognizing that language is not a self-contained system or static code on the one hand avoids the traditional obsession with the product—with skills, techniques, and conventions, essential though they are—and, on the other, prevents a pendulum swing to overemphasis on process or on the personal aspects.

(Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 27)

The move towards the process approach to writing predominantly in the 1970's onward has resulted in many composition classes and the resources for these programs being formulaic and prescribed, losing some of the excitement of composition that has fascinated writers for centuries. The writing process is explained by the grandfather of process theory, as “the process of discovery through language. It is the process of exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language...It is not a rigid lock-step process....” (Murray, 1972/2003, p. 4). Yet, it is often taught (as it is sometimes presented in our textbooks or how textbooks are

interpreted by teachers) in a linear and formulaic manner (Atwell, 1991; Calkins, 1986; Conrad, 1990; Silberman, 1989). So what type of process is it then? Whose process is it? In my educational experiences, I am often surprised by how few English teachers actively write fiction or non-fiction themselves. Therefore, it begs the question, how can we teach students to write if the act of writing (for our own pleasure or promotion) is foreign and unfamiliar to us? For the purposes of this research, I will refer to the “act” of writing as an over-arching term to describe the potential writing processes and post-processes, as well as the more nebulous “experience” of writing. In other words, the act of writing encompasses all of these possibilities of writing.

Metacognition is also a concept often addressed in cognitive developmental psychology. It, too, is an idea that is taking centre stage in many schools across the country as educators grapple with the ideas about critical thinking that entail the “awareness of one’s own thinking and reflection on the thinking of self and others as an object of cognition” (Kuhn & Dean, 2004, p. 270). Metacognition is often conceptually oriented in educational terminology as a set of collaborative or independent learning strategies and principles that enhance an awareness and application of knowledge, skill and experience (Brown, 1987; Costa, 2002; Fogarty, 1994; Jacobs & Paris, 1987; Palincsar & Brown, 1984). In the *Program of Studies for Senior High School English Language Arts* (2000) it is defined as enabling students “to become more consciously aware of their own thinking and learning processes” (p. 2):

Essentially, metacognition involves reflection, critical awareness and analysis, monitoring, and reinvention. Students who are engaged in metacognition recognize the strategies and skills they employ, appraise their strengths and

weaknesses in the use of these strategies and skills, make modifications, and monitor subsequent strategies. (p. 2)

As does the process approach to writing, these *metacognitive* interpretations or emphases again can lead to a formulaic approach to writing. Many published metacognitive and process approaches to writing consider that there are a series of thinking patterns that can lead students in the direction of better thinking and, therefore, better writing. Although this may be true in some instances, the act of writing is often multi-dimensional requiring a much deeper interpretation and representation of its purposes and processes. “The various strands of responses, especially in the middle ranges of the efferent [logical/purposeful]-aesthetic [emotive] continuum, are sometimes simultaneous, interacting, and interwoven” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 15). Reflecting on these multiple strands of responses is what Rosenblatt refers to as the “expressed response” or what a reader/writer does to

recapture the general effect of the [second stream of reactions] after the event and may seek to express it and to recall what in the evocation led to the response.

Reflection on “the meaning” of even a simple text involves the recall, the reactivation of some aspects of the process carried on during the reading [or writing]” (p. 15)

When students are taught how to write creatively, very little attention is paid in writing literature about delving reflexively beyond the thoughts and sometimes the feelings of the writers, including the wilfulness of the learners and their spirituality. These affective metacognitive “stances” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005) play a role in true metacognitive reflexivity as students plan, monitor, and evaluate (Fogarty, 1994) their writing text. As a

result, students have the potential to evolve their own understanding of the act of writing from a state of conscious to a heightened super-conscious awareness during their unique “writing experiences” (Kent, 1993) as they pre-write, write and re-write their texts (Murray, 1972/2003; Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003).

Writing as Art and Science: Linguistic Translations

We--writers and teachers--of writing, do not wish to reduce students to “carpenters or plumbers of the written word, who merely saw, cut, and fit the pieces in place once the master plan has been established” (Conrad, 1990, pp. xxxv and xxxvi). Although we hope to explain to students that writers benefit from having the fundamental techniques which allow us to communicate clearly and credibly to our intended audiences, these skills do not always “determine the practice of art; [instead, these writing rules] are maxims, which can serve as a guide to an art only if they can be integrated into the practical knowledge” (Polanyi, as cited by Lunsford, 1979, p. 40). Writing is a creative merging of both science and art. It is the science of effective communication which has its own rhetorical standards. As well, it is the art of aesthetics where “[t]rustworthy aesthetic universals do exist, but they exist at such a high level of abstraction as to offer almost no guidance to the writer” (Gardner J., 1991, p. 3). The writer must then mitigate these purposes of art and science by gauging, confirming and revising, or expanding the text. Hence, the text is shaped transactionally by both writer and self, text, and/or audience (Rosenblatt, 2005).

Connecting Schools of Thought: Process and Post-Process Theories of Writing

For the purposes of this research, I focussed predominantly on the two foundational and differing schools of writing research referred to as the process and post-

process theories of writing, although other empirical and qualitative research had been done and theories had been developed before or in response to these two academic counterparts. For example, I occasionally referred to the “Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005) as a complement to these two theories.

Nystrand (2006) referred to the following four historical contexts of writing in her article entitled “The Social and Historical Context for Writing Research” (2006): 1) formative context (1950’s and 1960’s); 2) receptive context (1960’s and 1970’s); 3) social context (1980’s) and the 4) post-modern context (1990’s). In these contexts, some writing paradigms and/or theories/methods emerged, such as the following: a) traditional rhetoric in a formative context (Lucas, 1955; Young, 1978); b) writing development models (Moffett, 1968); c) grammar instructional methods (Mellon, 1969; Read, 1971); d) logic and history of student errors (Shaughnessy, 1977); e) communicative competence within an ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1974); f) dialectical relationships (Bizzell, 1982); g) discourse competence enabling specialized groups (Faigley, 1985); h) writing across the curriculum (Olson, 1977); i) the transactional theory of reading and writing (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005) and others (as cited by Nystrand, 2006, pp. 11-27). Oddly enough, looking at recent writing research taking place in the late 1990’s to the present (2006) (MacArthur, Graham & Fitzgerald, 2006), there seems again to be a renewal of a cognitive process approach to writing with the recent advancements in brain research and technology (Berninger & Winn, 2006) resulting in a new cognitive language of writing instruction. Whereas, constructivism, of the 1990’s (onward) closely mirrors some of the principles of the post-process theorists of the 1970’s.

In general, the cognitivist theorists believe that the act of writing can be identified

in “codified phases that can be taught” (Breuch, 2003, p. 97) where the mind loops recursively between these logical phases of writing found to be indicative and generalisable of many writers. However, as various renditions of the cognitive theory have been turned into practice in many classrooms over the past thirty years, Murray’s initial process model (1972/2003) of a) pre-writing; b) writing and c) re-writing has been taken to mean linear and formulaic means of composing text. The post-process theorists responded to this extreme version of cognitive process theory in a way that “post-process has come to mean a critique of the process movement in composition studies” (Breuch, 2003, p. 98).

Breuch (2003) explains that there should be a re-examination of our definition of writing so that it is seen as “an activity rather than a body of knowledge, our methods of teaching [are] indeterminate activities rather than exercises of mastery, and our communicative interactions with students [are] dialogic rather than monologic” (p. 99). Less radical post-process and later constructivist thinkers recognized that the impact of the teacher-student relationship was critical for dialogic talking (Kent, 1993) or “to help students construct understanding of the world ...with guidance” (Berninger & Winn, 2006, p. 105) in order to write well.

It was my belief that both the codifiable process and less-codifiable post-process theories had their place in the act of writing, and it was this beginning conviction that fuelled my desire to research my writing in the context of these theories. It seemed important to consider how we (writers and writing teachers) think about this act of writing. Various metacognitive lenses have the potential to raise our awareness of these processes and post-process experiences to a level of understanding that can enlighten us even further as writers and educators. Teachers have sometimes tried to control much of

the writing process and thinking of their students as they endeavour to demonstrate effective writing strategies through their direction of a writing process. However, “[t]eachers who attempt to control all of their students’ learning processes could well be teaching strategies without helping students become metacognitive” (Foster, et al, 2002, p. 11). According to Graves, “writing spurs many kinds of thinking” (Jacobs, 2004), but it is also possible that thinking and an awareness of this thinking spurs different kinds of writing responses. “As students learn to think about their thinking, they learn more actively, decisively, and reflectively” (Foster, et al., 2002, p. 9).

From Metacognition to Meta-processing: The Link of Intelligences

Teaching students how to be self-aware of their own learning processes is a powerful theory and pedagogy because it puts them in the driver’s seat of their own learning experience:

At its best, self-observation allows just such an equanimous awareness of passionate or turbulent feelings. At a minimum, it manifests itself simply as a slight stepping-back from experience, a parallel stream of consciousness that is “meta”: hovering above or beside the main flow, aware of what is happening rather than being immersed and lost in it. (Goleman, 1994, p. 47)

This type of “meta” thinking is common in educational settings as it is referred to meta-knowledge (thinking about your thinking) and meta-memory (understanding your memory processing) interchangeably with the notion of metacognition (Flavell, 1977 and 1979). These ideas are most relevant when we consider the different *types* of thinking that we do as we learn. These types of *brain capabilities* are often referred to as “intelligences” (Covey, 2004). However, when we *reflect* upon our abilities within these intelligences,

this process of understanding begins to resemble “meta-knowledge” (Flavell, 1977) when we exercise our abilities to “meta-process” (Robinson, 2005/2006) our various intelligences.

We are often more familiar with the cognitive intelligence (IQ: Intellectual Quotient) which has been valued in our education systems and is highly tested and considered carefully when determining student aptitude in our classrooms. It refers to “our ability to analyze, reason, think abstractly, use language, visualize and comprehend” (Covey, 2004, p. 50) :

Researchers’ preoccupation with the efferent is exemplified by their focus on Piaget’s work on the child’s development of mathematical and logical concepts and the continuing neglect of the affective by behaviourist, cognitive, and artificial intelligence psychologists. This is slowly being counterbalanced by growing interest in the affective and the qualitative. (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 30)

Goleman (1994) also references the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ: Emotional Quotient) which considers five key factors “...self-awareness, managing emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and social arts. These domains include competencies such as impulse control, persistence, hopefulness, delaying gratification, and handling relationships” (Parry & Gregory, 2003, p. 91). However, Covey also talks about Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) as being “the central and most fundamental of all the intelligences because it becomes the source of guidance of the other [domains]. Spiritual intelligence represents our drive for meaning and connection with the infinite” (Covey, 2004, p. 53). This could be considered an extension of the meta-affective domain, but much research indicates that it is a separate way of experiencing the world and learning (Covey, 2004;

Hawley, 1993; Ruiz, 1997; Ornish, 1998; Walsch, 1996; Walters, 1990).

Riggs (1998) discussed three learning domains: cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling) and conative (motivation) as being a necessary framework for a balanced education and it is an interesting notion to consider the “meta” stance within each of these domains. By doing so, it greatly expands the potential of such discussions about learning domains and intelligences and creates the concept of “meta-learning” where we think about learning as a whole from various stances. If we also add the spiritual learning domain, there are then four *meta*-learning domains which can impact writing. It is also possible for other domains to emerge although, initially, it appeared that these four meta-learning domains held the most relevance for writing. Therefore, I proposed that when we self-reflect, we often do so from a meta-learning stance and expand the concept of *metacognition* to truly mean “*meta-processing*”. Therefore, my beginning definition of “metacognition” (“metacognition” and “meta-processing” are used interchangeably from this point forward) for the purposes of this research study is the following: *Meta-processing is the knowledge of one’s own knowledge, the processes, as well as the cognitive, affective, motivational, and spiritual states and the ability to deliberately monitor and regulate these experiences.* This definition expanded upon the definition given by Hacker, Dunlosky and Graesser (1998) which only included the first two domains: the cognitive and affective.

By decentring through these meta-learning domains which are all interactive and capable of impacting each other, we are better able to permeate and think beyond our unconscious and automatic thinking and develop our understanding of the mind. The terms “unconscious” and “subconscious” appear interchangeably in this research: “The

unconscious or subconscious mind is more than simply the aspect or aspects of the mind of which we are not directly conscious or aware” (*Wikipedia*, 2006). Freud suggested that “subconscious” is “frequently misused and confused with the unconscious, [and is only] the...automatic functioning of the brain” (*Wikipedia*, 2006). As well, he suggested that “the unconscious was a depository for socially unacceptable ideas, wishes or desires, traumatic memories, and painful emotions put out of mind by the mechanism of psychological repression” (*Wikipedia*, 2006). I did not enter into psychoanalytical debate about how the unconscious and subconscious states are accessed or differ. For the purposes of this research, I (like other educators) used these terms interchangeably to mean “that part of the mind wherein psychic activity takes place of which the person is [temporarily or permanently] unaware” (modified) (*Wordnet*, 2006). That part of the mind can be accessed deliberately or inadvertently (on occasion) through the act of metacognition within these meta-learning domains.

It seemed important that the *meta-conative* domain (Riggs, 1998) was considered carefully because it includes the elements of engagement (Schlechty, 2002), discipline and determination and it is with these attitudes that we function and screen our understanding of the topics we write about and our learning about how to write them. From the objective *metacognitive* stance we look through the lenses of our logical and rational minds. Here we consider how we understand our writing through linear, recursive and concurrent processes to divergently and convergently solve problems and create ideas (Covey, 2004). In the *meta-affective* domain, our feelings help us identify that which truly matters in our hearts. These emotions, ranging from sadness to happiness, can translate into another way of hooking our interest and interpreting our knowing about

what we write, and can impact the reality that we determine for ourselves in that experience (Jensen, 1998). In the *meta-spiritual* domain we are truly digging deeply within our own minds to respond to the big questions: “Who are we? What are we really doing here? What is our purpose, our calling, our vision of greatness?” There is an intangible “energy” or an indescribable “spiritual sense” about how we know who we are and it is this critical awareness that guides our thinking about writing (Hawley, 1995, p. 15; Walters, 1990). In the meta-spiritual domain we look for our inspiration. “Inspire (from the Latin *Inspirare*) means to breathe life into another” (Covey, 2004) and when we self-reflect on our writing we often look for what breathes life into our creativity. These four meta-learning domains are windows into the mind that allow us an opportunity to understand it differently. However, it is the intentionality (Dyer, 2004) of the meta-processing experience that is critical. There is an expectation that the end result of this awareness is action and the ability to re-route experiences to have even more successful outcomes. Flavell (1979) indicated “that there are two levels of children’s metacognition. One level is the acquisition of meta-knowledge. The other is the ability to produce it...” (Jacob, 2004, p. 18). Successful metacognitive ability comes with self-development and self-discipline where Hawley (1993) explained that there is “the cultivation of inner capabilities. It involves narrowing one’s attention so it becomes a force that can be directed...It takes work” (p. 134). It is this type of work that has the potential of assisting in the act of creative writing to push beyond the linear and functional writing instruction of some present school composition programs and into some exciting new creative territory.

Creative writing is usually a term that is associated with poetry, drama, novels, and short stories. “The unfortunate implication is that there is not much creativity involved in other types of writing” (Kinneavy, 1991, p. 636). For the purposes of this research, creative writing refers to any writing that is created anew by the writer rather than being simply a synthesis or a regurgitation of another’s ideas. It can be considered creative regardless of the writing stance or the fluctuation between these stances: “The efferent stance pays more attention to the cognitive, the referential, the factual, the analytic, the logical, and the quantitative aspects of meaning. And the aesthetic stance pays more attention to the sensuous, the affective, the emotive, the qualitative” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 12).

It can be also considered creative whether or not the writing has any of the three rhetorical writing aims: 1) transactional which proves a point or explores a topic in essays or articles; 2) creative or imaginative writing referring to literature or poetry; or 3) expressive writing using the self-expression of the liberal arts in journals, letters, music and other. Creativity means always being “open to learning what is new, to perceiving new differences and new similarities...[leading] to new orders and structures, rather than always tending to impose familiar orders and structures in the field of what is seen” (Bohm, 1998 as cited by Massoudi, 2003, p. 117).

When we write creatively, we are leaping in with both feet to make our new marks on familiar and new paths. Creative “[w]riting is exploring! We know the direction in which we will go and the main landmarks we hope to pass, but not every twist and turn of the path” (Conrad, 1990, pp. xxxvi). Goethe (n.d.) states, “Everything has been thought of before, but the problem is to think of it again (Proverbs in Prose, unsourced)”

Therefore, to first generate a seed of creativity from the depths of inspiration, then grow it into a sensible shape that illuminates the light of the artist's inventiveness is an amazing feat. It requires skill, passion, tenacity, endurance and at times, an almost divine intervention.

Research Premise

Research Problem

In light of observations about process and post-process tendencies in my own writing, it seemed valuable to consider the possibility that both process and post-process orientations can occur within the act of writing and that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive of each other. That could mean, in fact, there is something of a unique “writing experience” within the writing process that occurs each time I write and it could mean that this occurs each time a writer writes and is unique to each writer. There are innumerable separate transactions between readers, [writers] and text” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 1). I felt that by exploring what I call the “writing experience” at the outset through the four meta-learning domains, new insights about this writing experience might shift or confirm my perspective about how I compose within a writing process model. As a result of these new insights about writing (using an expanded metacognitive and writing process and post-process language), I could re-visit and re-fresh how I consider and teach the art and science of writing that may also be generalisable or relevant to aspects of others' writing and teaching experiences.

Preliminary Guiding Questions

These were six initial guiding questions within the main research question, although it was understood that these questions might evolve as the research took place:

1. What is the writing “process” (as defined by process theorists) that occurs during my act of writing?
2. Is there a unique writing “experience” (not necessarily defined by or found within a process or post-process theory or model) that occurs during my act of writing?
How can it be described?
3. What “meta-processing” (metacognition in the four meta-learning domains: cognitive [to know], affective [to feel], conative [to have the will], and spiritual [to be]) occurs during my act of writing? How and where does it occur?
4. How can I capture this conscious and, in some cases, unconscious thinking that occurs during meta-processing?
5. How can an awareness of the writing “experience-process” (a combination of both the indefinable experience and the definable process) and the act of meta-processing improve or hinder my work as a writer?
6. In turn, how can this awareness influence my classroom instruction?

Theoretical Constructs of Research Methods

Social Interpretivism

This qualitative research falls within the interpretivist philosophy in the social sciences. It assumes a social reality that is a product of processes by which social actors negotiate the meanings of and for actions and situations. The human experience is a process of interpretation rather than simply a sensory reception of the external world. Human behaviour depends upon how individuals interpret the conditions they experience. Social reality is not some “thing” that may be interpreted in different ways. Instead it “is” those interpretations which are both personal and social (Silverman, 2004). By examining

my experience as a writer and a thinker of writing, I endeavour to interpret my writing and that of others through an inductive autobiographical interpretive lens.

The ontology of autobiography, according to Olney (1980), involves the centrality of *bios* which refers to the historical course of our lives where

“is” has been transformed into “was”...[but] “what was” no longer composes a part of *ta onta*, the present, the sum of things that are now existing or that are now being... We are left with a present no doubt formed by the past but utterly sundered from it. “If all time is eternally present,” T. S. Eliot says, “All time is unredeemable.” And to redeem the time is one of the autobiographer’s prime motives, perhaps *the* prime motive—perhaps, indeed, the only real motive of the autobiographer. (p. 240)

What this perspective suggests then is that we can never entirely retrieve the past because the memory has a way of transforming the experience of the past through the lenses of the present. It was not the intention of this research to relive and reform all pure consciousness of past, present and future as would be done in a phenomenological context. Instead, I used a “strategy that employs memory in a fairly ordinary but nevertheless creative sense...[where I consider] time, [] history (albeit personal), [] narrative, and [] memory...” (Olney, 1980, pp. 240-242). I did so with the intention of making new meaning of it in the present. I was also careful to regard the importance of how experience operates within a conceptual and linguistic framework.

Modernism

There is a hint of the Modernist perspective in this research. It assumes that we are capable of lifting ourselves out of ignorance into an enlightened state of being

especially if there is a reasoned approach to learning more about ourselves substantiated by the experiences of others. In other words, if I write about my own writing, and compare it with the voices of other writers, I might shed enough light on the act of writing to benefit writers of the future. This research assumed that there can be some “essence” of a writer captured by the capitulation of narratives. This optimistic aspect of this study about the nature of writers and their philosophies and practices incorporates “the potential for improvement in the human condition and the scope of human accomplishments” (Rosenau, 1992, pp. 47-48). In this type of humanist spirit there is the belief that by examining ourselves we can redefine ourselves and escape our “frozen narratives” (Bruner, 1993, p. 39) or our “sedimented identities” (Ziarek, 2001 as cited by Pinar). Ziarek (2001) explained that by doing so, it “enables a redefinition of becoming and freedom from the liberation of identity to the continuous ‘surpassing’ of oneself” (as cited by Pinar, 2004, p. 51). In other words, if we are capable, aware and intentional, we can learn and grow and attain some enlightenment in our writing experiences.

Curriculum Theory

There is also a shade of the curriculum theory stance within this autobiography of my metacognitive writing process as it considers within it the personal and public perceptions in the sphere of education. Although the think-aloud process within this research verged on the phenomenological of living and reliving the actual experience of consciousness, I did not use the phenomenological curriculum theory method of *currere* which in Latin refers to “running the course”. *Currere* involves the approaches of free association and the psychoanalytic technique to generate the data; this will not be occurring in this research. However, in *currere* there are four interesting steps or

moments in the method: 1) the regressive (re-entering the past), 2) the progressive (predicting the future), 3) the analytical (examining both past and present), and 4) the synthetical (making it all whole) (Pinar, 2004, pp. 35-37). Although I did not use these actual techniques in this autobiographical research, I believe that there are aspects of the concepts of *currere* within it which have relevance in the interpretation of my data. For example, “[w]e learn[] to move back and forth between the personal and the social, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and future, and to do so in ever-expanding social milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). We are then better able to integrate into society and better understand ourselves in relation to society. “[S]elf-knowledge and collective witnessing are complementary projects of self-mobilization for social reconstruction” (Pinar, 2004, p. 37). The social reconstructive purposes of this work, of course, were to better consider the act of writing and its function in related educational curricula. Where we write, we think, and yet, *how* we think when we write is something that has mystified so many writers who feel compelled to write about their processes. I chose this mode of research because I believed that this kind of reflexive work was ideally done from “within” in the form of autobiography.

In working to overcome the “self” conceived by others, one ‘works from within,’ from one’s interiority, which is a specific configuration of the socius and there, by definition, a public project as well... that requires autobiographical excavation and the self-reflexive articulation of one’s subjectivity in society. (Pinar, 2004, p. 22)

The Philosophy of Autobiography

The act of autobiography is riddled with philosophical complexities especially when the act of autobiography is not only concerned with the history and data of my

writing process, but the re-enactment of the thinking behind this work as I remembered the metacognitive dimensions of my earlier and present writing. The philosophical underpinnings of autobiography are important as they guide the serious researcher in the social science of self-narrative. Bruner (1993) talks about how autobiography is in itself ...a way of construing experience—and of reconstruing and reconstruing it until our breath or our pen fails us. Construal and reconstrual are interpretive. Like all forms of interpretive conventions, how we construe our lives is subject to our intentions, to the interpretive conventions available to us, and to the meaning imposed upon us by the usages of our culture and language. (p. 38)

The initial purpose of this writing was to improve the understanding of how I perceived the art and science of writing. In turn, this understanding could expand, if not improve existing educational theory and practice in the same realm. The genre of conventions of this work involved the personal disclosure of self as I considered the public dimensions of writing reflectively in an educational context. The meaning, then, behind this writing was to know that what I perceived happened in my earlier writing might change as I reconfigured myself in new understanding: The autobiographer “...who takes the trouble to tell of himself knows that the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future...” (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 30). Therefore, “[n]o one can better do justice to himself than the interested party, and it is precisely in order to do away with the misunderstandings, to restore an incomplete or deformed truth, that the autobiographer himself takes up the telling of his story” (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 36). As well, the autobiographer “calls himself as witness for himself; [and] others he calls as witnesses for what is irreplaceable in his presence” (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 29). It did seem that this

research was strengthened when my witnessing data corroborated the findings, or this information supported the voices of other writers, or other writers supported my findings. We all seemed to be sharing this social writing realm as we created a meta-narrative together.

Writing autobiography is different than autobiographical theory which deconstructs the work of autobiographers. Instead, autobiography is sometimes considered to be quite free and open

because there are no rules or formal requirements binding the prospective autobiographer—no restraints, no necessary models, no obligatory observances gradually shaped out of a long developing tradition and imposed by that tradition on the individual talent who would translate a life into writing. (Olney, 1980, p. 3).

However, Bruner disagreed and suggested that autobiography requires “some sort of program. The program of retrieval must be guided by some criteria of relevance, by something like a ‘theory’ about how the isolated ‘facts’ of a life cohere...The ‘facts,’ we might say, are partly made, partly found” (p. 45).

The Distancing of the Researcher

An autobiographer must “distantiate her or himself from him or herself” (Pinar, 2004, p. 49). Or, “[a]t some point, the writer dissociates from the text and reads it through the eyes of the potential readers...[A] twofold operation is involved. The emerging text is read to sense what others might make of it. But this hypothetical interpretation must also be checked against the writer’s own inner sense of purpose” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 21). Therefore, there was the assumption in this research that we as writers are capable of de-centering or standing back and taking an objective look at

ourselves so that we can become conscious of our own experiences. “Decentring” is a term used by developmental cognitive researcher Piaget to reflect an advancing stage of cognitive development in children where they can empathize and step outside of themselves to reflect on their experiences. Odell (as cited by Lunsford, 1979) extended this understanding by stating that what is valuable about decentring is “getting outside of one’s own frame of reference, understanding the thoughts, values, and feelings of another person;...projecting oneself into unfamiliar circumstances, whether factual or hypothetical;...learning to understand why one reacts as he does to experience” (p. 39). For the purposes of this paper decentring was viewed as a way to step out of an experience and gain objectivity. By doing so, we as writers were able to be very conscious in that experience (Lunsford, 1979). It is this stance of personal objectivity that propels a person forward into greater self-awareness. However, Gusdorf (1980) argued that there is no such thing as *total* personal objectivity.

One must choose a side and give up the pretence of objectivity, abandoning a sort of false scientific attitude that would judge a work by the precision of its detail...the prerogative of autobiography consists in this: that it shows us not the objective stages of a career—to discern these is the task of the historian—but that it reveals instead the effort of a creator to give the meaning of his own mythic tale. (1980, p. 42 and 48)

Educational Language

Educational language was predominantly the medium of this educational research. Therefore, it was beneficial to have had previous experience with this language as a teacher and facilitator of teachers. I accessed my “linguistic-experiential reservoir...[to]

‘make sense’” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 5) of this research topic. I, as the researcher, looked at the everyday social world in order to make sense of socially constructed meanings and then interpret these meanings into a social scientific language. Language can assist in describing reality whether it is 1) indexical, where it is vague and equivocal, lending itself to several meanings or 2) reflexive, where we jointly create the social world in which we live (Heyman, 1997). “We have to interpret the meaning of the situation. The meaning depends on our interpretation, which is based on the context; at the same time, the context is also an interpretation” (Heyman, 1997, p. 11). Greater referential and representational language ability can assist in facilitating a greater awareness of our experiences. In one way, these interpretations can be seen as a re-presentation of our everyday experiences. However, in another way, they can potentially develop into theories about these experiences and these theories further evolve the language which explains them. By transacting with the research data for this research project, I was able to make “new meanings by applying, reorganizing, revising, or extending public and private elements selected from [my] personal linguistic-experiential reservoirs” (Heyman, 1997, p. 5). In this case, the language context was educational, although occasionally referencing cognitive psychological and psycho-analytical concepts. As a result this meta-linguistic merging of two language paradigms (educational and psychological) built on itself to create a further depth of understanding about the field of writing and metacognition in education.

There are hermeneutical influences of this ever-evolving understanding of text through language. “It is a circular relationship... The anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes explicit understanding in that the parts, that are determined by

the whole, themselves also determine this whole” (Gadamer, 1976/1985, n.p.). This heightened understanding can help develop greater strategies for future learning in the areas of metacognition and its influences on the writing processes. However, there is “the danger...that we become the language we speak” (Aoki, 2004, p. 25) referring to the fact that once language is established, it is hard to think beyond the language to describe unique and ever-evolving ideas. Therefore, it is important to think of language as an evolving tool of understanding. To endeavour to be creative in the new expression of compositional ideas that might stretch beyond existing conceptual language can further assist writers and teachers in the art and teaching of writing.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE OVERVIEW AND PRE-INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH TOPIC

New Language of Writing and Metacognition

Because of my prior experience as a writer, teacher and teacher of writing in an educational setting, I established some ideas about my own writing which are *a posteriori*. Social reality operates within a conceptual and linguistic framework and I began to establish an extended educational lexicon (which incorporates existing terminology in writing and metacognitive theories with new ideas) thus creating a new lexicon of writing and thinking about writing which I used to help understand my own writing process. This language served as a starting point to better understand what I already knew about writing and to create a terminology that I could either further defend and build upon or reconstruct as the findings questioned these ideas. I did not intend these to be hypotheses; instead, I wanted them to be constructs on which to base my thinking about writing and metacognition and to serve as foundations for any emerging theories. Such thinking would facilitate a further evolution of understanding that might refute or build upon these ideas. I did so to resonate with other writers and writing researchers in an effort to communicate and potentially compare our writing experiences and perspectives.

Differing perspectives about our experiences in conjunction with the experiences of others is addressed eloquently by Yogananda (Walters, 1990) in his story of the elephant driver and his six blind sons. When they are given the task of cleaning the elephant, they begin interpreting the “being” of the elephant. In this research, the elephant is the writing experience that we each have and we each determine that it is a different

creature based on the part of the elephant about which we are writing at the time, whether it is the sides, tusks or tail of the animal. The driver responds to all of his sons by saying: ‘So you see, my sons,’ he finished, ‘you are all right—but you are also all wrong!’ Each son’s truth is unique to him (p. 30), and as a result how each expresses it in language is important. Garfinkel (1984) talks about how the “typifying function of language [is] the bedrock of intersubjectivity” (p. 96). In this research, it is exploring and developing an advancing lexicon that might prove to have the potential to facilitate an even greater awareness of the topics at hand.

Existing Writing Theory

Process

As students of writing, many of us were taught to consider the final product as the indicator of success. We were taught to analyze the literature of the great authors which often distanced us from our own sense of ability and purpose in writing. Murray (1972) was one of the initial process theorists who suggested that writing occurs in three “stages”: prewriting, writing and rewriting. “The amount of time a writer spends in each stage depends on his personality, his work habits, his maturity as a craftsman, and the challenge of what he is trying to say” (Murray, 2003, p. 4). *Pre-writing* refers to the thoughts that occur before the act of writing. The impetus to write has many inspirations, and it is in this first stage that we begin to see the conception of many of these new and in some cases fragile ideas. The *Writing* stage refers to the “act of producing a first draft” (Murray, 2003, p. 4). This stage is where the writers must compile all of their initial ideas into some semblance of order, and it is this purging onto paper that can be very challenging. The final stage is the *Rewriting* stage. It is where writers go back over their

writing and they reconsider it through editing lenses. It is this type of early “process” language that afforded some misconceptions about the ideas of process. For example, the word “stages” suggests a linear thinking strategy, where in actual fact, Murray was embarking on a new road of flexible “recursivity”. “We have to respect the student, not for his product, not for the paper we call literature by giving it a grade, but for the truth in which he is engaged... There are no rules, no absolutes, just alternatives. What works one time may not another. All writing is experimental” (Murray, 1972/2003, pp. 5 and 6).

Other researchers took up the process cause in various ways either by embellishing on it, extending it, breaking it down into different components or reframing it, but the notion of process was still clearly present (Atwell, 1991; Calkins, 1986; D’arcy, 1989; Faigley, 1986; Flowers, 1981; Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003). “By far, the contemporary process movement has been the most successful in the history of pedagogical reform in the teaching of writing” (Matsuda, 2002, p. 69). However, some of these researchers took Murray’s ideas and articulated a very clear structure which had, and continues to have, the potential of being interpreted in a formulaic fashion.

Flower and Hayes (1981/2003) created a well-known cognitive process theory of writing. Their process theory rests on four key points:

1. The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing.
2. These processes have a hierarchical, highly embedded organization in which any given process can be embedded within any other.
3. The act of composing itself is a goal-directed thinking process, guided by

the writer's own growing network of goals.

4. Writers create their own goals in two key ways: by generating both high-level goals and supporting sub-goals which embody the writer's developing sense of purpose, and then, at times, by changing major goals or even establishing entirely new ones based on what has been learned in the act of writing. (pp. 274 and 275)

It is interesting to note that the cognitive model by Flower and Hayes (1981/2003) (see Figure 3.1: CAPITALS) (p. 278), albeit very insightful and useful, used the positivist, technological and industrial language prevalent in the 1970's to describe both sequential and recursive processes, such as the following: "construct, tasks, goals, product, outcomes and monitor". This type of language initially served its purpose helping to evolve the ideas and inspirations of the process generation of writing theorists. The writing path walked in positivism was beneficial because it brought us further along in our understanding of writing, and allowed us to then move beyond this type of thinking. However, this technical language extricated the ideas of writing for me from a more sensitive understanding of living and feeling with and through text. I needed a further evolution of language to better represent my encounters with text. The brain researchers in the "Decade of the Brain (1990-1999)" (Berninger & Winn, 2006) used similar technologically new language terms such as "executive functioning, and supervisory attention" (Berninger & Winn, 2006), but the traditional language was still present within their theories as well as their models of a "learning triangle: goal setting, planning, reviewing, revising, strategies for self-monitoring and regulating" (Berninger & Winn, 2006, p. 97). Therefore, I chose to modify this "industrial" sounding language to best

reflect my actual identifiable writing process within the “Structure of the Writing Model” (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003, p. 278) while focussing on three basic ideas: 1) the writer’s long term memory; 2) the task environment and 3) the writing processes (see Figure 3.1: *italics*). I did so as my first step towards creating my own model of writing and determining my own “writing experience” in light of this model.

Consequently, after looking at various process models, when I returned and took a closer look at Murray’s theory of pre-writing, writing and re-writing, his ideology (which I repeat here for clarity), seemed obvious: “It is not [intended to be] a rigid lock-step process...It is the process of discovery through language...It is the process of exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language” (p. 4). With my interpretations of his definition of process being flexible, it seemed possible that a basic cognitivist vessel of beginning, middle and end (or, pre-writing, writing and re-writing [Murray, 1972]) could house a more complicated web of “plural experiences” (Russell, 1999), which are not necessarily codifiable, to circulate within it. It also seemed possible to tap into these “writing experiences” and explore them through metacognitive lenses.

Post-process

The idea of “post-process” started to develop in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s in reaction to many of the process orientations of writing. Faigley (1986), one of the first post-process theorists, acknowledged some value in process theory when he wrote, “If process theory and pedagogy have up to now been unproblematically accepted, I see a danger that it could be unproblematically rejected” (p.537). However, his concern, like that of post-process theorist Berlin (1988) was that the “versions” of process theory are “imbricated in ideology” (as cited by Matsuda, 2003, p. 72). Bizzell also commented on

the perceptions of process and warned academics about the “wholesale adoption of a version of the ‘process approach’ to the detriment of public and social aspects of writing processes” (as cited by Matsuda, 2003, p. 72). In other words, the language of process theory can sometimes frame the thoughts of writers to the degree that we feel unable to think beyond it.

Kent (1993) determined that “if we consider writing as an indeterminate and interpretive activity, then ‘writing and reading—conceived broadly as processes or bodies of knowledge—cannot be taught, for nothing exists to teach’ (p. 161). The radical constructivists of the 1990’s), who are similar to the radical post-process theorists in this regard, claimed “that because the world is not knowable in any objective way there is no objective reality for people to learn” (Berninger & Winn, 2006, p. 105). However, Breuch (2003), who carefully critiqued/interpreted the work of post-process theorist Kent (1993), declared that Kent is careful to distinguish the “type” of writing that *can* be taught. Her interpretation is interesting because she explained that Kent (1993) asserted that “while grammar and rules about cohesion or sentence structure can be easily codified and transmitted to students, these systems should not be confused with the writing act—an act that he describes as uncertain and indeterminate” (Breuch, 2003, p. 100). Therefore, Kent did not suggest that teaching writing was impossible; rather, he suggested “that teaching writing as a system is impossible” (p. 101). Kent (1993) began “with the suggestions that we use a new vocabulary to discuss writing in relation to communicative interaction...” (Breuch, 2003, p. 101). Rosenblatt (1994/2005), whom I would not categorize as a post-process theorist, had some post-process notions. The descriptions of her writing process were, I believe, intentionally vague, although she asserts that writing transactions as not

entirely random.

[T]he writer needs to bring the selective process actively into play, to move toward a sense of some tentative focus for choice and synthesis... Often in a trial-and-error fashion, and through various freely flowing drafts, the writer's sensitivity to such factors translates itself into an increasingly clear impulse that guides selective attention and integration. For the experienced writer, the habit of such awareness, monitoring the multifold decisions or choices that make up the writing event, is more important than any explicit preliminary statement of goals or purpose... (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 17).

It is with this thought in mind that I considered how the indeterminate "experience of writing" (Robinson, 2005/2006) might occur within some determinate parameters, or how some writing parameters might encourage indeterminate writing experiences. I created a new vocabulary and, thus, an emerging writing theory to describe some of these new writing possibilities.

Emerging Writing Theory: Pre-Interpretation

By using new language in these realms of study prior to my self-analysis, I set a speculative stage for looking at how creative writing involves both a flexible process framework based on the ideas of the process theorists, predominantly the founding theorist Murray (1972), Flower and Hayes (1981), and some liberating post-process perceptions by Kent (1993), Breuch (2003), and Matsuda (2003). I integrated some of my own terminology with the theoretical language of these writing experts in an effort to codify some of the writing experience-process and communicate other parts that are less generalisable. My initial Writing Experience-Process Model (Robinson, 2005, see Figure

3.2) discussed how the “writing experience” occurs against a backdrop of process theory. The writing experience I described contained both the concepts of “flow” and “decentring” as described below.

Flow and Authentic Engagement: Pre-interpretation within Emerging Writing Theory

Flow is described as an “optimal experience, a state of concentration so focused that it amounts to absolute absorption in an activity” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 6). Berlitz and Lundstrom extended this definition by saying that “[f]low is the natural, effortless unfolding of our lives in a way that moves us toward wholeness and harmony” (p. 2). This type of “blissful flow” is not my usual experience with flow, although I can agree that it is all-consuming. My experience of flow is a disciplined one because “purging” the ideas that have built up in my head to a critical mass before they must burst onto paper can sometimes be an ugly slog of an experience. However, in the work of getting ideas onto paper, I do get lost in it to the degree that the text demands my absolute attention. This extreme “engagement” with my text occurs most often when the material that I am writing about or the outcomes associated with the completed product mean something to me. Schlechty (2000) talks about the experience of “authentic engagement”, where “[t]he task, activity, or work...is associated with a result or outcome that has clear meaning and relatively immediate value [to the writer]” (p. 1).

Decentring and Metacognition: Pre-interpretation within Emerging Writing Theory

“Decentring” is a term used by Piaget to reflect an advancing stage of cognitive development in children where they can empathize and step outside of themselves to reflect on their experiences. Odell (as cited by as Lunsford, 1979) talked about it as

“getting outside of one’s own frame of reference, understanding the thoughts, values, and feelings of another person;...projecting oneself into unfamiliar circumstances, whether factual or hypothetical;...learning to understand why one reacts as he does to experience” (p. 39). For the purposes of this research, I initially used the idea of decentring to describe a way to step out of an experience and gain objectivity by doing so in order to be very conscious in that experience. It is during this time when I step back and get a cool head about my writing that I am better able to see it for its difficulties and possibilities. While I am decentring, I am most conscious of having metacognitive dialogues with myself and as a result, I am then capable of sharing my discoveries with others.

“Metacognition is traditionally defined as the experiences and knowledge we have about our own cognitive processes” (Flavell, 1977, p. 71). These dialogues can be compared to what post-process theorist Kent (1993) described as “functional dialogism” which includes various forms of dialogue in the writing classroom with self and others (p. 171). The dialogism with self functions as a sort of question and answer session in the head, or a series of realizations.

However, my pre-interpretation of my mental dialogism was not always “cognitive”, or ‘thinking about my thinking’ questions, such as: ‘What writing strategy have I used, and is it working?’ Instead, my conversations tended to include many other aspects of who I found myself to be as a writer in this domain and initially four meta-learning domains. For example: In the meta-affective domain, a question might be, ‘What am I feeling most strongly about this topic, and am I getting that idea across?’ In the metaconative domain a question of motivation might be, ‘What’s blocking me?’ The meta-spiritual might look like the following realization, “The inspiration came to me in the

middle of the night. It came to me in a dream and has been haunting me ever since. It was like it was meant to be written.” Although these four meta-learning domains were clarified separately in order to distinguish their features and functions, I found them to be intricately connected as I seemed to experience them unconsciously in flow and more consciously when I decentred.

Fogarty (1994) suggested a metacognitive framework that involves three distinct stages of metacognitive reflection: planning, monitoring and evaluating. For the purposes of the initial visual representation of my writing theory, I used Fogarty’s traditional definition of “metacognition” to demonstrate its integration within my model of writing. I found that when I write, I do ask very cognitive process questions at the critical pre-writing, writing and re-writing stages. For example, I might ask at the *pre-writing stage*, “Who will be my audience?” Another question that I sometimes ask at the *writing stage* is “What word best works in this context?” At the *re-writing stage* of my process as I polish my work, I ponder, “Why am I being so repetitive of this one idea? Can I state it differently or eliminate it altogether?” Again, I believe that these stages can be reciprocal and do not necessarily happen in any specific order.

Conclusion of Pre-interpretation: Writing Model as a Whole

My initial Writing Experience-Process Model (see Figure 3.2) visually depicted all of the above facets of my initial (pre-research) understanding of my own writing experience. This writing “process” was represented in a sequential fashion on the top and bottom of the diagram to suggest a sequential framework of pre-writing, writing and re-writing in tandem with an interactive metacognitive process of planning, monitoring, and the evaluation of my writing. This model housed my writing “experience” represented by

the circle within it. Within this more abstract experience of writing functions, I had two definite interactive experiences of “flow” and decentring”. I use the term “recursive” to describe my writing experience-process and extended it to consider the possibility of “concurrent” thinking. Recursivity is a looping of ideas that brings me round and round again to functions within a model. Rosenblatt (1994/2005) explained recursivity as where the “[reader[/writer] and text are involved in a complex, nonlinear, recursive, self-correcting transaction. The arousal and fulfillment—or frustration and revision—of expectations contribute to the construction of a cumulative meaning” (p. 9). The concept of concurrency extends this description of recursivity by suggesting that thinking happens simultaneously without any looping or sequential tendencies. Codifying these reciprocal and concurrent processes could be attempted within a writing model as to the tendencies of authentic engagement and the reflexivity of the “subconscious, conscious and superconscious mind” (Himalayan Academy, 2006). However, these functions of writing may not be transferable from person to person, or even from one writing experience to the next with one writer (myself as the writer). I added “meta-processing” because of the recursive interplay of logic, feelings, intentions and enlightenment that assists me in developing a successful end product during my writing “experience”. When I spoke of enlightenment, I referred to “true power, true value and the meaning of life” (Fowler, 1995, p. 28). All of these functions seemed to inform my experience as I looped through and reflected upon and potentially developed new understanding as my writing process, experience and product evolved.

Existing Theories of Metacognition and Moving Beyond Cognition

Metacognition

By definition, “[c]ognition refers to the process of knowing. *Meta*, derived from the Greek, means ‘beyond’ or ‘from’. *Metacognition*, then, refers to knowing how we learn best and consciously controlling our learning...” (Foster, et al., 2002, p. 5). The concept of metacognition was pioneered by Flavell (1977 and 1979) who was also actively researching the idea of meta-memory at the same time. He indicated in his earlier research that metacognition is “knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena” (1979, p. 906). His model involved “a wide variety of cognitive enterprises [and these occur] through the actions and interactions among four classes of phenomena which do not tie to the concept of meta-learning domains; rather, they are unique to the *metacognitive* aspects of his theory: a) metacognitive knowledge, b) metacognitive experiences, c) goals (or tasks), and d) actions (or strategies)” (p. 906). There have been numerous other metacognitive models/frameworks, taxonomies and procedures researched in the cognitive domain in education (Artz & Armour-Thomas, 2002; Brown, 1978; Fisher & Mandl, 1984). Each theory has its own unique language and distinguishing characteristics which can at times make the concept of metacognition confusing for educators to grasp as a whole. In some instances there is a lack of consensus about the distinction between metacognition and cognition (Butler, 1998). However, Kramarski and Feldman (2000) examined the deeper implications of metacognition by identifying that “[m]etacognitive knowledge has three components referring to strategy use: declarative (knowing what), procedural (knowing how) and conditional (knowing why)” (p. 150). Quite commonly, the work of teachers when grappling with these metacognitive components often begins when they consider three guiding questions as a starting point to assist in self-understanding: “1) What do I find easy to learn? 2) What do I find difficult to learn?

And 3) What conditions help me to learn challenging materials?” (Foster, et al., 2002, p. 7). There is some research indicating that metacognitive knowledge (the what, the how and the why) in the “thinking” domain is teachable to those who are not intuitively metacognitive (Cross & Paris, 1998; Hartman, 2002; Pressley et al., 2004; Schraw, 2002; Wong, 2004). Again, in this initial research I distinguished the “thinking” (cognitive) meta-learning domain from the others which involve feelings, motivations, and spirit. There is very little research indicating that metacognition can be recorded or taught in these other three meta-learning domains.

However, this ability to take this extra step backwards or forwards (however we might conceive of reflecting on our thoughts, feelings, motivations, and spirit, considering our consciousness) before taking action has been well-considered by many philosophers over the centuries. The famous spiritual avatar Yogananda (1990) stated that “[l]iving creatures not only want to exist: They want to be conscious of their existence” (p. 42). In the Buddhist philosophy there is a desire to empower man to make the most of life and be responsible for his own lifetime experiences. For these believers, the strength is in the mind:

THE MIND

A flickering, fickle mind

Is difficult to control.

The wise person strengthens it

With determination.

Like a fish

Thrown onto the shoreline,
 The mind thrashes and quivers
 When we do not transcend passions.

The mind is difficult to control.
 It flies from object to object,
 Landing wherever it pleases.
 Thus it is good to tame the mind,

For a well-tamed mind brings happiness. (Larkin, 2003, p. 16)

Because it is our mind that responds to all of the information that we receive, we must learn to be selective in our attention, which is another way of viewing metacognition:

James (1890) tells us that we are constantly engaged in a “choosing activity,” which he terms “selective attention” (Vol. I., 284). We are constantly selecting out of the stream, or field, of consciousness “by the reinforcing and inhibiting agency of attention” (Vol. I., 288). This activity is sometimes termed “the cocktail party phenomenon”: In a crowded room where many conversations are in progress, we focus our attention on only one of them at a time, and the others become a background hum. We can turn our selective attention toward a broader or narrower area of the field. Thus, while language activity implies an intermingled ... associational matrix, what is pushed into the background or suppressed and what is brought into awareness and organized into meaning depend on where selective attention is focused. (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 6)

We can help manage our selective attention or become more aware of each facet of our

creative experience by asking ourselves the right kinds of metacognitive/meta-processing questions in the four various meta-learning domains (and potentially others) and, as a result, help others to do so with effective meta-processing strategies. Taking this responsibility for ourselves to better understand our place in the context of the worldly and the spiritual realms (Hawley, 1993, p. 21) is the essence of most of this research literature. In other words, “I am the only one who can truly know and in turn manage my own mind”.

There are fewer metacognitive models or frameworks in the other meta-learning domains, although there is much literature in education on the importance of each of these domains to the fulfilment, creativity and self-efficacy of the individual (Butler, 1998; Goleman, 1995) and in other fields of study which include leadership, medicine, psychology and sociology (Belitz & Lundstrom, 1998; Hawley, 1993; Ornish, 1998). Wilber (2000) in his model entitled “The Great Chain: Nest of Being” talked about the physical world and the social world and how they are seen as intrinsically connected. Each level (which works its way out from the central circle of matter to the following in this order: physics; biology, psychology theology and then finally the spiritual/mysterious) contains and transcends its junior level.

Meta-affective

The meta-affective domain requires that we think about feelings and interpret how our feelings impact our thinking. Some research has indicated that metacognitive meaning is greater when it is connected to ends or results that truly matter. It is also engaging to the thinker where it is deliberately sought after in a meaningful context (Wong, 2004). Therefore, the feelings with which we understand our learning dictates much of how we

grasp and interpret information. Cognitive psychologists, in applying the findings from brain-research, have underlined the importance of “hooking”, or grasping the attention of the feelings or the brain function of the “amygdala” (Gardner, 1991; Jensen, 1998; Parry & Gregory, 2003) which is the part of the brain that governs our emotions because by doing so, it creates meaning or relevance for the learners with the learning they are experiencing. It is important to consider the role of emotions when we learn:

The human mind can only consciously focus on one thing at a time, and it is our emotions, mediated by the emotional brain, that dictate to what we pay attention.

There is an emotional component to all learning and it seems to work like this:

Emotion focuses our attention, and attention sets the stage for learning. (Parry & Gregory, 2003, p. 15)

Metacognition works well when we are actively engaging and activating the numerous strengths and styles of the thinkers (Jensen, 1998; Schlechty, 2002) so that students “feel” good about what they are doing and are able to incorporate their emotions into these learning experiences. It is a patient discipline to be able to decentre and analyze how we feel about our learning and why we might be unable to do so under certain circumstances such as times of stress. When people are learning, “stress needs to be kept within tolerable levels so that ... self-esteem and personal efficacy remain intact” (Goleman, 1994, p. 27). Creating a positive and safe climate for thinking and learning is crucial for the mind to be able to focus on what it needs to do. There is much to be gained when we teach students to be in touch with their feelings and to learn how to create emotionally optimal circumstances for their learning.

Meta-conative

Successful meta-conative ability comes with self-development and self-discipline where, Hawley (1993) explains, that there is “the cultivation of inner capabilities. It involves narrowing one’s attention so it becomes a force that can be directed...It takes work” (p. 134). Our wandering, undisciplined mind can be a most challenging one for everyone, especially students. This powerful mind controls our head, heart, body and spirit (Hawley, 1993, p. 12) and is the thing that interprets all of the information that we perceive to be true. The *attitude* with which we function screens our understanding and results in how we learn and grow. Hawley explains that “detachment and freedom are synonymous. To detach from things is to become uncaught by them...” (p. 116). Detachment means getting unhooked from negative emotions and learning more positive ones that create a positive and motivated attitude which can positively facilitate our learning.

Yogananda (1990) suggested that we need to be disciplined enough and have desire enough to evolve in our behavior in light of our new enlightened awareness of self and our circumstances. “Action originates in the will, which directs energy toward its desired end. This, then, is the definition of will power: desire plus energy, directed toward fulfillment” (p. 65). Discipline is the focused determination that we exhibit and find within ourselves when we know that something truly matters. It is the consistent choice we make to insure our intended outcome. The term "discipline" comes from the meaning “disciple-ship”. Jesus encouraged his disciples to be strong and committed in their leadership of his word when he said that “[a]ll men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Mathew, 10:22). When we are disciplined, we are true to the commitments that we set for ourselves. It is truly a difficult domain

within which to self-reflect because there are so many ways to be unmotivated. Despite heightening awareness in these areas of motivation and being metacognitive about what motivates us and what does not inspire us, the discipline to follow through on this awareness is often an unconscious barrier or something that has not been learned as a behavioural response to difficulty.

Meta-spiritual

When we ask ourselves meta-spiritual questions, we are digging deeply within our own minds to respond to these types of questions: “Who are we? What are we really doing here? What is our purpose, our calling, our vision of greatness?” (Hawley, 1993, p. 18). Hawley (1993) referenced a model he calls “The Six Landscapes of Love” where people operate on a metaphorical journey of loving beginning with the ocean of desire, moving to the plains of feelings, over the action hills, into the giving mountains, up the energy peaks and finally arriving at the highest realm of spirituality. Hawley (1993) referred to spirituality as a state of reverence where “[r]everence consists of dedication, eagerness, and enthusiasm. There’s deep admiration and respect in it...There’s deep conviction and earnestness in it...Reverence is an intensified state of commitment—and commitment is the grail that [educators] are eternally seeking” (p. 47). In this state of self reflection, we can awaken ourselves in new ways and experience many things that might resemble joy, peace, clarity, or an acute sense of ourselves. Writing can be the medium for these types of enlightened experiences which are difficult to define, but are universally experienced in a variety of ways.

Meta-kinaesthetic

The meta-kinaesthetic domain is not considered highly relevant in most of the

literature on metacognition, and hence I did not consider it relevant in the initial guiding questions. However, it is important to consider at least how the body works in harmony with the other four aspects of self. “Doctors are the first to acknowledge that the body heals itself...How does the body balance and harmonize the functioning of the brain...? Our body is a brilliant piece of machinery that outperforms even the most advanced computer” (Covey, 2004, p. 51). And yet, we do not always listen to it. We override its purpose to inform us of its health with a multitude of busy tasks and day-to-day priorities which often do not include the maintenance of this amazing machine. “The body is very literal. It will show you as graphically as it can what you need to be aware of, which always has to do with taking better care of yourself and loving yourself more” (Gawain, 2006, M21). Overall, the general impression is that if we do not listen to our bodies, we cannot ask the right questions about its influence on other parts of our lives. When we are unfocussed, unmotivated, and apathetic, it is often because our body has been neglected.

Emerging Metacognitive Theory: Pre-interpretation

In my pre-interpretation, I believed that we can learn and grow about the topic of writing by stepping back from ourselves and “decentring” and, while doing so, reflecting on our experiences through four metacognitive lenses. I tried to capture the ideas of how these thinking processes can affect us as we are “meta-processing” and while we are interacting with others during this process which I refer to as my Meta-Processing Theory Diagram (see Figure 3.3). However, within this model we can also ignore and continue acting as, what I call, our “Established Selves” because we favour our habits of mind. Our “Mind”, the central circle, encompasses all of the facets of true self: mind, heart, body and soul and it has the potential to evolve and grow (Walters, 1990; Hawley, 1993). It also

has the potential of regressing and diminishing as it resists growth and understanding (Jensen, 1998; Wolf, 1998). The second inner circle which surrounds the inner circle of the Mind is the Established Self. It forms barriers that do not always allow for and defend against the awakening of the Mind.

The Established Self is where we are very clearly engaged with who we are and when we are participating actively in our own experiences unconsciously and automatically as well as consciously and deliberately. However, it is not until we decentre through the four meta-learning domains that we are truly able to reflect on the “Mind” and then act intentionally within this newly acquired state of awareness. It is also possible to do a concurrency of progressive and regressive behaviours in light of our meta-thinking. Our mind rarely operates in a continuous state of improvement or deterioration, but fluctuates between the two as we attempt or accept a greater state of improvement or deterioration. Decentring requires stepping outside of ourselves with various metacognitive skills that are either natural to us or learned. When combining these skills with some desire to learn about self, we have the potential to be very introspective about how we consider our Mind.

The four meta-learning domains in this beginning model continue to be defined independently as they evolve. It is important that the elements of discipline and determination are understood as critical to the process of metacognition and that is why I put meta-conative (motivational) as the largest decentring circle on the outside of the model. It is this circle that engages us with the world. Without a true persistent desire to learn, the meta-processing of the person lacks depth and validity. This outer circle is also known as the “engagement” circle. Unless we can hook ourselves or each other into

entertaining the process of self reflection or analysis, the process will not begin. As well, sometimes a positive or negative engagement which ranges from interesting activities to crises can be the impetus to explore the Mind further. The second largest circle is the meta-affective circle, which (when we are given permission) allows our feelings to illuminate our learning encounters. Next, is the metacognitive circle where we are often schooled to look at our studies through logical eyes. Finally, there is the meta-spiritual circle, where, if we search long enough and hard enough, we can come in touch with that which is closest to our Mind all along, our souls.

Metacognitively “enlightened” individuals will continue to find opportunities to open the Mind within the Established Self, and will become more competent at doing so with practice as we learn new “Meta” strategies. There will be times of harmony and dissonance within the practice of doing so, and the ebbing and flowing of this understanding will be dependent on the consonance and dissonance of the experience. As well, the possibility for greater self “enlightenment” comes with “collective enlightenment” (Javad, 2003) when the outer circles of metacognition overlap from one individual to the next. Again, enlightenment refers to being able to say what is in our body, mind, heart, and soul as clearly as possible, and then respond in action. This is what I believe to be the ultimate form of being true to ourselves and others and, thus, the act of an enlightened mind.

The greater the possibility of there being an overlap of the fully functioning meta-learning domains, there is a greater chance for collaborative introspection. However, if people are only coming in contact with dysfunctional meta-learning domains and encounter only other “Established Selves”, there is very little potential for collective

metacognitive enlightenment. In fact, Established Selves can deter other Established Selves from learning about their Minds as they reinforce the barriers that protect themselves. Alternatively, it is possible for a fully functioning metacognitive individual to engage the other's dysfunctioning "Meta-conative/Engagement" domain and act as catalyst to another's metacognitive process. The overlap of the circles of self indicates the optimal juncture of people for "collective enlightenment" (Javad, 2003). It is when these junctures happen that metacognition can have a compounding effect because the socialness of our experience can stimulate an even greater awareness of self.

Summary of Key Terminology within Literature and Pre-interpretation

To begin with, I suggested that the writing process includes a flexible cognitive framework of pre-writing, writing and re-writing (Murray, 1972/2003). During this writing process, I made reference to a less concrete and post-process happening which I referred to as the "writing experience" which is the sometimes indescribable experience of writing that has no beginning or ending, or any distinguishable stages. During this writing experience within the writing process, I described having "metacognitive" conversations with myself and others that inspire, re-route or block me (Flavell, 1979). Thinking about my thinking in the four meta-learning domains of a) thinking [metacognitive], b) feelings [meta-affective], c) motivations [meta-conative], and d) inspirations [meta-spiritual]) is "meta-processing" which expands the initial concept of metacognition to include all four of the meta-learning domains. This type of meta-processing can occur during my state of absolute engagement or "flow" as well as during a heightened state of awareness or "superconsciousness" while I am "decentring". "Superconsciousness" was defined for me in a Calgary Catholic School District English Language Arts Workshop (Green, 1998) as

being a heightened state of consciousness in this three level interactive model. Therefore, when we are being metacognitive and raising our level of awareness, we are in fact raising our level of consciousness into superconsciousness (see Figure 3.4):

All of these thought levels of consciousness and the activities within them appeared to occur simultaneously or “concurrently” which more aptly described my writing *experiences* than the idea of looping “recursively” which I also do, most often in my writing *process*. All of these ideas were expressed in a language intended to reflect the act of “creative writing” (Massoudi, 2003) in fiction or non-fiction. This “creativity” is referred to “as a special state of mind, fully aware and fully open, without projecting or without judging... [It is] a sense of wonder and awe” (Massoudi, 2003, p. 116). A metacognitively “enlightened” individual will continue to find opportunities to release or open the “Mind”. The Mind is the openness of heart, mind, body and soul which often lies hidden behind the “Established Self” where these capacities often hide behind our habits of thinking. As well, the possibility for greater self “enlightenment” comes with “collective enlightenment” (Javad, 2003) when the learning domains of metacognition align with another’s experience or overlap from one individual to the next.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Overview

After researching some process and post-process theories of writing, I decided to consider my own act of creative writing through an autobiographical interpretive lens. In this qualitative research, it seemed valuable to go from existing writing theory, to my writing practice, and then back again to theory, looking through reflexive eyes. I felt that by writing about my own experiences while also considering the writing experiences of others, I could then heighten my awareness of my observations about this topic. “[A] language of wakefulness allows [me] to proceed forward with a constant, alert awareness of risks, of narcissism, of solipsism, and of simplistic plots, [and] scenarios...” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 182). Through this “wakeful” interpretive lens of metacognition considering at first the four meta-learning domains, I attempted to illuminate these writing theories. I was able to get some sense of my writing positions within them, next to them, and in contrast to them. In other words, I initially examined how I and other writers incorporate these meta-learning domains into our writing experiences before, during and after we write. As well, I considered how we think beyond the cognitive models, or incorporate these other three meta-learning domain concepts into our writing practice. I asked other questions in addition to the research questions: What language do we use in our “plural processes” (Russell, as cited by Breuch, p. 98)? How do our styles of writing and thinking about writing support or contradict the existing or emerging theories of writing and metacognition? This process of self-reflecting and triangulating the credible

voices of authors afforded greater trustworthiness and confirmability of the findings. As well, I hoped to uncover how we block thinking in order to protect ourselves and/or defy growth and change. I did all of this research with education in mind. The intent was to facilitate learning about writing in an educational context.

Autobiographical Process

It seemed sensible to consider the “autobiographical program” of Bruner (1993) (mentioned earlier in the Philosophy of Autobiography) when I worked through this autobiographical research process. This autobiographical process considered three key elements which were interactive and reciprocal and in some cases concurrent: 1) the discourse of witness; 2) the discourse of interpretation; and 3) the autobiographical stance. Bruner saw these parts of autobiography combining so that they work together to create a sense of realism (verisimilitude) so that we can believe what is being said. As well, he felt that the autobiographical process, especially the last element, must be negotiable to the degree that it allows the “autobiography to enter into the ‘conversation of lives’” (Bruner, 1993, p. 47). In other words, “Are we prepared to accept this life as part of the community of lives that makes up our world?” (p. 47). This process which includes all three of the elements of autobiography (witnessing, interpretation and stance) was presented in a linear fashion in my initial research proposal for the purpose of relating the specific type of thinking within each; however, it was not necessarily how this research always unfolded. In fact, in many cases it combined these processes simultaneously. By having autobiographical concepts as a framework for data collection and interpretation, while triangulating this data and interpretation with the voices of other writers, I was able to establish some purposeful coherence to this autobiographical journey at the outset;

however, I also welcomed deviating from this structure to allow the data to unfold in narrative, and explore the findings as they appeared naturally.

A Discourse of Witness

The first matter of witnessing involved looking at the accounts of my first-hand experiences with writing, past and present. The witnessing stage created a vivid sense of reality in the details expressed by myself as witness. I first began framing my research by looking at my writing in the present. The writing that I did for the purposes of this research were the following: a poem (imaginative), some present journal entries (expressive) and an article (transactional) to demonstrate my present writing in all of these categories. While doing so, I participated in a “think-aloud” and deciphered my thinking about thinking and my thinking about writing while I wrote. I used the think-aloud protocol, but modified the protocol for my own individual purposes which means that instead of tape recording myself as I wrote, I wrote notes in a think-aloud journal. I found that verbalizing while I wrote distracted me and disturbed my concentration.

Emig (1971) researched *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* through a very thorough think-aloud protocol (where students spoke out loud into tape-recorders and with interviewers while they wrote). These protocols then gave researchers some insight into the thoughts of the writers who would not normally communicate about these processes in this manner. She also extensively interviewed her subjects and used other information about their writing to substantiate her research. I also endeavoured to describe what was going through my mind (while performing the writing tasks outlined for this research) as well as reflecting in other ways before, during and after I wrote. I welcomed the expected and unexpected in my reflections. Pinar (2004) talked about the

“haphazard observation” (p. 51) and explained that it is “smart because it invites the ‘truth’ to inadvertently find its way through the censor. Later, when one’s eyes are looking the other way, perhaps one understands the meaning of a misplaced clue. It is an indirect investigation” (Pinar, 2004, p. 52). For example, I discovered inadvertently that my unconscious mind plays a small role in my writing. Woolf (1930) discussed “how tremendously important unconsciousness is when one writes” (October 29).

As well, in this stage of the discourse of witness in the autobiographical process, the facts of my writing data were a “mimesis” (Bruner, 1993). “These accounts are most often marked by the past tense, by verbs of direct experience such as *see* and *hear...*” (p. 45). Fortunately, my mother kept much of my writing from childhood through to the time when I moved away from home. I then also kept some of my writing from that point forward. I examined these documents and some of the writing that I have composed over the past two years. Instead of working chronologically, I decided to back flash to past examples of writing while examining my present writing to emphasize ideas that arose, to demonstrate contrasts that occurred over time, or to find other patterns from past to present using the constant-comparison method (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By doing so, I emphasized the present state of awareness about my writing in relation to my past experiences.

In an effort to develop categories of thought using the constant-comparison method of interpretation, I attempted to be perceptive of all of the types of thinking I do while considering my past and present writing using the first three guiding questions in the past and present tenses as the starting points to this reflexivity:

1. What was the writing process that occurred during my act of writing in my past

writing? What type of process occurs in my present writing?

2. Was there a unique “writing experience” that occurred during my act of writing in the past? Does it occur in the present? How can it be described?
3. What meta-processing (metacognition in the four meta-learning domains): cognitive (to know), affective (to feel), conative (to have the will), and spiritual (to be) occurred during my act of writing in the past? What meta-processing in these domains occurs now in the present? How and where does it occur in my act of writing?

I have provided excerpts and examples of my writing to help demonstrate this witnessing process.

A Discourse of Interpretation

The next element of Bruner’s (1993) autobiographical process considered the discourse of interpretation that “organizes the detailed constituents of witness into larger-scale sequences...Since well-framed ‘facts’ seem able to speak for themselves, it remains for *diegesis* to give them wider significance” (p. 45). Specifically, I worked through the stages of the constant-comparison method by first comparing incidents applicable to each descriptive or explanatory category of research that I underwent. For example, I integrated four main categories and their properties by reflecting back and forth between the writing data of 1) past to present; 2) present to present; 3) myself to other writers; or 4) other writers to other writers. I also 5) refined these concepts, identified the properties and explored the relationships between them and my own thinking and writing processes in the textual domains of a) transactional, b) imaginative and c) expressive writing. Then, I looked for emerging themes about writing and about metacognition that either supported

or refuted some of the existing and emerging theories found within this research.

As emerging themes became well-defined, I used them as a spring board for other interpretation. For example, when the topic of “getting motivated to write” arose repeatedly in various stages of my writing process, I sought out the thoughts and ideas of other writers on this same topic. As I read their ideas, new thoughts arose about the matter of creative impetus, and I went back to my writing with new ideas with which to sift through my other writing data. I also considered other ideas outside of my initial literature review and pre-interpretations because with ongoing reading and reflection I was able to reconsider different facets of this analysis. I read further to help explain my findings and by doing so, found interesting links to other research where I might not have done so. It allowed me to explore new avenues of theory and practice.

While I re-considered the first three guiding questions through interpretive eyes, I also added the fourth and fifth guiding questions for consideration:

4. How can I capture this conscious and, in some cases, unconscious thinking that occurs during meta-processing?
5. How can an awareness of the writing experience-process and the act of meta-processing improve or hinder my work as a writer?

It was this type of double “stepping back” that created a distance that allowed me as the autobiographer the opportunity to “reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time” (Gusdorf, 1988 as cited by Pinar, 2004, p. 50). As Gusdorf (1988) suggested, I took a look in the mirror of my reflections. “In such a mirror the ‘self’ and the ‘reflection’ coincide” (Pinar, 2004, p. 51).

Triangulating the Data

To further validate my observations that I made of my own writing through self-narrative, I triangulated some of my own experiential research with the words of published writers who also reflected on their own writing processes. I demonstrated a reflexive inter-subjective approach where I assumed that self-explanations were possible, although there was the potential for multiple meanings and interpretations within these explanations. By weaving the voices of some well-known writers and poets (who are also writing educators) such as Phillip Levine (poet), Linda Pastan (poet); Marilynne Robinson (writer), (as interviewed by Osen, 1995; Osen 2002); Georgia Heard (writer and poet, 1995), and Anne Lamott (writer, 1995) into my emerging themes through my constant-comparison method, I made connections that either corroborated or refuted some of my own ideas about the act of writing as I participated in the autobiographical process outlined by Bruner (1993).

The language of other writers required a sensitive interpretation to discern the subtle meanings that could have fallen into any of the meta-learning domains. Again, the matter of language is always the difficulty when interpreting the voices and texts of self and others as we may be communicating the same ideas, but expressing them differently. I intermingled these subjective and public texts so that I might be able to see some harmonic patterns or separate motifs within which I formulated and speculated about different ways of knowing writing. I oriented my findings in relation to any relevant existing and emerging theories of metacognition and writing process and post-process. This type of analysis format accommodated interpretation in the following categories: text style (transactional, imaginative and expressive), meta-learning domain topics, and other ideas that emerged within or outside of these themes.

Autobiographical Stance

Autobiographies, according to Bruner (1993), have a third and final aspect to them which he referred to as “stance”. It is the autobiographer’s posture toward the world, toward self, toward fate and the possible, and also toward interpretation itself. “Unlike ordinary discourse, which presupposes intention, stance seems innocent to it” (p. 45). Therefore, to articulate stance was challenging. However, when I reconsidered the stance of my writing, I understood that mine was the stance of an aspiring writer, student and/or teacher who hoped to share a witness of my experience with others who also write and teach. Therefore, an educational voice emerged using educational language which could have credibility with educators in an educational setting. It was also through this autobiographical stance that I “negotiated” with the other people in this context (Bruner, 1993). It is in this experience of “stance” that I re-considered the fifth guiding question, and considered the implications of the final guiding question:

5. How can an awareness of the writing experience-process and the act of meta-processing improve or hinder my work as a writer?

6. In turn, how can this awareness influence my classroom instruction of the same?

In other words, I validated and transformed my act of writing through wakeful metacognitive eyes. As a result, my final question evolved to also mean: ‘How can I then rouse the hearts of educators and students to believe that there are other ways of teaching and thinking about writing?’ I speculated on the implications of it in curriculum, and the practice of this curriculum.

Limitations

Four main limitations existed in this autobiographical study from the outset. First,

metacognition or meta-processing assumes a highly functioning state of awareness and an ability to express this awareness in all of the learning domains. Second, memory, which is the critical part of autobiographical research, can also prove problematic as people are never able to completely and utterly retrieve what ‘was’ or how we thought about what ‘was’ (Olney, 1980). The third limitation involved the process of the “think-aloud” and how the act of concurrent reflexivity during the act of writing might disturb the authentic writing experience and process. And, finally, I narrowed my study to writers and poets (writing educators) who seemed relevant to this study and who were compiled in such a way that their interviews and discussion about their own writing was accessible. By doing so, I was limiting my work to these sources and by doing so, it might not indicate how other less like-minded writers experience/process their writing.

Advanced Understanding and Awareness

In order for this study to be effective, there also needed to be a high level of enlightenment or sophistication in the various relevant intelligences: IQ, (mental intelligence), EQ (emotional intelligence) and SQ (spiritual intelligence) to be able to effectively use the meta-conative, metacognitive, meta-affective and meta-spiritual learning domains to reflexively consider one’s creative writing experience and process.

Such self-awareness would seem to require an activated neocortex, particularly the language areas... Self-awareness is not an attention that gets carried away by emotions, overreacting and amplifying what is perceived. Rather, it is a neutral mode that maintains self-reflectiveness even amidst turbulent emotions...self-awareness can be a nonreactive, nonjudgmental attention to inner states.

(Goleman, 1994, p. 47)

I was very cognizant of my self-awareness capabilities and the language that I used to portray these kinds of experiences.

Memory

Memory is important to the process of autobiography. “Memories and present reality bear a continuing, reciprocal relationship, influencing and determining one another ceaselessly” (Olney, 1980, p. 244). However, the memory has an interesting way of recalling information. Any retrospective analysis has the potential of distorting the absolute accuracy of the various thought patterns that might have occurred during the writing process:

Time carries us away from all of our earlier states of being; memory recalls those earlier states—but it does so only as a function of present consciousness: we can recall what we were only from the complex perspective of what we are, which means that we may very well be recalling something that we never were at all... (Olney, 1980, p. 241)

Memory, then, became both the tool and the dilemma for me as the autobiographer as I unconsciously transformed the past through my present experience and language even though I found that my new language and new contexts sharpened my initial interpretations of these experiences.

As in any qualitative study, these subjective and complex portrayals of my writing knowledge were bound in my initial and evolving “writing” language and were vulnerable to my interpreter biases or misinterpretations regardless of my effort to adopt an open interpretive stance. People tend to describe their memories through the language they have to explain it. Language is bound in ideology and the use of language to re-enact

experience can alter its factual basis as determined by a researcher who is hoping to compile it into some semblance of pattern and relationships. Therefore, all writers who might have had similar experiences may have communicated them differently. I had to be sensitive to the subtleties of these descriptions as I captured and interpreted them and in many cases found among them a common voice.

Think-Aloud

I participated in a modified think-aloud protocol which involved writing about my thinking while I wrote as I attempted to depict these super-conscious reflections into text. Although, a think-aloud has the potential of disrupting the true practice of writing, writers are generally knowledgeable about their abilities and can communicate them in other ways and at other times. I was initially concerned that in an effort to understand how the golden eggs of writing were produced, there might be some cost to the writing of a poem, the journaling and an article. Emig (1971) indicated that “[e]ven the most mature and introspective students in the sample [of eight students], found composing aloud...an understandably difficult, artificial, and at times distracting procedure” (p. 5). Although I found doing a modified think-aloud process (where I *wrote* about my writing while I undertook my creative processes) quite challenging, I also found it to be very rewarding. This layered look at writing as I wrote about my writing (and in some cases *again* about my writing) proved insightful.

However, I did find it more difficult to get into the nuts and bolts of my *actual act* of writing than to generalise about it as a whole. Emig (1971) concurs in her research:

[Writers] focus upon [their] feelings...about the difficulties of writing—or

not writing—almost to the exclusion of an examination of the act itself. A very wide survey of writers' accounts reveals this preoccupation: Nelson Algren, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, Simone de Beauvoir, Guy de Maupassant, F. Scott Fitzgerald, E. M. Forster, Andre Gide, John Keats, Norman Mailer, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Paul Satre, Robert Louis Stevenson, Leo Tolstoi, Mark Van Doren, H. G. Wells, and Virginia Woolf are but some of the writers for who[m] this generalization holds true...

The limitation in referring to these forms of data exclusively, then, is that they focus on partial phenomena. They often describe brilliantly the context, the affective milieu of the writing act; but the act itself remains undescribed. (pp. 10-11)

I too found myself susceptible to skimming the surface of the writing experience and to theorizing and philosophizing about why my creative writing event was what it was. Instead, I endeavoured to embrace this philosophizing about creative writing while also staying focussed on the details of my act of writing (while I composed poetry, a journal entry, and an article). I wanted to capture the intimate and fleeting thoughts that crossed my mind on and under the surface of consciousness as I made choices and committed ideas to paper. However, in doing so, I would find that some processes might be so automatic that I or other writers would not easily access this internal processing.

A final complication of the think-aloud that I thought of at the outset was that I needed to adopt two stances, one of objective-subjective detachment so that I could acquire the distance I needed to speculate about what I do and think, and the other of an intensified engagement with my experiences with text in order to create it. I was

concerned that combining both would prove to be difficult and would only result in a pseudo-writing reflexivity that would only capture a partial understanding of the encounter with self and text.

Narrowing My External Data

I included the voices of other writers and poets who are also writing educators (previously mentioned) who have had published commentaries about their writing experiences and processes through interviews and self-narratives in books such as *The Writing Life* (Osen, 1995) and Osen's *The Book That Changed My Life* (2002). This may be a limitation as I initially narrowed this study to the authors that resonated with or complemented my study. Many of the authors that I referenced appeared to be in tune with these types of influences in their own writing to the degree that they expressed them in a compatible language. I had to look for the discreet language in their writing descriptions that assumed or suggested these types of experiences.

The Purpose and Significance of the Study Restated

There is a growing participation of English Language Arts educators in writing process and metacognitive professional development workshops inspired by the most recent curriculum. They are enthusiastic about better understanding how writing theory supports writing practice beyond the cognitive paradigms of the past. As well, they are interested in seeing the connections made between metacognitive processes and writing processes. The question "How do we think about our thinking and, in turn, our writing?" is of interest to these teachers to the degree that they are interested in how other like-minded professionals and writers/writing educators think about their writing using the meta-learning domains.

By having the opportunity to self-reflect and “excavate” my creative writing (Pinar, 2004, p. 51) and my thinking about my creative writing, I have come to better understand what stimulates or hinders my own act of writing. Insightful inner and inter-textual dialogues with myself and other writers who expand on the relevant theoretical terminology have afforded me a greater illumination of the multi-dimensionality of writing and metacognitive theory and practice. To date these types of activities have been most often described as a series of formulated cognitive and *metacognitive* processes. My research has allowed an opportunity to explore some familiar and new theories (which include my model of each) on the topics of 1) metacognition (meta-processing), and 2) process and post-process (and related) writing theories. When we (writer-educators) combine the two, we can dynamically consider their inter-connection when we create or teach the creation of text.

Although I created new language and models to help expand the ideas within this research, I was careful not to be too involved in my own ideas so as not to consider other possibilities within the data. It is this language that allows a unique starting point for communication and interpretation. Just as we can explain the itinerary and the potential highlights of a wonderful trip, the itinerary only explains what is likely to happen. It is not until we as writers venture on the journey with text and *live* it, that we truly understand our own unique experience within it. Master writers, or teachers who themselves write, not-writing technicians or textbooks, can best assist students with such a writing journey (Lunsford, 1979). Writers “learn by doing *with* a recognized ‘master’ or connoisseur better than studying and reading about abstract principles in textbooks” (p. 40).

Overall, the impact of such a study on teaching could be a significant one.

“Teachers often do not evaluate the effectiveness of their approaches and instead teach the way they were taught,” (Hartman, 2002). Instead they may be influenced to think about their own motivations, thinking, feeling and inspirations in their own writing and their practice of teaching writing in the classroom. It becomes important then for teachers to consider how to “reflect on how they can assist students to discover and use those learning strategies and options that work best for them” (Foster, et al., 2002, p. 7). By teaching students the language of thinking and writing, teachers help them to develop a vocabulary to describe their thinking and writing and in turn have the potential to affect their relationship with these concepts in new ways (Jacobs, 2004). “[S]tudents learn by doing and *then* by extrapolating principles from their activities” (Lunsford, 1979, p. 40). How teachers might assimilate new ways of writing and thinking about their writing may be an important observation/conclusion of this research study. Sharing these models about writing experience/process and meta-processing is not meant to create static generalizations; they are to be further modified based on the research findings within this study and future studies. Teachers and students who are actively writing and thinking about their writing may consider their own unique writing paths. This research may serve to guide professional best practice in the English Language Arts as teachers grasp the innovative “essence” of the act of writing. Teachers might better understand how to honour themselves and/or their students for their ability to think, feel, be motivated and find higher meaning in their own creative writing.

CHAPTER FIVE

WITNESSING MY CREATIVE PRE-WRITING

THROUGH THE LENS OF ENLIGHTENMENT:

The Evasive Truth

As I entered my forties, I started to consider more carefully my purpose for being here, and activities that best align with this quest for self-knowledge. I keep looking for that evasive “truth” that helps lead me and others to an enlightened state of being where “the universe of learning will open up in all its gracious simplicity (Schucman & Thetford, 1996, p. 273). I go to church on and off, have taken graduate courses in philosophy and spiritual leadership, and continue to read about matters that pertain to human fulfillment. All of these are “experiments with truth” (Gandhi, 1957 cited in Nair, 1997). As I do so, I tread slightly off the path of my conservative parents and their parents before them as I continue to ask myself, “What does it mean to be enlightened and how do I find, develop or achieve moments of this in my life experiences?” In response to this question, I find that my purest moments that even come close to the concept of enlightenment are when I am creative writing. While writing, I am most insightful about who I am in the context of my multiple communities: mentors, family, friends, colleagues, class mates, students and other. While writing within and about these communities, I am having important conversations with myself and knowledgeable others, speaking with a new found confidence about who I am and still want to become. I can identify with Virginia Woolf when she wrote, “I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice” (Briggs, 2005, 105).

However, I am finding that my new voice sometimes still echoes in the large and vacuous chamber of an older identity. These origins of my character are based in my traditional, white, Protestant, middle socio-economic, family upbringing. I am a well-educated, forty-year-old, single parent who has been a teacher of music and English all of my life. I have traveled enough *to know what I don't know*, but have actually never lived anywhere but in Calgary, Alberta. I have experienced much, but still feel that I have so much more to learn.

The Language of Enlightenment

Therefore, I speak tentatively about enlightenment, and refer to what I can identify in myself and others when I believe there are glimpses of *it*. There seems to be a heightened state of “joy” (Jones, 2004) that comes when we are in tune with ourselves and those around us. I thought it would be wise to combine the experiential with the spiritual language when I speak of enlightenment because of my value of “faith and...human formation and transformation” (Fowler, 1995, p. 28). I connect with certain spiritual, leadership and educational avatars, who describe the idea of having *arrived* at an ultimate and ideal state of being as demonstrating certain characteristics. I am less-familiar with all of the developmental stages that lead to these enlightenment outcomes (but they are not the focus of this research). However, I am most interested in the terminology they use to express an elevated state of being to see how this language looks through different scholarly eyes and across different schools of thought. This list of the language of enlightenment (and it is by no means comprehensive) is the following: faith, trust, imagination, life force (Fowler, 1995); peace, joy (Jones, 2004); self-realization, truth (Yogananda as translated by Walters, 1990; Gibran, 2005; Gandhi, 1957 in Nair, 1997);

light (Schucman & Thetford, *A Course in Miracles*, 1996); love (Jones, 2004; Hawley, 1993; Gibran, 2005); blind faith, reverence, (Hawley, 1993); inspiration, intention (Dyer, 2004); sanity (Jacob, 2005); second-knowing (Rumi & Barks, 1995); vision, passion, conscience (Covey, 2004); intelligence (Rumi & Barks, 1995; Covey, 2004); maturity (Piaget, 1969 in Fowler, 1995); self-actualization (Maslow, 1970 in Banks & Thompson, 1995), self-knowledge, and discipline (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998; Covey, 2004). This language, to describe it briefly, is altruistic, artistic, abstract and philosophical, not to mention theological. There also seems to be some consensus among all of these scholars of enlightenment that we are not always static in these elevated experiences of being. We can regress and progress in the achievement of these states or epiphanies, although time and aging often correlate with a maturity within them. I will reference this language of enlightenment in the context of my experiences with text.

These ideas are intimidating qualities or states for which to aspire. However, I resonate with some of these great thinkers' ideas more than others. For example, I believe that what underscores many of my moments of enlightenment is the concept of "spiritual faith" and my

image of an ultimate environment...[F]aith affects the shaping of our initiatives and responses, our relationships and aspirations in everyday life, by enabling us to see them against the backdrop of a more comprehensive image of what constitutes true power, true value and the meaning of life". (Fowler, 1995, p. 28)

My faith in a higher being, and/or a higher power in myself (I am still exploring these possibilities) influences how I view and act within my world. As a result, how I live day-to-day is moulded by this sense of faith and my value of the human condition in my

immediate and global communities. In turn, how I put these ideas into text is also influenced by this same faith.

After having grappled with the language of enlightenment of the aforementioned teachers and drawing on their wisdom, I have come to my own personal conclusion about what I believe to be “true power, true value and the meaning of life” (Fowler, 1995, p. 28). It sounds quite simple when I write it, but it is much more difficult to live by: “Say what you mean, and do what you say.” How often do we avoid saying what is authentically ours to say? And if we do speak our truth, in our own voice, using our own words, how often do we *not* see it through to fulfillment because of some perceived obstacle or our own lack of will. To be able to say what is in our body, mind, heart and soul as clearly as possible, and then respond in action, represents what I believe to be the ultimate form of being true to ourselves and others, and thus the act of an enlightened mind.

Falling Upward into Text

I often catch glimpses of the vibrant yellow rays of “joy” (Jones, 2004) in my life’s experiences, but, like the sun, if I look for its meaning too directly, I cannot always see it, perhaps for its brilliance. However, when I look around me at how the hills and valleys of my life turn golden in the sunshine whether it is the early dawn or sleepy twilight, I know that a “light” (Schucman & Thetford, 1996) is there. It is in fact all around me, guiding me with its possibility, especially when I am writing. When I write, I “trust” (Fowler, 1995) in the idea of “blind faith” (Hawley, 1993). It is also here where I make bold leaps into the depths of my own artistic potential. In my writing, I feel that I can

let go of understandable logic and make the big step beyond. And when that leap

is made, the fall is usually straight up, toward Spirit...There's quietness and serenity at these heights, closer to Spirit. This is the place of certainty, of moments of faith so high we merge with truth. This is where something at our core whispers "yes...yes" with full confidence...the blooming of our own "proof," the creation of our own "authority." (Hawley, 1993, p. 99)

When I write creatively, whether it is prose, poetry, journals, articles and other (and I will periodically refer to composing music), I rejuvenate my "life force" (Fowler, 1995) and find a foreground for the background of a more complex faith that I am still forming. It is here where I feel my real power and find a unique meaning in my life experience. I am reluctant to say that I have found enlightenment or *the* "truth" (Yogananda & Walters, 1990) in it or through it, but prefer Gibran's (2005) perspective about finding truth.

Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather, "I have found *a* truth."

Say not, "I have found the path of the soul." Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path."

For the soul walks upon all paths. (p. 55)

A Path of My Soul: Getting Inside the Writing

Pre-conditions and Conditions

I can honestly say that I have found *a* path of my soul through writing. But, how has this happened or how does it continue to happen in my past and present creative writing? How can I illustrate the pre-conditions or conditions for such an enlightened experience within my own creative writing (Candidacy Question One, January 19, 2006)? When I speak of "preconditions", I consider these to mean "a pre-requisite", or "to put into a certain condition or mental attitude beforehand" (Webster's II, 1984, p. 550). In

other words, the questions for me to answer with regard to preconditions are “Where do I truly begin before I even start the process of writing?” Or, “What moves me to create before I even begin?” When I consider “conditions” I look for “existing circumstances” (Webster’s II, 1984, p. 148). “What helps or hinders me in the process of my writing from the beginning to the ending?” It was during the pre-conditions and conditions for writing that I indirectly, and deliberately, reviewed the first three guiding questions of my research. I modified the second question to emphasize the concept of enlightenment (Robinson, Research Proposal, 2006, p. 17).

- 1) What is the writing “process” (as defined by process theorists) that occurs during my act of writing?
- 2) Is there a unique writing “experience” (not necessarily defined by or found within a process or post-process theory or model) that occurs during the act of writing and how do I brush with my higher self through this experience (modified)? How can it be described?
- 3) What “meta-processing” (metacognition in the four meta-learning domains: cognitive [to know], affective [to feel], conative [to have the will], and spiritual [to be]) occurs during my writing? How and where does it occur in my writing?

Focusing on the Writing Experience

I have written five types of writing for this writing research: 1) my thesis (critical and analytical of my process of writing the following four types of writing); 2) an article (expository); 3) a poem (imaginative); 4) and a journal entry (expressive). My 5) think-aloud journal accompanied this process and helped to capture the raw reflections about my

experiences with text. This multi-layered approach to uncovering how I “pre-write [for this chapter], write and re-write [subsequent chapters]” (Murray, 1972/1993) through multiple metacognitive lenses involved many levels of thinking, like the complex layers of the petals in a China Aster. Although I recognized the challenges of writing, for the purposes of this research, I focussed on the matter of writing and not just the matter of overcoming the barriers of writing such as: writer’s block, the time constraints of the writer and other barriers (although I do address some obstacles that arose). There are already many writing resources for educators and writers that speak to the obstacles of writing and how to “think” past them (Atwell, 1991; Calkins, 1986; Conrad, 1990; Kinneavy, 1991). Instead, my focus is on the road less traveled about the lived writing experience. I was more interested in getting under its skin and into its blood stream. How does it pulse through me while I do it, and why might my reflexivity in this regard be important for me and others? I had various ways of theoretically slicing this topic with my first three guiding questions about writing and metacognition. For much of this beginning stage of data collection, I attempted to write without much preconception. I looked into my past and present writing and made research connections if they seemed relevant to my writing as I was in the moment of participating and/or reflecting upon it. I let this complicated blossom unfold naturally. However, it was eventually necessary to look in retrospect through my own and other researchers’ lenses at these beginning stages of writing in the context of my reading and research.

Writing From Within: Preconditions

Determination

I have heard that we are all story tellers of our lives, but only the few who put the

pen to page are actually considered *aspiring* writers. Of course, much of society believes that those who publish are *real* writers. Therefore, what motivates me to put my fingers to the keyboard to be an aspiring *real* writer? It is not always easy carving time out of my busy schedule or multi-tasking (where I jot down ideas on the back of agendas in meetings, or napkins in restaurants), but the urge to write is a powerful one for me. When I do not write, I get a little lost. As Heard (1995) explained when she does not write, “My body knows it. I feel cranky and life seems dull. The more I write, the more I have the urge to write, and the closer I come to finding my way home” (p. 6). When I neglect my computer, it is like part of me has been sitting in a small room for too long without fresh air, bright light or good company. The companionship of my written text is an important part of my life and without it, I can get quite lonely.

To use a meta-conative descriptor, my mother often described me as having the “tenacious” Finnish female quality in my blood that they refer to as “sisu”. I can only assume that this cultural reference means dogged determination even when it goes a little *too* far. Having this innate determination to work at things that matter to me has come in handy over the years. The creative voices in my head that I have identified and befriended are 1) the critic; 2) the comic, but more dominantly, 3) the bossy cheerleader who is always telling me to try harder, reach further, and stretch higher. I think that this “functional dialogism” referred to as “internal dialogues between self and an internalized audience” (Kent, 1993, p. 103) is a natural phenomenon of creative engagement with text. When the voice inside speaks with “intention” (Dyer, 2004) it can produce energy and some positive results as indicated in the Old Testament “as a man thinketh, so is he”. This wilful spirit showed up in an earlier piece of my writing where I decided after exploring

various future careers such as a circus girl, hotel worker or nurse, that “I wanted to be a *scool ticher*” (see Exemplar 5.1 (Age Seven), Robinson, 1994, Appendix 8). From an early age I had a “love” (Gibran, 2005; Hawley, 1993; Jones, 2004) of pictures and words on paper.

To Know That I'm Not Alone

I relate to why primitive cultures wanted to paint onto or carve into stone the triumph of their battles, conquests, victories, births, legends and other history. It is compelling to consider that the self-narration of our own lives might possibly be witnessed by someone else, somewhere, somehow, far into the future or even by ourselves when we go back through our own writing archives. There is something very powerful for me about looking back at my past writing. In it I can feel a stable sense of my own identity, even as I witness its evolution and the “maturity” (Piaget, 1969 in Fowler, 1995) in my text. When I write, there is a sense of immortality in it. It helps me dispel the notion that when I die, my ideas pass with me. The quote from the movie *Shadowlands* (the life of C. S. Lewis): “We read to know we’re not alone” (Attenborough, 1993, n.p.), means to me that “We *write* to *express* so that we’re not alone now and over time.” In other words, we write to help us *remember* ourselves and to also be *remembered* by others. For this reason, I find a sense of well-being and “peace” (Jones, 2004) in the act of writing.

My experience of being alone is a lifetime experience as Lewis (1905) confirmed in “The Secret Thread”.

Again, you have stood before some landscape, which seems to embody what you

have been looking for all your life; and then turned to the friend at your side who appears to be seeing what you saw—but at the first words a gulf yawns between you, and you realize that this landscape means something totally different to him, that he is pursuing an alien vision and cares nothing for the ineffable suggestion by which you are transported. (p. 123)

However, as a writer, I defy this aloneness and attempt to persuade myself and my readers that what I see and experience can be understood through language. I do believe that through words, I and the reader can be one in the moment, even if the experience I write about or my experience that they read about is vicarious. When I was fifteen, I wrote the poem “Three Roses for the End of Time” (see Exemplar 5.2, Robinson, 1991 in Robinson 1994, Appendix 14) which was about what I felt *might* be true of different kinds of love even though I was inexperienced with love and loss at the time. It was stolen and then later appeared in our high school newspaper because my friend (to whom I had privately confided) thought it was worth reading. In this example, love could, by Lewis’s standards, be considered an “alien vision”, but it is a concept that I believe through “reflexive” language we can jointly appreciate as writer and reader (Heyman, 1997).

Desire to Improve

Although I have received a small bit of recognition for my writing through some publications or contests, people have often asked me why I have not spent more time marketing my material. I have usually responded by saying, “With the little bit of time I have, I’d rather be writing than selling.” I write for the “love” (Jones, 2004) of writing. There is probably also a small part of me that has wondered until recently whether I was ready to be published, and so I pushed instead to improve my skills.

Publishing is not all it's cracked up to be. But writing is. Writing has so much to give, so much to teach, so many surprises. That thing you had to force yourself to do—the actual act of writing—turns out to be the best part. It's like discovering that while you thought you needed the tea ceremony for the caffeine, what you really needed was the tea ceremony. The act of writing turns out to be its own reward (Lamotte, 1994, xxvi).

This love of writing, which I consider my life's work, is exalted by the spiritual master Gibran (2005) as "light" when he asked: "What is it to work with love?...It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit...Work is love made visible" (pp. 27-28). My confidence in sharing my writing has increased over the years, and it is now not only important for me to know how people see and feel the message that I have written, but it is satisfying to see their responses to the art form itself. Other writers feel the same. "I look forward to getting feedback on my work. Some are nervous about this process, but I like to hear what my writing does when it lands on my audience" (Kavanagh journal entry in Nixon-John, 1996, p. 49). I feel more creatively "actualized" recently as I attempt to make my best writing self even better (Maslow, 1970 in Banks and Thompson, 1995).

I do not think that it is just for the ego that I look for reactions in my audiences. I am the lone golfer on her course trying to get her ball into the hole with fewer shots each time. When I achieve a desired effect in my readers, I have improved my writing game. Perhaps my chipping is improving in my paragraphs or the structure of the whole is my ever-strengthening long drive. I keep score to know that my skill is improving not to beat my fellow golfer (although there is *some* satisfaction in winning), but to know that I can call myself a golfer.

However, in my drive to improve, I need to consider “two kinds of intelligences”:

...one acquired,

as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts

from books and from what the teacher says...

With such intelligence you rise in the world.

You get ranked ahead or behind others

In regard to your competence...(Rumi & Barks, 1995, p. 178)

I realize that I have often concerned myself with this first intelligence. Instead, as I find my voice in my writing, and feel the potency of text, I need to rediscover and harness the other intelligence:

Already completed and preserved inside you.

A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness

In the center of the chest...

This second knowing is a fountainhead

From within you, moving out. (p. 178)

The key has been to find this “fountainhead” inside of myself and become more confident with it in text to the degree that others will see, understand and appreciate it. In some regards, I took these kinds of risks when I was younger in my poetry. In a published example entitled “The Soloist” (see Exemplar 5.3, Robinson, 1988, p. 25), I wrote about what I knew best as a young pianist of eighteen, which was the thrill and the fear of performing on stage. A few years later I felt that I suppressed or lost this “second knowing” (Rumi & Barks, 1995) to the structured world of teaching and academia, but recently I have been reclaiming it.

Catharsis

I write because I *have* to write, and have done so since I was a little girl. I wanted to express my experiences from an early age, first through pictures and then through words. Often by excavating my own intensely happy and/or difficult feelings and bringing them forward into new light in text, I had an easier time of working through the matters in my mind and heart. I see this emotion in one of my first picture stories where I describe resenting my new baby sister coming into my house and stealing all of the attention of my mother and father: “I wish I was a Baby/ there Cheeks are as red as Santas sout/and mother Lets them Goaway waen there not Don there soup/ They Don’t have to Go to Scoohl/ they Don’t have To Work/ They Don’t no Better/...Boohoo Boohoo...(see Exemplar 5.4 (age six), Robinson, 1994, Appendix 4). Often, the bigger the crisis and the greater the passion that I experienced over my lifetime, the stronger my desire to write picture stories, poetry, journal entries, short stories and music became. As well, the more fervent my experience, the more vivid my portrayal of it became through language and melody. For example:

Pride

I unveil to you a bold truth.

All mankind thinks of itself,

Consciously, unconsciously, and subconsciously.

We strive to further ourselves at the

Displacement of others.

We love because we wish to be loved.

Rarely do we laugh at ourselves
 As we laugh at others, and
 Who do we defend most often?

Natural?

How strange to know that
 The end result will always be ourselves.
 If we fail at that

We are the ones we cry for. (Robinson, 1981, fifteen years old)

Jensen (1998) confirms that “Emotions give us a more activated and chemically stimulated brain, which helps us recall things better. The more intense the amygdala arousal, the stronger the imprint” (p. 79). I believe that this is a common experience among artists as so many Romantic composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were struck with the malady referred to as the “illness of the century” (Machlis, 1984) where they could never quite achieve the expressive goals of their own passionate feelings. For me, creative writing, with its freedom and limitlessness was, and still is, often a form of catharsis, even though at times I, too, experience an artist’s illness where I cannot quite put into words or music exactly what I feel.

Woolf felt that “she had done for herself ‘what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest’” (Briggs, 2005, p. 160). Perhaps the text has and continues to be my counsellor and gives me some “sanity” (Jacob, 2005). The words give me a voice and, regardless of who answers, I listen and gain a fresh perspective of the

experience when I see my feelings printed indelibly on paper.

It was this form of self-help and communication in my younger years which helped me then and continues to allow me to develop some degree of “self-knowledge” (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) which is “...the wisdom to know one’s ignorance and how one’s patterns of thought and action inform as well as prejudice understanding...Deep understanding is ultimately related to what we mean by wisdom. To understand the world we must first understand ourselves” (p. 57). Yogananda (Walters, 1990) gives a spiritual perspective of this same idea:

Self realization is, in fact, the only religion. For it is the true purpose of religion, no matter how people define their beliefs. A person may be Christian or Jewish, Buddhist or Hindu, Muslim or Zoroastrian; he may proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only way, or Buddha, or Mohammed—as indeed, millions of believers do. He may insist that this ritual, or that place of worship, bestows salvation. But it all comes down to what he is, in himself. (p. 117)

Escape and Vicarious Experience

Ironically, as much as I want to discover who I am through my own writing, I also look to find new beginnings in these self-revelations. The final lure of it for me is the temptation of intentional escape and vicarious experience. As I looked through my writing history, I found that much of it surrounds the idea of a main character breaking out of his or her old life and exploring a new setting or facet of self that he or she has not experienced before. For example, in my published story entitled, “A Turning Tide” (see Exemplar 5.5, Robinson, 2002, p. 143) that I wrote when I was a young mother, the main character has had a lovely holiday away from her overbearing and negative husband. She

makes company with a kind stranger on the beach and rediscovers herself and her repressed dream of moving to Victoria. Ironically, I divorced soon after writing this piece, and I have spent much of my life preparing for just such a move to Vancouver Island. This *Shirley Valentine* (1989) theme of a fresh start is a tempting one for me and reveals that my writing gives me wings where I cannot always fly at that time.

The idea of “imagination is the compound word *Einbildungskraft*; literally, the ‘power’ (*Kraft*) of ‘forming (*Bildung*)’ into ‘one (*Ein*)’” (Fowler, 1995, p. 24). By setting the image into place in my writing, I have the power of “visualizing” it into being (Mackenzie, 2006). “In essence, we...become what we think” (Mackenzie, 2006, p. 1).

Our individual thoughts create a prototype in the universal mind of intention. You and your power of intention are not separate. So, when you form a thought within you that’s commensurate with Spirit, you form a spiritual prototype that connects you to intention and sets into motion the manifestation of your desires. Whatever you wish to accomplish is an existing fact, already present in Spirit...If left undisturbed in your mind and in the mind of intention simultaneously, it will germinate into reality in the physical world. (Dyer, 2004, p. 18)

Perhaps, to some unconscious degree, my writing has been setting the mental stage for some changes that I seek in myself and my life. Again, my determination as a young child in writing to be a teacher demonstrated this idea of intentionality (see Exemplar 5.1 (Age Seven), Robinson, 1994, Appendix 8).

Beginning to Write: Conditions

Topics of Writing

Writing out loud is a difficult task, but I endeavoured to capture the origins or

seeds of inspiration from wherever they came while I wrote. After much deliberation, I determined that, aside from the research paper and support documents which helped to interpret my writing, the topics of the three new pieces of creative writing were to be the following: 1) a short article about understanding self and relationships for an Alberta Magazine entitled *Synchronicity* which is a magazine designed to explore various matters of body, mind and spirit; 2) a poem about how I fit with and differ from my family of origin; and 3) a personal journal entry in response to a personal matter about my identity in the context of my relationships with others. Each of these types and topics of writing had its own unique challenges and drew different kinds of creativity from inside of me. Each motivated me to begin speaking on paper in a different way, although the conditions for beginning have similarities for all four (which includes the research/candidacy paper).

Readiness: The Seeds of Inspiration

It became clear that being ready to write something is very important to me. Usually ideas that I jotted down in my writing journal had priority over those still fermenting in my head. One would call out to me, “I am very important. The timing is right! Get this down before you forget!” Often this kind of “calling” stemmed from my emotions or a need to speak my truth at that time.

[E]motions trigger the release of the chemicals adrenaline, norepinephrine, and vasopressin...When we evaluate, we are imbuing feelings to the content. This suggests the link between feelings and meaning. It’s all processed at an unconscious level in the middle of the brain and brain stem area. (Jensen, 1998, p. 93)

Brain researchers and cognitive psychologists, again, have played an important role finding

scientific evidence about how our emotions play an important role when we determine that what we feel is meaningful and, in my case, what is meaningful to write (Gardner, 1991; Jensen, 1998; Parry & Gregory, 2003).

The Candidacy Portion of the Study

I felt most driven to write my candidacy paper because of the immediacy of the deadline, the prestige of the audience and the importance of this paper and my academic future. As well, the topic of this paper was one that interested me and, although challenging writing, it was something that I believed would be valuable to me to get onto paper and share with others. The rigor of the writing required that I determine its structure. For me, until I *know* how I will present a large piece of critical writing in a given frame, I do not begin planning on paper. Therefore, I envisioned the paper and, in turn, its form, for hours on end. My think-aloud journal entry describes my internal processing:

January 22, 2006

It seems that any type of writing that involves a form or structure whether it is fiction or non-fiction occupies a lot of time as I walk or do everyday tasks that aren't too mentally demanding. The form gnaws at me as I wonder how to frame this paper. Do I dive in and just start writing? Or, do I provide a bit of history illuminating the context of enlightenment, me as a writer from the beginning, and then how I "begin" to write text. The latter seem[s] more sensible and considerate of the reader and what I intend to do. It is difficult to extricate myself from my roots of research writing and simply be an artist. I feel an obligation to wear many hats in this paper: researcher, historian, writer, writing teacher and

composer. (pp. 2-3)

It was difficult not to be defeated by the enormity of this topic, but I rose to the challenge and began to read. I read everything that I could get my hands on, put stickies on relevant passages, and started to pull together some ideas in my head. *“I read books and book-marked key passages. They seemed to jump off the pages. There was a certain serendipity, as like a carpenter gathering his/her tools and materials, everything was coming together just waiting for me to write” (Robinson, January 22, 2006, pp. 9-10).*

As I began writing this paper, I felt *overwhelmed* until I set my mind to breaking the writing task down into sections on a mind-map (see Exemplar 5.6) and began being methodical in my approach once I had gathered enough personal and relevant information. I kept telling myself (the cheerleader), “Now you have the time. Enjoy it!” This motivational voice inside of me has always played a large part in my “self-discipline” (Covey, 2004; Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). This discipline has helped me to write even when I do not *feel* like it. Much of my life, I have had to write when the opportunities arise, such as my son being asleep or having an hour here or an hour there during lunch breaks. Being disciplined helps me to overcome my own creative ambivalence. However, this type of discipline took years to mature. I have numerous stories as a child and young adult that were started and never finished.

The Article

I was quite “authentically engaged” (Schlechty, 2002) and ready to write the article that I am tentatively calling “Listening to Your Inner Voice: Am I in the Right Relationship?” I chose this topic because it was meaningful and relevant (Dewey, 1938) to me and I had some knowledge of this topic. I had very few opportunities throughout

my formal schooling, and undergraduate schooling, to write on topics that were important to me. These educational institutions of my past were not based on the Dewey philosophy of subject relevance to students taking their “[k]nowledge seriously and therefore show[ing] them that they know more than they themselves often realize” (Osborne, 1991, p. 156). However, it has become liberating to write about topics that are of value to me. There is a sense of “passion” (Covey, 2004) that shows in my writing as a result of this creative emancipation.

Based on my own deliberation, in this article, I asked myself important questions to formulate a good discussion piece: 1) Do I like who I am? Do I like who I am when I am with this person? 2) Do I feel at ease with my thinking and feeling in my present life? Does my partner share in the responsibility of the thinking and feeling that is necessary in a relationship to the degree that I can rely on him? 3) Do I have energy in my life that I can feel in my body, mind and soul? Does this relationship take more energy from me than it creates? And finally, 4) Do I have some peace of mind in my life? Does this relationship enhance or detract from this peace of mind? These are the important logical, emotional, physical and spiritual questions that gauge whether I am healthy or toxic *to* the relationship or if I am *in* a healthy or toxic relationship. Prior to this research paper, this topic had been brewing on the back burner of my mind for a year.

My ideas percolate for long periods of time before I write. For example, one of the essays that I wrote recently entitled “The Reciprocity of Forgiveness” had been growing in my head for over a decade. The motivation to finally write it was a graduate course that I was taking on spiritual and moral leadership (EDER 651.15, University of Calgary, 2005). I did not really realize until I sat down to write the paper that I had been

unconsciously gathering information for years about how I believed forgiveness to be an intentional and reciprocal act. Then, with the catalyst of an assignment, I sat down and wrote a sixteen page paper fluently and easily. I probably would have eventually written this article because the topic was very important to me, but I often need writing catalysts to get me started.

The Poem

At this point in my research process, my poem was still stewing in my head and I was less ready to write it, although I was confident that it would *happen*. When I write poetry (and music), rarely do I pre-write in the form of a webbed outline, although I might jot a few words or phrases down in order to remember them (or jot a melody down on staff paper). When I do decide to write, the words just seem to come as if I am scribing for *an- "other"*— angel, ghost, or something. I feel a connection to a higher intelligence when these thoughts burst upwards into life. Rumi and Barks (1995) expand on this supernatural aura of intelligence:

Your intelligence is always with you,
Overseeing your body, even though
you may not be aware of its work...

Your intelligence is marvellously intimate.
It's not in front of you or behind, or to the left or the right.

Now try, my friend, to describe how near
is the creator of your intellect!...

Muhammad said, “Don’t theorize
 About essence!” All speculations
 Are just more layers of covering.
 Human beings love coverings!...

Observe the wonders as they occur around you.

Don’t claim them. Feel the artistry

Moving through, and be silent. (pp. 152 and 153)

I agree that it is very difficult to “theorize about the essence” of the creative experience and how the words seem to come alive on paper. Perhaps it is easier to consider a psychological perspective:

[E]vidence from a variety of sources suggests that our knowing registers the impact of our experiences in far more comprehensive ways than our own conscious awareness can monitor...Subliminal knowing registers the impacts and meanings of occurrences we experience without our narratizing or examining them...

An image, as I use the term here, begins as a vague, felt inner representation of some state of affairs and of our feelings about it. As we have suggested, the forming of an image does not wait or depend upon conscious processes. The image unites “information” and feeling; it holds together orientation and affectional significance. As such, images are prior to and deeper than concepts. When we are asked what we think or know about something or

someone, we call up our images, setting in motion a kind of scanning interrogation or questioning of them. Then in a process that involves both a forming and an expression, we narrate what our images “know.” The narration may take story form; it may take poetic or symbolic form, transforming nascent inner images into articulated, shared images; or it may take the propositional form of conceptual abstractions. (Fowler, 1995, pp. 25 and 26).

When I initially formulate my poetry, it comes out in ephemeral fragments of thought in sight, sound, tastes, moments, and in some case, but not always, words. A poem for me is the conduit between my “electromagnetic energy fields” (Pond, 2000, p. 3) and a universal energy that sustains my life.

January 30, 2006:

I know that I want to write about my differences from the rest of my family. I keep focusing on my “green eyes”. It’s the really only distinguishable physical feature that is so different from their blue eyes, but our personalities, attitudes and temperaments are so vastly different. Last year, I met my other cousins from Saskatchewan. They all had green eyes, and for a weekend, I belonged. How can I capture these ideas? Just now, out of the air came the idea of my grandmother’s loom and how she would weave pieces of our old clothing into her rugs. What pieces of clothing are woven into my rug? I like this idea. I’ll sit on it for awhile. The ideas will come. It’s an important topic. (pp. 19-20)

I compose music in the same way and for the same reason. I sit down and the notes rush forward as if they were already meant to be there. The most difficult part then becomes scoring it onto staff paper.

*The Journal**January 30, 2006:*

As for my final piece of writing, the expressive journal, I'm avoiding it. It seems to be so personal, almost like a personal confessional where I tell all. However, when I tell all, I have to dig deeply and uncover these emotions and make sense of it all. When the time is right and I can truly express what is in my heart onto paper (because it has been a difficult month), I will. Until then, I'd rather write my article which, oddly enough, logically attempts to unravel my thoughts on my personal matters in a very safe [...] way...I like writing to get on top of my feelings...(pp. 20-21)

When I considered that my journal would be read by others, it hindered my desire to expose such deep sentiments. There has never been any pre-writing necessary for me for this type of writing other than to be ready to talk to myself very honestly on paper. At this point, I was not motivated to do so, even though the feelings were powerfully present and the content for writing was available within me. I decided to set this writing piece aside until I was truly ready to write it.

Setting the Stage for Writing All Three Pieces of Writing

Movement and Body

Once some of my ideas were committed to paper and others were still floating around in my head, I walked. Walking is a wondrous activity that warms and raises my ideas to some creatively edible point. For example, as soon as I hit my well-worn trail around Carburn Park Lake in Calgary where deer lurk and squirrels play, or when I hike any other trails in the mountains nearby that hold pungent nature smells and a terrific view,

the ideas just pour out of me. Heard (1995) wrote of the same physical need:

Now I have my own ritual: I walk. When I'm in New York I begin at Seventy-first Street and walk through Central Park to Strawberry Fields...toward Metropolitan Museum and then turn my steps home again. The walk takes me about an hour...As I walk, I write. Words circle my head. I speak lines out loud to see how they'll sound. The rhythm of walking orders my mind and limbers me up for the hours I will sit in one place. When I finally do sit down to write, I've already been at it for an hour. (p. 34)

I wrote similarly in my think-aloud journal:

January 22, 2006

Walking back and forth from the Banff Springs Hotel was where much of my writing took place. I would reconfigure how I'd put my ideas together and then when arriving at either location, hotel or Y, I'd scratch down the ideas quickly before forgetting them. (pp. 10-11)

I find that if I have some element of distraction for my mind and body that is pleasant, routine or mindless, this can be helpful to allow my brain to relax and refocus.

Wolbrink (1996) mentioned that "inspiration" (Dyer, 2004) strikes when

the writer is performing a routine activity such as driving the car, mowing the lawn, cooking, or shaving. For some reason, mild distraction seems essential to the process known as inspiration. We often speak of the way an idea or solution to a difficult problem comes in like a bolt from the blue. (Wolbrink, 1996, p. 187)

However, I find that physical malaise can impede my creativity, whether it is resulting from some emotional or physical cause:

January 28, 2006

When it came time to write today, a personal/family difficulty arose and it tired me. It tired me to the point where I could not find the usual joy and energy in me to compose. Instead, I focused on menial chores so that I could try tomorrow. I believe when the heart is wounded it is difficult to project immediately onto paper. It takes me time to rest and recover. For this reason, I'm starting to believe that there is more of a physical realm in my creativity. I may have been too quick to simply dismiss this from my meta-processing theory. (pp. 13-14)

When I feel healthy, awake and physically alive in the day, my ideas come out more easily than when I am grounded in poor health and weak energy. I have to take care of my body to peak it for the purpose of writing which means eating, sleeping, and exercising well and regularly. It was at this point of my research that it became obvious that I would have to include another meta-learning domain. Now that I was recognizing the importance of the body's influence on my writing, it seemed important to incorporate work about what I would later call the "meta-kinaesthetic" learning domain.

Private and Public Context

It occurred to me in this research that until recently, I was only able to really do what I would refer to as my *best* creative work on my own. Privacy for me to write has been critical whether I have been alone in a park or alone in a crowd. As a child, most of my writing exemplars are from private moments at home or in the park. In graduate and post-graduate school, I wrote most of my papers and theses alone when my son was away or in bed. It has not been until recently that I have experimented with writing while someone who *is aware of my presence* is in the same space. I have written with my

students in a classroom context, but it has been sporadic and of less significance to me than my private work. With this being said, I still believe that modeling the love of writing to students while writing with them has made a difference to them and serves as an additional motivation for them to write more often and to write well. One example of this collaborative creative effort was a shared letter-writing activity that I did with a class of grade seven students. Each student wrote home thanking a parent or guardian for something for Thanksgiving. I took part as well by writing a letter to my own mother. We then asked the parents to respond in kind. The experience was so compelling for me that I wrote a story about it entitled “Writing Home” (in private later) (see Exemplar 5.7, Robinson, 2001, pp. 65-68). To have the whole community writing to each other was a convincing lesson for me and the students about the energy created when sharing text.

However, out of necessity, I have also learned to write under some pretty unusual *private* conditions: in smoky pubs, on airplanes, in buses, in waiting rooms and even in hospital beds, provided that I am not the focus of someone else’s attention. I *prefer* having a pleasurable “state” (Jensen, 1998) in which to thrive creatively and it is usually in these more desirable circumstances that I do my best writing. Any type of positive private setting or atmosphere where my mind can wander will give me a good creative opportunity. For example, one of my favourite places is in the steam room at the conservatory in the Calgary Zoo. The smell of exotic flowers slows me down long enough to think. When my mind is relaxed and not “neurally hi-jacked” by an emotionally loaded situation, it can focus on learning and creating (Goleman, 1994).

Depending on the difficulty of the writing, I can become very picky and seek out the circumstances that have brought me prior success in feeling calm, creative and very

focused; for example, listening to Baroque music, being in a warm temperature, or enjoying the ambiance of a very specific place. I did so to begin my candidacy paper:

January 22, 2006

I'm sitting out over the Bow Falls from the majestic picture windows of the Banff Springs Hotel. I've spent the weekend alone on a writing retreat with the sole/soul intent of writing towards this paper. It wasn't easy getting here. In light of my twenty-eight day time frame, I determined that I have only a few good weekends to carve out some time...There is something very reverent about sitting here over such a spectacular vista writing in my journal. (pp. 3-5)

In Retrospect

After reflecting on how I begin my creative writing, reconsidering my initial research questions and the accompanying candidacy question, I realized how little of it has to do with words, paper and pen. We often think of these “process” starting points (Murray, 2003) when we get our students to begin their writing. However, I have done very little of my best beginning writing preparation in a contrived situation such as a classroom, office or other academic setting using fixed pre-writing methods. I write better when the ideas are of interest to me and inspire a genuine inner *need* to write. As a result, I tend to seek out or let ideas seek me out in authentic places, where I am alone (I wrote all of the candidacy paper in seclusion), and for reasons that I have described. As well, I notice during these times that there has been a synchronicity of events that seem to surround me as ideas come together almost by accident.

Flow

When I received my candidacy question, ideas began “flowing” together in what I

can best describe as a “deliberate unfolding” (Belitz & Lundstrom, 1998; Csikszentimihalyi, 1990). “Flow is marked by two types of occurrences: synchronicity and fortuitous events. As the experience of flow increases in our lives, so do these occurrences” (Belitz & Lundstrom, 1998, p. 4). It was not until I “decentered” (Piaget & Odell, as cited by Lunsford, 1979) and took a closer look at my writing that I was able to notice the tiny events that occur in my creative writing with an incredible velocity. For example, the books that I ordered for the research had been delayed and arrived on the very afternoon that I needed to leave for my writing retreat, and the reading that I did on my first night perfectly suited my writing purposes of the following day. As well, when I shopped in a bookstore in Banff, within a few minutes of being in the store, I found an unfamiliar book title (that practically fell off the bookshelf into my hands) very inspiring to my topic entitled *Re:Generations: Canadian Women Poets in Conversation* (Brandt & Godard [Eds.], 2005). To use a Jungian expression, these “meaningful coincidences” on their own may not be very significant, but it is the frequency with which they occur that makes them more profound. Belitz and Lundstrom (1998) confirmed that “[c]omprehending this dynamic process is often easiest when we stand back and look from a distance” (p. 39).

When I am in flow, I do not always appreciate these creatively accommodating incidents, but these artistic good fortunes help me to be lost in the experience of writing. It is here where I come as close to my “higher self” as I believe possible. When I am in the eye of my creative storm, I am completely consumed, lose track of time, and engage with my mysterious inner world of imagination. When I take the time to activate my imagination, I am often surprised by what is inside of me. I am finding that the more I

read, the more I realize that these types of flow and serendipitous experiences happen to other writers as well (Heard, 1995; Rumi & Barks, 1995; Wolbrink, 1996).

Our lives are connected to one another's and to the larger world and universe.

Sometimes I have doubts or questions about my life, and the world seems to answer back with connection: Migrating starlings flock in the trees after my grandfather dies, or I'm wondering how a friend is and the phone rings and there she is...Synchronicity draws recognizable patterns on a sometimes chaotic universe. Writers need to pay attention to these synchronistic moments and events. (Heard, 1995, pp. 103 and 104)

Saying What You Mean and Doing What You Say

An example of this type of unforeseen circumstance happened to me as I searched to re-visit and validate, from another source, the importance of "thought" and "words" to support this concluding section. Once again, a book jumped out at me almost immediately, and, when I opened it, the first page that I turned to exactly summarized my previous motto about enlightenment: Say what you mean, and do what you say:

The process of creation starts with thought—an idea, conception, visualization...Nothing exists in your world that did not first exist as pure thought...

Thought is the first level of creation.

Next comes the *word*. Everything you say is a thought expressed. It is creative and sends forth creative energy into the universe. Words are more dynamic (thus, some might say more creative) than thought, because words are a different level of vibration from thought. They disrupt (change, alter, affect) the

universe with greater impact... (Walsch, 1996, p. 74)

Bringing my natural unconscious and conscious imaginative dreaming forth from thought to text can be a challenging task (depending on the writing and my readiness for doing so). Deciding what ideas of this initial creative thinking will make it to paper, how it will be structured, what words will best convey my creative intention and other writing considerations become, for me, the more intensive work than generating the initial thoughts. (I refrain from using the word ‘difficult’ because although it is rigorous work, it can be quite invigorating). Therefore, I do not commit my imaginings to paper until I am truly ready to engage myself entirely in the full and unique creative experience. The discipline of making that jump to paper is again something important to re-consider. What motivates me to finally get it down on paper?

When I talk to students about the creative journey, I don’t talk to them about having creative potential. I talk to them about actually doing the work that is necessary to actualize the imagination. Being creative involves making a significant commitment to understand the skills and process necessary to arrive at a satisfying outcome...[B]ecoming skilled in any fine art takes time, persistence and patience. (Robinson, 2003, p. 26).

I believe that it is this persistence to uncover or capture what is happening in my head onto paper that stretches me to my very limits as I attempt to master my sometimes disobedient mind. “To reach a state of impeccability, you need to practice unbending intent” (Dyer, 2004, p. 58) which means overcoming the obstacles the mind poses because it is *always* thinking, either in sleep or wakefulness.

By being disciplined enough to do the creative work, I notice that it is sometimes

prophetic of change in my lived experience:

Words are the second level of creation.

Next comes action.

Actions are words moving. Words are thoughts expressed. Thoughts are ideas formed. Ideas are energies come together. Energies are forces released.

Forces are elements existent. Elements are particles of God, portions of All, the stuff of everything. (Walsch, 1996, p. 74)

On a closer scrutiny of my writing from childhood to present, there appeared to be acts of pre-emptive action, experimentations on paper, or warm-ups in preparation of what I was going to become. My words captured action and also anticipated action, and it is this exciting realization that now moves me to consider its greater influence in my life as a whole as I attempt to *write* what I mean and in some cases *experiment* with doing what I *write*.

The Aspects of Being

When I authentically engage in writing I now see that it involves all aspects of my life which include mind, heart, motivation, spirit *and body*. Walsch (1996) combined these five categories into what he referred to as “three-fold being[s]”:

You consist of *body*, *mind*, and *spirit*. You could also call these the *physical*, the *non-physical*, and the *meta-physical*...

Some of your theologians have called this Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Your psychiatrists have recognized this triumvirate and called it conscious, subconscious, and superconscious.

Your philosophers have called it the id, the ego, and the super ego.

Science calls this energy, matter, and antimatter.

Poets speak of mind, heart, and soul. New Age thinkers refer to body, mind, and spirit. (p. 73)

Regardless of the naming of the aspects of being, I have now noticed them all, to some degree, in my writing even though I originally omitted the physical domain. I felt that it was not “relevant to my act of writing and therefore a quotient not included in this particular research” (Research Proposal, Robinson, 2006, p. 13). I differentiated meta-processing initially into *four* interactive meta-learning domains (1) thinking, 2) feeling, 3) motivational and 4) spiritual) differentiating feelings and motivations because there appears to be enough research to do so (Riggs, 1998). As well, when I re-considered my writing data, there continued to be an argument to separate feelings from motivation because sometimes I find that although I may be emotionally available and creative, I may not be disciplined and/or truly motivated enough to sit down and write. As a result, I continued to make a distinction between the two in this research.

Five Meta-Learning Domains

Because of the addition of a new meta-learning domain, it seemed important to address my third guiding question in more detail: “What “meta-processing” (metacognition in the four meta-learning domains: cognitive [to know], affective [to feel], conative [to have the will], and spiritual [to be]) occurs during my act of writing? How and where does it occur?” I demonstrated that when I begin writing poetry and prose, I 1) “thought” very carefully about the images that I had in my mind, as well, how I would eventually capture them. In my prose, for example, I *cognitively* constructed them into a webbed outline as a pre-writing activity prior to embarking on the writing journey. As

well, 2) my *feelings* were important as they determined what I found important enough to write. It appeared that personal experiences, images or ideas that were powerful to me, were written. The third aspect, 3) Intrinsic *motivation*, is still a nebulous concept for me; however, in light of my observations I found that, “sustaining motivation to learn has to come from within” (Banks & Thompson, 1995, p. 270). Other than my course assignments, I had always been my own creative motivator because no one else really pushes me to write. However, I also see that my feelings and motivations were interconnected. My feelings determined my energy and passion in what it was that I was attempting to communicate and, thus, these feelings *could--* but not always did-- determine my attitude towards the writing process. And 4), my experience with flow and inspiration was a critical factor as it greatly influenced where I found the seeds of my creation as if by some matter of muses and magic. It was this *spiritual realm* where I seemed to have a heightened experience with my inner voice.

Again, my self-analysis determined that it was important to consider a fifth dimension to my emerging meta-processing theory which is 5) the ability to reflect on the *physical self* when I considered my creative writing process and experience. Movement and my physical well-being appeared to play an important role in my ability to concentrate, focus and be in tune with the ideas that were burgeoning forth in my head with a destination of a written product. Even if my emotions triggered my physical wellness or illness, I still had my body to contend with. I was reluctant in the beginning to also consider the Physical Quotient (PQ) in a learning framework as it seemed to pertain only to the unconscious effort to run our respiratory, circulatory, nervous and other vital systems in our bodies (Covey, 2004). I did not initially find it to be as relevant to my act

of writing as the other four and I did not consider it in my initial guiding questions; however, I later included it as it became obvious that it was inextricably linked to the other four and was an important part of my writing. The body impacts the creative state. As in sports, the functional body creates an optimal artistic experience. Controlled double-blind scientific laboratory studies are producing increasing evidence of the close relationship between body (physical), mind (thinking) and heart (feeling) (Covey, 2004). Again, in this research, the body connection with the other five learning domains was a critical link to achieving a positive writing state.

The Ultimate States

Covey (2004) makes sense to me when he writes about the “ultimate states” of four native intelligences, although I modify them slightly in my own self-evaluation. (He does not distinguish between the meta-affective and meta-conative, but combines them as an *affective* intelligence):

When you study the lives of *all* great achievers—those who have had the greatest influence on others, those who have made significant contributions, those who have simply made things happy—you will find a pattern. Through their persistent efforts and inner struggle, they have greatly expanded their four native human intelligence or capacities. The highest manifestations of these four intelligences are: for the mental, *vision*; for the physical, *discipline*; for the emotional, *passion*; for the spiritual, *conscience*. These manifestations also represent our highest means of expressing our voice...(Covey, 2004, p. 65)

When considering these 1) intelligence capacities, I concur that mental *visioning* is important as I prepared to launch into text. For the 2) physical, I would say that instead

of discipline (although there is some aspect of this in managing my body), it would be an *awareness* and *appreciation* for the role of my physical intelligence in my writing that would be my ultimate manifestation. Again, I would instead consider *discipline* as a separate domain because it underlies all of these intelligences. By having an internal locus of control where we respect our ability and effort, we are able to reap the rewards of all of these four intelligences described by Covey (2004). I do see the need for 3) *passion* in my writing and am often affectively moved to write more when it is present. And finally, for 4) spiritual intelligence, I believe that *conscience* and *consciousness* play a part in raising these inspired connections with others and my higher self into being.

Learning to Listen

My writing voice strengthens as I experiment with “truth” (Gibran, 2005; Gandhi, 1957 as cited by Nair, 1997; Yogananda & Walters, 1990) and heed the calling of the computer. It beckons to me at strange hours of the day and night. When I am feeling balanced and whole, I respond. “[W]hen you engage in work...that taps your talent and fuels your passion—that rises out of a great need in the world that you feel drawn by conscience to meet—therein lies your voice, your calling, your soul’s code” (Covey, 2004, p. 85). It was at this point in my research that I learned to listen and understand my call to write using *five* distinct and interactive meta-learning domains and heed them in my writing process and experience. It became important to revise my third guiding question to read:

- 3) What “meta-processing” (metacognition in the *five* meta-learning domains: cognitive [to know], affective [to feel], conative [to have the will], spiritual [to be] and *kinaesthetic* [the body interaction]) occurs during my writing?

How and where does it occur in my writing?

As a result, I continued to work with these five meta-learning domains in the writing and re-writing sections of my research which follow (as I did in this chapter during my period of pre-writing). These *five* meta-learning domains enhanced my creative writing potential while I wrote 1) a poem (imaginative); 2) journal entries (expressive); and 3) an article (transactional).

CHAPTER SIX

WITNESSING MY IMAGINATIVE WRITING OF A POEM

Finding Time and Inspiration

I felt like writing a poem when I was on a trip to Lisbon, April 2006. It was here, when I was alone, that I was inspired to capture all of the wonderful thoughts and feelings that stirred inside of me each time I entered an historic site such as a cathedral, monastery or palace. I had time to myself to truly think about what I was privileged enough to see in my travels. Rumi (1995) advised us that

There is a way between voice and presence

Where information flows.

In disciplined silence it opens.

With wandering talk it closes. (p. 32)

I discovered that I need a lot of quiet time on my own to awaken, hear and respond in text to the creativity inside of me.

This holiday afforded me the time to create and reflect on the poetic ideas blossoming inside of me. In Chapter Five, I had initially considered some ideas for a poem about a family loom in my pre-writing thinking. However, writing poetry, to me, is like surfing. When the mood moves me, the wave of creativity washes in and I ride it as long as possible, balancing precariously on its crest. I no longer felt like writing the poem about the loom. Instead, I wanted to ride a new wave about what I was feeling in the present on my holiday adventure in Lisbon, Portugal:

April 20, 2006:

I sit looking out over the Tagus Estuary and see much of Alfama from the on Largo das Portas do Sol, and want to incorporate the “language” of my experiences [into my writing]. I am the traveller and everywhere I go there are mosaics: small pieces designing a whole. This is my experience as I pattern together experience after experience into some semblance of a meaningful whole. So, how do I incorporate this into a poem? I start with the historical language surrounding me. I start there and then work inward...If I had chosen to sit down yesterday, it would have been an effort. Today, with some Porto Madeira and a beautiful view of Lisbon, I feel like writing. It’s not really that simple because I “chose” to write when my impulses are always to be lazy. So, today the inclination overrode my ambivalence. I have a paper to write and a poem seeping through my pores. It’s time. So, I’ll pursue my jot notes and draft further later. Perhaps if I walk, the ideas will come. Oh Lisbon! You are good for the soul! (pp. 59-61)

I found that it was the remembering of a moment and my reaction or analysis of this event in the remembering where I could best discover its real value and meaning, and perhaps enhance it for its artistic merits. Winckel (1983) talks about the fact that “[t]he short-term memory can hold only a small amount of information at any one time, and thus may have to depend on *reconsciousness* as a kind of repository for information retrieved from subconsciousness...” (p. 9). I took notes of my experiences as I was in them so that I would not forget some of the details because “vivid detail is the life blood of fiction”

(Gardner, 1991). I later put this “mosaic” of particulars together, piece by piece, *after* I had put some distance between myself and the thought-provoking events. *April 20, 2006*: “*My life feels like myriads of little pieces and I am attempting to make sense of it. Sometimes the further [I] stand away, the more [I] squint [my] eyes to blur the whole, the more [I] truly see [it]. When [I] come too close, [I] lose sight of it all...*”(Robinson, 2006, p. 64). This occasion was similar to other creative writing situations where I feel the experience more keenly in its memory than I do in its first encounter. I re-live it very vividly when I re-access this information and piece its meaning together anew. In Lisbon, I was also able to heighten the meaning of my re-lived experiences in text one step further when I attempted to explain my creative process in action.

However, in contradiction to the need to stand back and detach in order to reclaim a writing experience, I found that (as in my youth), I write best when I experience some pathos: pain, great emotion or inspiration such as I was feeling on this vacation. I understood in my creative self-reflections that intense attachment to a feeling is also something that works in tandem with the detachment I need in order to complete a poem. As Shapiro (1974) wrote poetically:

As you say (not without sadness), poets don’t see, they feel.

And that’s why people who have turned to feelers seem
like poets. Why children seem poetic. Why when the
sap rises in the adolescent heart the young write poetry.
Why great catastrophes are stated in verse. Why lunatics
are named for the moon! Yet poetry isn’t feeling with
the hands. A poem is not a kiss. Poems are what ideas

feel like. Ideas on Sunday, thoughts on vacation. (p. 37)

In my youth, I wrote poetry about love and loss. In my adulthood, I examined critical matters of family and culture. My passions have changed over the years with my “developmental tasks” (Kingma, 1987) of finding my first love, having a family, building a home, and then finding my life’s work. Pastan’s statement rings true of me, “What I write about...has changed as my life has changed, for my poetry has always been immersed in my life” (as interviewed by Osen, 2002, p. 151). It appeared that both intense involvement and the need to stand back and reclaim these emotions and observations were both important when I wrote this new poem in a Portuguese setting.

The Evolution of the Poem

What have been often distinguished as three separate stages of writing (pre-writing, writing, and re-writing) by process theorists such as Flower and Hayes (1981/2003) are often one and the same for me when I write poetry and this was true of this new poem as well. A looser poetic process model (Wilson, 1954) resembled *some* aspects of this act of poetic writing: 1) Selective Perception of the Environment; 2) Acquisition of the Technique; 3) Envisioning of Combinations and Distillations; 4) Elucidation of the Vision; and 5) End of the Poem and Its Meaning to the Poet (Wilson, 1954 as cited by Emig, 1971). I resonated the most with the third part of this process because “envisioning of combinations and distillations” appeared to be a reciprocal process; therefore, this section of the process seemed to encompass all of the others in one large process of a poetic “*madwoman*”. I referred to the “Madman, Architect, Carpenter, Judge: Roles and the Writing Process” by Flowers (1981) as it continued to be a relevant and flexible writing model. It does not have specific “stages” of writing. Instead it

describes the “roles” of creativity found within the act of writing. I could relate very closely to all of these roles at some place or other in my writing experience, especially the *madwoman*, who seems in many ways to have a dominant voice in my poetic process.

I would have to agree with Gardner (1991) when he explained that
 ...the organized and intelligent fictional dream that will eventually fill the reader’s mind *begins as a largely mysterious dream in the writer’s mind*. Through the process of writing and endless revising, the writer makes available the order the reader sees. Discovering the meaning and communicating the meaning are for the writer one single act. (p. 36)

For me, the conception of the ideas, the writing and then finally the polishing of a poem were all an interconnected flurry of experiences and processes. If pushed to explain each part of my act of writing, I could (painfully) break it down to distinguish its steps for the purpose of explaining them. However, to do so would make my experience appear linear (where it is truly not linear in my mind) in order to explain it to an audience.

Carving Out the Words

I collected the words of the Lisbon churches and art (see Exemplar 6.1) because they were alive and jumping out at me to be caught in poetry. “I collect words because I love them, and as a writer I need to be able to pepper my writing with words from everywhere” (Heard, 1995, p. 49).

April 20, 2006:

So, the words are coming now. I catch a thought here and there adding a word like “terracotta”, instead of stucco. And what about cenotaph? It fits somewhere. What am I trying to say? I’m not sure of the link just yet. This is

very similar to when I compose [music]. I sit at the piano and follow the melody and chords as they create their own song. All of a sudden, I have a song, and then I add to it. Perhaps it needs a deceptive cadence or a subtle modulation? What effects do I add? The same [occurs] with [my] poetry. The message will surface eventually. I just have to trust it. (p. 62)

After I found these words, I was able to uncover their significance and the underlying theme of their interconnectedness.

...I start with a lot of material, a kind of hunk of marble somehow excreted onto the page, and my job seems to be to chisel at it and chisel at it until everything that doesn't belong had been removed...This business of not knowing where a poem is going when you begin it is something I started thinking about after reading an essay by William Stafford called "Writing the Australian Crawl." He says you must trust the poem and follow it where it wants to take you, along the way learning things you didn't even know you knew. Reading this...I didn't wait anymore until I had an "idea." Instead I would start with an image, or a feeling, or even a sound, and see where it led. (Pastan, as interviewed by Osen, 2002, pp. 152-153)

I also described this uncovering of my ideas. It seemed like

April 20, 2006

... a wild frenzy of wordsmithing. I can't really deconstruct why I choose or discard ideas. The message seems to be a lonely one as I question who is "building my destiny", I suppose. These little pearls of experience get strung onto a necklace; the tiles cemented into panels'; [and] glass [is] melded into

metal. (p. 64)

In other words, the art unfolded, and *we* worked (the art, which is a higher force, and I) in tandem as we discovered what was meant to be said. As I've said before, I felt like there was an angel on my shoulder helping me in this ethereal poetic process:

[S]ome writers—not the least of them Homer—have taken that point of view, speaking without apology of Muses as, in some sense, actual beings, and of “epic song” and “memoir”...as forces greater than and separate from the poet. We often hear even modern writers speak of their work as somehow outside their control, informed by a spirit that, when they read their writing later, they cannot identify as having come from themselves. I imagine every good writer has had this experience. It testifies to the remarkable subtlety of fiction as a mode of thought. (Gardner, 1991, p. 51).

While I wrote this new poem, I continued to believe that I was blessed with a mystical muse that visited me from time to time, smiling at me with inspiration and urging me to write so intensely that it became an almost fanatical state. It kept me awake at night, and distracted me during the day. I became a bit obsessive about this poem for the three or four days that it took me to write it. My pages were messy and words were crossed out, replaced, and crossed out again (see Exemplar 6.2). I resembled what Gardner (1991) referred to as a “true artist”: For “[t]rue artists, whatever smiling faces they may show you, are obsessive, driven people—whether driven by some mania or driven by some high noble vision...”

April 21, 2006 (the next day):

So, I've slept on it and unlike other poems where I've felt sated by the creative

feast, I do not feel that way here. Why?...I was moved yesterday by the Largo da Sé which was built by Afonso Henriques for Gilbert of Hastings, the first English Crusader and Bishop on the site of the old Mosque. Sé is short for Sedes Episcopalis, the seat of the Bishop. It was devastated by three earth tremors in the 1300's and a big earth quake in 1755. Polishing this piece today sitting in the hothouse in Edward VII Park overlooking a pond of Trumpeter Swans and feeling the sun touch my skin, is rewarding. It [finally] came together for me with a bit of tweaking and shifting of words from here to there...I was a bit more overt in my connections of cathedral to self. I am now immensely satisfied. It feels right to me (although I keep wordsmithing [it]), and I cannot abandon it for the article.

(p. 68)

Time passed for me quickly as I participated in the passionately driven “flow” of writing this poem which I knew would become an ode. The poet Levine (1995) also described this state of flow as “that magical state in which nothing could hurt me or sidetrack me; I had achieved that extraordinary level of concentration we call inspiration” (p. 95). And so it happened after visiting a cathedral in Lisbon and writing its story that I was able to re-experience its magnificence in text.

My Poem “Ode to the Sé: The Seat of the Soul”

Oh, my Architect!

Reconstruct my façade

shaken by tremors;

burned by fires.

But the crypts

cenotaphs, sarcophagi;
scrawled with ageless graffiti;
lie protected.
Draft your allegorical pillars
that will be carved in marble;
Hire the best artisans
to pattern glossy Azulejo panels
over bleeding spots of terracotta
Reframe the broken panes of colour
with lead;
counting on the sun
to illuminate the stories.
Stand far away to redesign
what appears crumbled and old
Unless you plan to loom near
and weave silk into textiles
that adorn my altars.
No, rebuild me from the outside
with your neo-secular spiritual styles
in this sacred place.
But can you truly fix what has never been broken?
for the sacristy still stands inside;
from the beginning;

untouched.

In Retrospect

The writing process that occurred during my act of writing this poem “Ode to the Se: The Seat of the Soul” (April, 2006) could be broken down and codified into a process framework in order to explain the various stages and steps that I took to write this poem. For example, becoming inspired enough to capture words onto paper would seem to resemble a “pre-writing stage” (Murray, 1971/2003), (although Murray’s model was not intended to be linear). Uncovering the message in the words and putting them into a shape or meaning could be described as “writing” (Murray, 1971/2003). And, my constant need to revise and wordsmith it in the end could also be seen as a “re-writing” (Murray, 1971/2003) strategy. However, to explain these steps as singular processes in themselves ignores the fact that while I participated in each of these acts of writing, other thoughts and feelings were happening concurrently. For example, while I was collecting words, I was also thinking about how certain words would fit together, and what ideas these words might best represent. When thrashing through words and connecting, omitting and reconnecting ideas, I was revising and collecting more words at the same time. This concurrent series of events going on in my mind seemed more complex than the linear and one-dimensional stages described in process models for the purposes of *codifying* the writing *experience*. These models did not seem to capture *exactly* what was happening in my writing *experience* (although they hinted at certain aspects of my process). The fervour, passion, excitement, soulful and physical experiences were not addressed well, if at all, in the recursive process models. The lack of attention paid to these important aspects of self in writing made even the most recursive models seem

sterile and feel linear even if these were not the intentions of these models.

My thoughts and feelings were happening simultaneously; consciously and unconsciously; and in many cases, automatically. It seemed to be a naturally evolving *writing experience*. Intense emotions that were explored while in the “flow” (Csikszentimihalyi, 1990) of the experience were combined with the logical need to detach from them in order to re-experience them in a new artistic light and express them to an audience. In this detachment I found that the re-living of these experiences when I wrote them afresh, was more vivid and exciting than the initial “encounter” (Buber, 1970, p. 60). For example, my memory of the Sé Cathedral is now firmly fixed in my mind. In my quest to vibrantly illustrate its religious beauty, it became a metaphor of mythical proportions. When I detached, I *reconsidered* my engagement with these ideas for a few days. While I creatively paused, I underwent a vast series of imaginative considerations. It was here when I asked “for the higher creative intelligence within [me] to find a way of resolving and integrating all the important aspects of [myself]” (Gawain, 2006, S. 23): motivational, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual, into some semblance of comprehensible artistic text. The end result was a poem that helped me to re-experience this grand Portuguese cathedral in a new and profound way.

Therefore, when I was not in the throes of the creative experience, being pulled into all sorts of conscious and unconscious dimensions of thoughts, feelings, motivations, body reactions and inspirations, I was able to “decentre” and step back and analyze some of the “functional dialogism” (Kent, 1993) going on in my head. I was having multiple conversations in all of these meta-learning domains that were pushing me to write, as well as resisting my efforts to write. One of the journal entries in my think-aloud journal

prompted me to research the initial “resistance” that I experience before I was able to access a wealth of available creativity. I called it resistance because it felt that I had to overcome *something* before I could proceed with my writing. It was almost as though I had to *break through* a small shell of protection in order to profit from the substantial yolk of ideas that lay within:

April 22, 2006

Sometimes I feel like I'm swimming under ice. Some thinkers/philosophers have equated this subconscious experience as “dreaming” (Ruiz, [1997]), or “sleepwalking” (Walsch, [1996]) through life. I feel resistance every time I want to break through the ice and surface to breathe the fresh air of “awareness.” I believe in order to achieve self awareness, you have to overcome a certain self-encapsulation like layers of self or I could compare it to the moulting of the Tarantula when he lies on his back and sheds his armour to uncover a new self. (pp. 85-87)

I felt that I was surrendering to both the conscious and unconscious creative forces within me. I initially referenced the concept of “reconsciousness” (Winckel, 1983), or a repository of ideas lying close to the surface of memory as a way to explain this idea. However, in retrospect, I believe that the schema that most aptly describes this wakeful creative consciousness is the theory of “preconsciousness” (Freud, 1940/2006).

Although this initial research that I cited is not current, it is foundational in the field of psycho-analysis. In Kubie’s article entitled “Neurotic Distortion of the Creative Process” (1958), he explained that our creative activities come from the

“preconsciousness” rather than the unconscious part of the mind. “An Outline of Psychoanalysis” (Freud, 1940/2006) seemed to describe what I felt when I experienced an almost erogenous creative zone of consciousness lying very close to the surface just *waiting to break through* into consciousness:

Everything unconscious that behaves in this way, that can easily exchange the unconscious condition for the conscious one, is therefore better described as “capable of entering consciousness,” or as preconscious...[T]hey press forward...into consciousness. There are other mental processes or mental material which have no such easy access to consciousness, but which must be inferred...It is for such material that we reserve the name of the unconscious proper...What is preconscious becomes conscious, as we have seen, without any activity on our part; what is unconscious can, as a result of our efforts, be made conscious, though in the process we may have an impression that we are overcoming what are often very strong *resistances* (Freud, 1940/2006 as translated by Strachey, 1949, pp. 34-35)

In some cases (especially where I was *ready* to write), my writing was easy and seemed magically accessible, like the preconsciousness described above. All of the five meta-learning domains were instrumental in awakening the more difficult (less ready) unconscious state into a conscious art form and helpful in overcoming any sense of resistance that I was experiencing out of fear, ambivalence, and laziness or other. I had many conversations in my mind in the following areas: I felt free and liberated from my normal routine (meta-affective), and I had more time to really explore my creative processing. My creativity came to life while I was moving, and walking around the city

through all of its magnificent architecture. My senses were alive with the smells of the musty museums; the sites of the medieval gargoyles welcoming me into the grand entrance ways of the palaces; the feel of the uneven cobblestones beneath my feet; the tastes of the pastries from the local Pasterias; and the sounds of the Portuguese minstrels floating through the streets performing the melodramatic fado music typical of this culture (meta-kinaesthetic). With all of this incredible cultural stimulus, I was moved to write and felt connected to a higher force (meta-affective and meta-spiritual). There was an unexplainable need inside of me to capture it like a picture in a photo album (meta-conative) so I could take it home and share it with other people. And once I was able to awaken from this dream of creativity, I considered the audience and the language that I needed in order to convey it artistically so that others could also appreciate and understand my Portuguese experience (metacognitive) even if it was through *my* eyes.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

WITNESSING MY EXPRESSIVE JOURNAL WRITING

Deeper Layers of Knowing

“To live is so startling it leaves little time for anything else” (Dickinson, 1830-1886, Quotable Women, 1994), and yet somehow I made the time to write in twenty-four journals since I received my first diary on my 11th birthday, July 11, 1976. Now that I have read through them and reflected on them from the distance of time, I found that this section of my research alone could be an entire research study of its own. It was difficult to focus just on the salient points relevant to this particular study on creative writing and metacognition; however, it became easier as I framed my journal reading and interpretation into my key guiding questions, saving further analysis for another research occasion.

While I read and reminisced, I was reminded of many fun and important highlights of my life with my friends and family that, in some cases, I had forgotten. The journals presented them in youthful technicolor, and in highly exclamatory detail: “*April 5, 1980: Today I awoke for the first time in my new room! It was a very nice feeling to be in a neat, tidy, personal room of my own, which I totally designed myself...*” (p. 56). “*July 11, 1981: I just drove my self around the neighbourhood but no one was around to see me show off. How horrible...I love driving!!!!!!*” (p. 20) “*February 9, 1982: There is the most absolutely, fabulous gorgeous guy in Law who likes me! He asked me to go to his phys ed. class and he suggested that we go to a basketball game together. He keeps smiling at me...*” (p. 156).

In my childhood journals, I explored many reasons for writing in them because these journals were *mine* and not instigated by anyone else to fill them. In them, I recorded my life, made predictions, wrote about world events, described my reactions to the days' occurrences, analyzed my circumstances, and documented my thoughts about my friends and family. (Notice the imaginary audience in second person):

December 24, 1979:

I just purchased my journal today and am wondering if I will succeed to remember to continue writing in this book throughout the year, 1980. In my past journals I have failed to do so because of these small sizes [of diaries]...First before I continue any further I must introduce myself to you. There is so much I want you to know, whether I'm introducing myself through the years to my future family or to readers whom I don't know... (see Exemplar 7.1: Robinson, 1979/80, p. 3)

Later, in my early twenties, my journals were intentionally more reflexive, but still concerned with a second person audience, although it appears that the audience is now just myself:

December 27, 1988:

I think that you will find this journal far more interesting than my last few. I find that I am reading more into life, and as a result I am getting more out of life. My priorities have expanded to include quite a bit more than they used to...I have accomplished many...things. I haven't perfected my goals, but I do feel that I have touched on them, and I'm there. Now I find myself reaching into the past. I'm trying to find out who I am, and where I go from here. (pp. 2-3)

There seemed less predicting and more goal setting in them from the 1980's forward than in my previous journals. Again, these journals were my own invention and within them I formed my own reflexive intentions. Each new journal started with some resolution to begin afresh. It seemed like the opportunity to have a new beginning and try something different with my life.

My formal schooling had never adopted any journaling strategies in my classes. It was not until my graduate courses in 1993 (when I was twenty-eight years old), that I was exposed to this type of medium for learning. Because I had been journaling all of my life, I felt excited to consider academic learning in this manner.

My journaling throughout my life and into the present was very "expressive": "*Expressive* is the form of discourse in which the distinction between participant and spectator is a shadowy one" (Britton, 1982/2003, p. 158). I was the participant and spectator all at once as I wrote for and to myself to express various facets of myself and my experiences. My journal served as a sounding board for creative thinking and action that I might choose to eventually make public. For example, these ideas often translated later into a poem, or a conversation that I might have with a colleague:

We might describe this early form [of expressive writing] as an all-purpose expressive. As the writer employs it to perform different tasks, fulfill different purposes, and increasingly succeeds in meeting the different demands, his all-purpose expressive will evolve: he will acquire by dissociation a variety of modes. Expressive writing is thus a matrix from which will develop transactional and poetic writing, as well as the more mature forms of the expressive. (Britton, 1982/2003, p. 170)

This expressive writing always required of me a certain mindset of openness that involved creating a vulnerably open textual world. There was always the risk of openness not intended for public eyes.

For the purposes of this research, it was difficult to be on the inside of this expressive writing experience while also being on the outside looking in. For example, when I was ready to write a recent journal entry for the purposes of this think-aloud process, and to do so authentically in the manner that I had always approached my journals (as I mentioned in my previous chapter), I procrastinated. I became self-conscious about making my private text public. Buss and Kover (1996) mentioned that journal writers become “more concerned with the boundaries between private and public, more aware of the kinds of powers involved in silencing others, in breaking silence, in designating boundaries and in deciding who gets to speak in a discourse that gains community authority” (p. 13). However, in the name of this research, I took the plunge. I also missed journaling because it was/is important to write expressively in my life regardless of the difficulties of the think-aloud interpretation of this process.

Like the advice of the mother to her children to always wear clean underwear in the instance of a horrible accident, throughout my life, I wrote well in my journals on the off chance that they were stolen and secretly read by someone else, or in the instance that I decided to share them with another person.

There are indeed times when this is the only reading component—when one writes for oneself alone, to express or record an experience in a diary or journal, or perhaps to analyze a situation or the pros and cons of a decision. Usually, however, writing is felt to be part of a potential transaction with other readers.

(Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, pp. 20-21)

Because of this sense of audience, I was and still am cognizant of attending to the conventions of the language, although paragraphing and structure were/are of a lesser concern to me in my journals than the sentence structure, word choice and punctuation. My form is generally loose and follows a sort of *organized* stream of consciousness where I let my ideas flow, but I try to attend to some categories of thought patterns that resemble paragraphing. However, what appeared to be most important to me in my journals was to convey my experiences as articulately as possible so that I would remember them the way that I wrote them down.

Digging Beneath the Surface

Writing had always served the purpose for me of sifting through matters and making sense of them. “*December 19, 1989: I would like to organize myself soon, and find out what I have, where I’m going and how I’m going to get there. I think “writing” is going to help me*” (p. 45). It always seemed to be my textual purpose “...to dig beneath the surface [and be insistent] on the deeper layers of knowing...” (Heard, 1995, pp. 45-46). This digging for understanding was indicative in the following recent research entry as I looked at the context of my life and how I could learn to be a better mother of my teenaged son by re-examining my old journals:

April 16, 2006:

It takes me to go to Portugal to get my writing groove back. I’ve been so consumed with teaching at the university, my leadership group, taking care of Andrew, being solution oriented and getting my house in order, etc. that I haven’t had a chance to write since I’ve prepared for and passed my candidacy

oral. Even getting ready to go for this trip and also prepare for my two surgeries in May (May 4: nasal, May 30: shoulder), I have been distracted from being creative, or intellectual. I've also been getting scholarship applications ready and applying for jobs...I'm pretty excited about going back in the classroom after six years...I'm wanting to impact learning in a more direct way, and see if I'm a better teacher now after I've done so much professional development. As well, I want to be part of a school culture again. I miss that, having a "family" of educators around me...As well, I can connect to Andrew by teaching his grade level and knowing the expectations of his programs in the humanities and other.

...Andrew reminds me of me at his age. I started writing in a diary at his age. It would be worth reading again to see how I have progressed in my thinking. I seem to remember a more frenetic and emotionally charged existence much like what I'm observing in my son. Everything was about what I "felt" and not really about putting multiple perspectives of the experiences in my life together by considering my intuition, body and rational mind. I seemed out of touch with the present moment and didn't listen—really listen to what was happening around me. I was moving too fast to really gain as much as possible from my life. I watch Andrew be so impatient with everything, everyone and himself and I wonder how to calm the stormy seas inside of him...(pp. 22-26)

These private sentiments were not something that I would share with my friends, family or even Andrew. By taking the time to write, I was able to unravel some thinking that I normally pushed aside in my busy everyday life.

My next research entry helped me to examine new ways of thinking that were

inspired by the next leg of my holiday on the island of Madeira.

April 27, 2006:

As I was walking, and seeing new and interesting sites, I could feel my brain alive with new thoughts and feelings amidst the backdrop of this tropical island. I could feel new ideas for my writing, home, job, teaching, parenting and other surfacing with a new...force. I can't help wondering if the brain research isn't at play with me. My new experiences tear me out of my neural pathways embedded in my way of looking and behaving in my little part of the world. Brenda (my roommate) and I were talking about how we get into dressing in the same clothes despite having a larger wardrobe, and we eat the same food, despite liking a broader variety. Our habits of mind seem to be at play, and when we are immersed in a new "thinking" environment where everyone around us speaks and acts differently, it is difficult not to question ourselves and say. "Why don't I do that?" or, "Isn't that an interesting approach ..." or, "I'm glad we don't do it that way." This jarring of our thinking patterns can be a powerful catalyst for change... (pp. 100-101)

My new encounters inspired me in hundreds of ways, and my writing profited from this newness all around me.

Speaking in Text

When I was journal writing, it felt like I was *speaking in text*. I was aware of the many conversations happening inside of me:

April 22, 2006:

The resistance sounds like this in my head: "Not now, it's late," or "Someone else has already written that," ...or "Who is ever going to read this?" or "Is this valid to write about my own experience," or "Someone else wrote/said this better." ...[I]’ve been really aware of the resistance that has probably always inhibited me...However, my desire to be out of the water to breathe freely and walk on two legs is stronger now. It [also] sounds like this... "I can do this!" or "My committee thinks I write well!" or "Life is too short. I have to try it now or it might never happen!" "Seize the day!" "Life is living in the moment!" "I don't know if I don't try!" ... (Note the exclamation marks). It becomes apparent to me for the first time that my "domestication" (Ruiz, [1997]) has been riddled with fear...[Instead] I say, "Wait and see." Life is about the remote possibility that an adventure is just around the corner... (pp. 86-88)

This ability to express myself in journal writing is a "form of written discourse closest to speaking" and has always served as a natural starting point for me as an aspiring writer, assisting me at times in my youth when I had "rich language resources recruited through speech, but few if any internalized forms of the written language" (Britton, 1982/2003, p. 169). I found that in these more recent journal entries, like any of my other types of writing (regardless of my audience, private or public), I was concerned with making sense and finding some figurative aesthetics to make my meaning clearer, or at least more interesting, to me. I realized in this research analysis that even in my most intimate moments with my journal, I held back and maintained some distance between myself and the heart-felt topics of my journals. In other words, I do/did not let it all hang out.

Although I preferred not to be overly negative in my journal, there were instances of strong emotion. Even as a young woman at a heightened time of angst in my relationship, I sounded very formal in my portrayal of the anger and hurt, rather than venting my hurt and emotion as it must have been happening in the pathos of the experience. Journaling was my way of making sense of things, staying calm, and working through the matter in words, such as in this instance in my marriage:

September, 1993:

...He seems unable to cope with problems and expresses his views that my desire to communicate about problems is an attack even when I carefully script out what I am going to say using "I" statements. We seem unable to talk things through despite my efforts...It is verbal unloading. Even though I try to get things out in the open, he fights to allow things to build up instead of stopping problems...

In this instance and other, I have always used *some* discretion in how I approach matters of the heart, just as I do when I speak to close confidants about my feelings or when I write in journals or other forms. I considered what a person or audience would want to hear or read whether the audience was myself or someone else. I did not feel that verbal and textual diarrhoea was enjoyable to listen to, nor read, let alone speak or write. That type of verbal rampage had always been and continues to be an exhausting and confusing endeavour for me. No one may ever read my journals, but I always felt that someone might, or *I* would eventually (or at the least God might be listening); therefore, I should express myself in comprehensible and literate ways.

The themes in my journals were very much the same throughout the years as I discussed and continue to discuss my joys and sorrows about family, friends, relationships,

work and other, but the reflexive nature of my journaling text about these topics has matured considerably since my first journal in 1976. I had acquired more stylistic and structural compositional skills, and I explored some of these in my more recent journals (2003-2006). I now gave/give myself more permission to consider a topic in greater detail and in various ways using my mind, motivations (goal setting), body, heart and soul. By developing as a reflexive thinker and writer in a journal from an early age, I had helped to develop my emotional quotient despite or in spite of my personal and professional obstacles:

The idea that we have “emotional IQs” and that the development of mental intelligence is not necessarily accompanied by the development of skills such as good judgement, relational maturity, and ethical subtlety is a concern often expressed today, and indicates, we believe, a need to make tighter and more practised connections between the public and private modes of experiencing and thinking about the world. These need to be made in language, both written and spoken, since maturation of intelligence, both emotional and intellectual is inevitably linked to maturation of language ability. (Buss & Kover, 1996, p. 12-13).

By putting my feelings into words and creating some semblance of order to them, I was able to help manage my emotional quotient (EQ), which Goleman (1995) explains as being quintessential to establishing a healthy emotional quotient.

In Retrospect

The Matter of Memory

Being able to remember my lived experiences over time, enhanced my ability to

ascertain what I believe to be my writing processes and experiences of the past and their evolution into the present. My memory allows me...

... a certain remove...to take into consideration all the ins and outs of the matter, its context in time and space. As an aerial view sometimes reveals to an archaeologist the direction of a road or a fortification or the map of a city invisible to someone on the ground, so the reconstruction in spirit of my destiny bares the major lines that I have failed to notice, the demands of the deepest values I hold that, without my being clearly aware of it, have determined my most decisive choices...

The past that is recalled has lost its flesh and bone solidity, but it has won a new and more intimate relationship to the individual life that can thus, after being long dispersed and sought again throughout the course of time, be rediscovered and drawn together again beyond time. (Gusdorf, 1980, pp. 38-39)

As well, in this research, my memory provided me an opportunity to review my journal writing over time, revealing rich examples of my 1) motivational (goals I had achieved and wanted to pursue); 2) emotional (reflections on my feelings of happiness, sadness and confusion about my life's events at the time); 3) cognitive (analyses of my challenges); 4) physical (discoveries about my body and its development as well as its health); and 5) spiritual (my belief about my connection to others and a higher power) development. These are just a few examples of these types of meta-processing activities that I experienced in text in this expressive form of my writing.

However, there were often discrepancies between what was written in my journals and what I remembered. It became important to read carefully what was written in these

private chronicles, and also to note what was *not* written within them. What did I not take the time to write? What did I simply avoid writing? This became a form of *invisible* data that was quite telling to me as an autobiographical researcher:

As one gets older, childhood years are often conveniently consolidated into one perfect summer's afternoon. The events can be projected on a light blue screen; the hurtful parts can be edited out, and the moments of joy brought in sharp focus to the foreground. It is our show. But with all that on the cutting room floor, what remains to tell? (Ortiz-Cofer, 1991, pp. 21-22)

It seemed that instead of simply editing my life in my memories in my later years, I had used much of my journaling at the time of the writing to revise and reify an honest, but edited façade of my life experience. I often (in my earlier journals) focussed and got lost in the writing of what had truly been my most significant experiences at that time in order to encourage the best memories possible in the future. Although there were times that I would express disappointment, frustration and anger, these emotions were often tempered in my expressive writing. I would express negative emotions, but never to the truest and purest degree that I felt them. Therefore, even though my life was legitimately happy in my adolescence and young adulthood, journaling became a way of *retelling* my daily life to myself *then* and projecting this perspective into the future as well. Although I was more revealing of my emotional highs and lows in my recent journal entries (1996 forward), I still did/do not tell all. For some reason, I still unconsciously censor some of the emotional outpouring that might occur in more graphic details and dialogue. Therefore, my expressive writing process was to retell my day's(s') events chronologically and in some articulate detail, but my writing experience was to re-experience from my

day(s) only what I felt was important to remember (good and bad) and a version of it that I felt was appropriate to re-read in the future. I seemed to get lost in the retelling of those particular events, while ignoring, what I would perceive now to be, other probably equally important happenings.

The Guiding Purposes for My Journaling

There is a risk, when working with this type of qualitative research data, of suggesting that this journal writing, albeit authentic writing from different stages of my life, speaks the *truth* about my life, like written memoirs or an autobiography. In fact, in many ways, the logged entries in my first two “diaries” from 1976 to 1979 (which essentially “record[ed] observations about events that [were] usually short and objective” (Parry and Gregory, 2003, p. 292), and the longer “journals” from 1979 to the present (which are “[w]ritten recollections and reflections that focus on [my] emotional reactions to events...”) (Parry & Gregory, 2003, p. 292) tell the personal events that I believed were happening at the time. However, with greater maturity and insight, as well as the knowledge I had of different historical contexts, I was able to appreciate these textual archives for what they represented then and now. They were windows into the private and *selected* perceptions of my life at the time they were written *and my efforts to make sense of them*. I amalgamated the existential conditions (external contexts) of my life with my internal conditions (emotive and cognitive responses) (except in the initial diaries/logs) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, if any other objective researchers were reading and interpreting these journals, they might draw some insightful and potentially misleading conclusions because they were not privy to the context of these journals, or the evolving purposes for them. “Writing is always an event in time, occurring at a particular moment

in the writer's biography, in particular circumstances, under particular external as well as internal pressures. In short, the writer is always transacting with a personal, social, and cultural environment" (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 17). They would be made aware of the public aspect of the meaning, but the submerged base of the private meaning would lurk underneath the surface of *my* memory (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005). However, I (the researcher) was able to grasp the little sub-text hints that others might have missed because I lived the experiences and I was able to remember (in most cases) what these subtleties represented. For example, I wrote:

August 31, 1992 (two months after having my baby son):

There seems to be so much "busy" work that I am satisfied doing now. I take care of: diapers, over all cleaning, cooking, laundry...baby care, music plans etc. I'm forever doing something. I'll have to do my garden tomorrow too. I'm going to sit down and start working on my book. I'm still mulling it over in my mind. I feel like I'm procrastinating, but the ideas seem to still be moulding themselves. (p. 104)

An objective observer might have thought that I was a happy new mother who was about to do some creative writing. What people did not know was that the book that I was working on called *Missing Pieces* was about an extremely unhappy married woman with a son. This fictional protagonist, Leslie, left both her husband and son for the summer to do a piano concert tour, and while on this trip, she had an affair. My creative fictional writing had often and continues to explore ideas brewing inside of me and I experimented with these ideas through my characters. Although I never left my family to have an affair (nor would have I), there were aspects of the truth of my unhappiness in this story. I either

excerpted aspects of my life experiences somehow, subtly or overtly, or I created scenarios that I probably wanted to live out vicariously through the fictional characters. However, why would I not have written about these ugly aspects of my marriage more often and more intricately in my journals? Perhaps I felt that the fictional characters afforded me freedom and anonymity as well as a greater voice in my lived experience.

My marriage journals portray me as a traditional wife leading a conventional life like my parents—the one I was supposed to live. I was supposed to be happy, and therefore, I wrote that I was happy. I think I even believed that I was happy (to some degree). Therefore, the purpose for my journals was to write what I believed at that time, and the purpose for my fiction was and continues to be a way of testing alternative life experiences. Unlike my journals, my stories were a way of trying on the shoes of my main characters for awhile, just to see what it might be like—to escape and be someone else for awhile, or to be who I truly was/am underneath.

I found myself wondering about the journals of many female pioneers in Alberta that my academic cohort was exploring for her doctoral research. Were these women documenting what they were truly experiencing in their lives, or had they cognitively sifted through it to report what was acceptable even to them? I believe that there are many layers of text in our writing lives depending on the type of text that we choose to write, and they do not always tell the same story (or at least they did not in my life). This psychological analysis is not the focus of this research, although an interesting digression to point out the layers of thinking embedded in my and potentially others' journal writing. It would make a wonderful psychological research project to uncover and interpret the multiple psychological meanings in different types of text by one or more writers.

In general, my earlier teenaged and young adult journals went from naively happy to being filled with progressively more difficult and open expressions of emotions ranging from happiness to a moderate degree of emotional angst as I went into my early thirties and beyond. What was beneath these changes was not simply that I became a more complex and emotionally volatile person than in my youth; rather, it was more a reflection of my *evolving purposes* for writing in them. My purposes went from *telling* my life to *interpreting* my feelings about my life. As a result, these journal purposes affected what I chose to write or *not* write, and *how* I chose to write this information. I unconsciously and consciously censored what I would reveal in text to represent my experiences at the time as I wanted to, to help make sense of them, and/or to reveal how I *did* in fact understand them.

Setting a Course of Intention

My journals seemed to be an effort to capture my metacognition or inner conversations on paper from childhood onward:

The man who recounts himself is himself searching his *self* through his *history*; he is not engaged in an objective and disinterested pursuit but in a work of personal justification. Autobiography appeases the more or less anguished uneasiness of an aging man who wonders if his life has not been lived in vain, frittered away haphazardly, ending now in simple failure. (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 39)

Perhaps there is something about my journals that aspired to live out the dreams that I had set for myself in my journals, like an instruction manual, or a well-laid out map of “intention” (Dyer, 2004) so that I would not see my life as a simple failure.

February 4, 2000:

Today is the day that I take control of my life again...I want to get back to being thrifty and saving money and working with what I have...I will do the things that I love to do...I will not let my colleagues intimidate me and modify my professional objectives in the school. I will not take on too many conferences, but will choose those that profit my family, finances and career and in that order. I will relax more with Andrew...He is a joy and I have had some trials with him, and haven't been at my best handling them. I'm going to [narrow] down my responsibilities to what I must do. I'm going to savour my holidays...

In them, I leapt out into the future, blazing a path of my intentional destiny. My meta-conative conversations came alive everywhere in my journals as I said what I wanted to be, to have, to see, and to experience. As well, in my journals I also reflected back and contemplated my history in order to determine the best way to proceed forward in light of it: “February 24, 2000: *I forgive myself my indulgences lately. They were to help sooth some pains and to create a renewed sense of home and wellness, but I must step back and start saving for future.*” Despite some expressions of turmoil through many of my recent journal entries, there always seemed to be a spirit of forward-thinking optimism in this inner speaking that I shared on paper. It allowed me to motivate myself to overcome my difficulties and succeed in spite of them. Dyer (2004) suggested that in order for us to “realize [our] desires, [we have to] match them with [our] inner speech” (p. 57), and to some degree, I believe that my journal writing helped me and continues to help me meta-conatively as I set my personal and professional life in motion.

It was obvious that my overriding purpose for writing in my journals was to make sense of my thoughts and feelings and to find a way to slow down my experiences in order

to better understand them. I also wrote what I wanted to remember and be remembered for. "...[P]ersonal journals help [people] discover that writing is a process of constant revision and re-thinking; it is reflexively related to their understanding of the world" (Buss & Kover, 1996, p. 12). In my case, I explored my thoughts, feelings, motivations, feelings in relation to my body as well as my belief about God and destiny on the topics of importance to me.

Bringing your thoughts, ideas, emotions, and wishes into the concrete world through journal writing makes them real and tangible, giving you more conscious control over your life. It allows you to step back from your thoughts and emotions and take an unattached, objective view of what's going on inside you...Journaling can clear your thoughts and prepare you for action. (Buss & Kover, 1996, p. 118)

In many ways, my journalling journey afforded me many opportunities to metacognitively reflect and then act within my world in selectively intentional and meaningful ways.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WITNESSING MY TRANSACTIONAL WRITING

AND RE-WRITING OF THE ARTICLE

Getting Ready to Write

I had already participated in some pre-writing for the article on the topic of relationships (as indicated in Chapter Five), and determined to some degree “the rhetorical situation and audience which prompted [me] to write [as well as my]... own goals in writing” (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003, p. 279). In what could be called a “pre-writing stage” (Murray, 1971/2003), I had dug into some related readings and research, as well as my long term memory to determine how I might get things out into the form of a web outline where I “reorganized and adapted that information to fit the demands of the rhetorical problem” (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003, p. 280). My planning process on this webbed outline also accomplished the matters of generating ideas, organizing and goal-setting (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003, p. 281). This previous pre-writing took some initiative and internal readiness before I could complete it. However, to work on this article for this research, I found myself having to get ready again as I prepared to put these “ideas into visible language” (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003). It took time again to establish a presence of mind to make the jump to “translate a meaning, which may be embodied in key words (what Vygotsky [2004, pp. 268-281] calls words ‘saturated with sense’) and [organize it] in a complex network of relationship, into a linear piece of written English” (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2004, p. 282).

May 21, 2006:

I'm going to write my article [on the topic of finding the right relationship]. My outline is ready, but jumping into the text... (arm wrestling with the right words for an introduction), takes some serious initiative on my part. [I have to break through] into ... my ideas... Procrastination is something that I've always prided myself on not doing, but why must I always get all of my domestic matters done before I launch into my writing? I guess, like other writers, I grapple with finding the right time..." (pp. 111-112)

Godwin (1995) talks about how much of the activity we think of as writing is, actually, *getting ready to write...*

I've been writing almost every day for thirty years... And, as I begin to formulate my description of how one goes into this mysterious space where one writes, I find myself assailed by the same doubts that I cope with on an average morning... when I go up to write *anything*, including this essay.

I confess, right at the start, to the doubts—and sometimes outright dreads—that go with me as I climb the stairs to my study in the morning, coffee mug in hand: I have to admit to the habitual apprehension mixed with a sort of reverence, as I light the incense—yes, I'm the one with the incense—wondering: what is going to happen today? (pp. 4-5)

Therefore, I, too, noticed two periods of “readiness” that needed to occur for me at each of these creative junctures: 1) before I planned or as I *envisioned* my ideas (Chapter Five), and 2) before I “translated” them or *captured* them into text (write). I, like Godwin

(1995), orchestrated a world of creative readiness when I wrote/write:

May 21, 2006:

[A]s I prepare to jump [into writing], the ideas are beginning to unfold. As I mentioned before, readiness seems to be pivotal to the whole process. There is always a slight resistance from somewhere to begin with, but if I can step over this hurdle, I seem to manage. The ideas come out a bit shaky at first as I restore my writing confidence, but the fluency of it returns as I get [going]. I equate it to stretching before a workout. Right now I am quite stiff. (p. 112)

I found that part of getting ready for this article like any other transactional writing that I have done was/is all about figuring out a good work environment that helps me get and stay focussed. I have mentioned before that finding the right creative ambiance is valuable to inspiration in the “prewriting stage” (Murray, 1972/2003). However, when I am “writing” (unlike my “pre-writing” where I like to be anywhere and everywhere that I can be inspired), I need an *effective* and *comfortable* office system. It is important for me to have a tidy and organized work place where everything is familiarly placed and easily accessible. Here, books, like friends, encircle me with their support, cheering me on from the side-lines. My computer and chair are ergonomically correct to allow for long creative writing periods. However, beyond these practical matters, I am always seeking that special place of flow within the confines of my office—a *place in my head* where innovative ideas are readily available. At this point of writing, I no longer need to be surrounded by the setting that once inspired me because I have remembered it through notes, pictures, or mental recollections. “[I] unleash the power of flow when [I] create a

supportive internal environment that frees [me] mentally” (Belitz & Lundstrom, 1998, p. 154).

The following three techniques made space for “flow” while I wrote this article where the words poured into me and out of me onto paper with ease: 1) creating silence; 2) following my intuition; and 3) practicing mindfulness (Belitz & Lundstrom, 1998):

Silence is far more than the absence of sound. It is also the absence of activity, the absence of stimulation, the absence of thought. Yet although silence is absence, it is not emptiness...It is being attuned with your depths. It is being fully and completely in the moment...

Intuition is knowing what you know without knowing how you know it. It comes as gut feeling, as words, as images in a dream, as pictures in your mind...Some consider it unconscious knowing surfacing into consciousness; some say it is information picked up through the five senses below the level of conscious awareness. Intuition speaks from silence...

When you are *mindful*, you pay attention to the details. A rose is not just a rose: it is the vibrant depths of the color crimson, the whirl of intricate interlaced patterns, the soft texture of velvet...Mindfulness puts you in the moment—and when you live fully in the moment you can experience the power of flow. (Belitz & Lundstrom, 1998, pp. 154, 167 and 173)

I had to contend with the minutiae of everyday life while I grasped for time to clear the way for this type of soulful thinking, writing and editing about relationships. I found that I can always achieve a higher level of writing when I have laid the matters of my life to rest and am alone in my office or somewhere with my laptop where I have uninterrupted time

to myself to write about what is important. But, in this case, the meta-conative question kept arising as I attempted to write this article: What motivates me to push beyond all of these noisy external and internal distractions? This question of motivation continually arose throughout this research, and I am not certain of the answer to *how* I persist. I am convinced that *why* I persist is because my topics are important to me, like this topic about relationships, just as the process of forging these ideas into some understandable format is rewarding.

The Importance of a Meaningful Topic: Revealing Truths

It became increasingly more obvious to me while I wrote this essay (as in other types of writing I explored) that I like to write when I can write about subjects that matter to me. I found bits of *my* truth in pieces of my writing as ideas burst forth in various fiction and non-fiction forms. When I was/am *moved* to speak about a topic that occupies much of my thoughts, I am thrown into a passionate creative flow, and time simply slips away.

Flow is engendered by passion—passion for life, for knowledge, for a cause, for a relationship, for truth. Passion means caring deeply about something beyond ourselves. It means engaging with it at intense levels. It means letting go of self-protective caution to involve ourselves wholeheartedly with what we love. (Belitz & Lundstrom, p. 57)

It would appear that I had some important truths to share about human connections in this written commentary about finding the right relationship as Begley (1995) described of his own writing. “I have an obligation to myself, which is to write as well as I can, and never to depart from the truth. And the truth is not an autobiographical truth, which

interviewers are usually after, but an emotional truth...What I write comes out of some crucible inside of me” (as interviewed by Osen, 1995, p. 115).

When reflecting on this article about relationships that I was writing for the purposes of this research, an example of my past transactional writing came to mind. I wrote an article over a decade ago entitled, “My Paper Trail: My Road Back to Safety” (Robinson, 1997). It was interesting that I did not think about this article (that I purposefully never published) until I was writing this research section. I remembered it when I was driving and reflecting back on all of the meaningful topics on which I had ever written. I was filled with a lightning bolt of enthusiasm. This article was probably the most significant that I had ever written. I ran downstairs and started ripping through old boxes of filed documents, praying the whole while that I still had it. Finally I found it at the very back of all of my filing boxes. I held it up like a trophy, eager to re-read it after all of these years. In it I had referenced how writing had been my salvation—an instrument for communicating myself in the form of legal evidence. I wrote this persuasive essay a few years after a long legal altercation. In it, I explained the importance to me of writing and writing well. I also mentioned the significance of keeping my writing and the written responses of others:

Until recently, I did not realise that I had a paper trail. It is not just a small fragmented trail of writing fitting in and out of my past in places with vast gaps, but a long extensive trail meticulously saved first by my mother and then by myself...Through all of my life, especially as an adult, writing has been a catharsis for me where I can speak honestly on paper, sometimes to someone else, but most often just to myself. I’ve been a writer all of my life. Not a writer in the

traditional sense of a published author, but a writer of my life and of my feelings.

In turn, I have become an English teacher to help demonstrate the importance of writing well and the satisfaction of writing for its own sake... (Robinson, 1997, p.

2)

The paper trail of my journals, letters and jot notes had come into effect as legal evidence that eventually demonstrated the truth of my legal situation, and afforded me trustworthiness in my case. In this article I reflected about the importance of honesty ringing forward in text:

The power of words was present everywhere. It had been explained to me somewhere along the line that if you have something good to say, write it down, but if you have something bad to say, don't. I am glad that I did not heed this advice entirely. (Robinson, 1997, p. 9)

As well, I talked about how the act of transactional writing (in this case the act of proving a point by constructing an effective argument in text) saved me thousands of dollars and perhaps much more:

I began to write because my lawyer and I had two days to prepare an affidavit for a court date that had been presented to us in five days. I began to write a responding statement powerfully, credibly and with a clarity that I had only practised for twenty-five years. I wrote with a strength that I could not exhibit verbally [at that time]... (Robinson, 1997, p. 6)

I was convincing in this article that this form of communication could be a good course of therapy and action for other people in my or other legal situations:

Why is writing so important? We move quite naturally from talk to writing, and

therefore are motivated by genuine reasons to communicate. Writing recognises the unique situation of everyone. It recognises our unique frames of reference, our different purposes for writing and our varying degrees of understanding about our subjects. Writing is perceived by writers as a way of thinking through learning (Martin, 1984). Simply by writing this essay, I have learned a little more about my experience and I hope that I have conveyed my story to other people...I now recognise the incredible power that someone else and the justice system can have over my life if I don't fight for what I know is true. I can only hope that the system will allow time for the judge to...consider all of my writing and the writing of others... (Robinson, 1997, pp. 9-10)

In the end, after much more writing, I was successful in this legal case. This passion for conveying a sense of truth and justice also came out loudly in this written commentary.

This type of emotional and truthful writing rings at a pitch for me that is higher than what I consider the lower ones where writing tasks are assigned to me by a professor or editor, or I need to write for profit or academic success. However, I often found/find motivation to do any kind of writing, even those contrived by others for specific purposes (whether they are academic, professional or other) if I am able to give it a bit of my own *voice*. Casey (1995) states “[T]here is something wonderful about a writer who has her own voice. And there is something horrible about the sound of an imitated voice...[T]here is an intimacy your inner ear recognizes even before the rest of your brain approves” (p. 63). In other words, writing where I have a choice and *some* freedom within the confines of a given frame of topic, length or form, can be very stimulating for me, and potentially more meaningful for the reader.

Considering the Topic of Relationships

In this article, I chose to write about relationships. My outline (written and discussed in Chapter Five) helped me to focus on my key ideas. Many relationship experts seemed to have some good ideas about how to find, achieve and sustain a healthy relationship, but their prescriptions for success were not always relevant to me and left me wondering how applicable some of their ideas were to a general audience. Therefore, I believed that a worthwhile starting point was to first acknowledge other writers who have written extensively on this topic and then explain how I would deviate from the self-help directed by others to the self-help that comes from within. I wanted to get people to listen to themselves and prompt them to ask the right questions. In some ways, having experienced many different types of relationships in my life (acquaintances, intimate, and professional), I believed that I had something relevant and valuable to say on this subject. As well, I thought that this topic, lit by a new way of looking at it, would be interesting to the reader. As M. Robinson (1995) says, “I think that the first responsibility of a writer is the same as the first responsibility of any artist—which is to create something of interest and value, something that behaves in terms that are describable in the language of aesthetics” (p. 83). After researching the ideas about metacognition, I thought that using metacognitive strategies *to ask our own questions* was an innovative approach to evaluating the success of a relationship that others might also be interested in exploring. However, it was important for me to remember that this article was just an idea—a theory about how being metacognitive *could* improve our chances of recognizing a good or bad relationship through a process of reflexivity. I concur with M. Robinson (1995) when she writes, “The culture of the nonfictional is a country in which writers actually think they’re

saying things that are true—a very naïve idea” (p. 83). My introduction to my article “Am I in the Right Relationship? Listening to Your Inner Voice of Body, Motivation, Mind, Heart and Soul” climbs the slippery slope of *truth* and reads as follows:

When dealing in the realm of significant relationships which includes our closest love connections with ourselves, family, friends and most intimately, our significant partners, we all have an inner consciousness about these relationships in the background or foreground of our connections with these people. I have learned as a forty-something woman, to listen to this inner knowing with my body, heart, mind and soul and to trust it. As I have grappled with forming strong relationships over the years, I have been an avid reader of the relationship experts who have and continue to support their readers in self-help books with interesting and informative ideas about the following: finding the “right” relationship (De Angelis, 1992); or knowing the “rules, if love is a game” (Carter-Scott, 1999); as well as the “time-tested rules for capturing the heart...” (Fein & Schneider, 1995). Other authors give us helpful relationship questions, checklists, criteria and surveys (De Angelis, 1992; Andrus, 2006), and tell us to beware of “love myths” (Kingma, 1987), or to pay attention to our unique “love codes” (Kahn & Rudnitsky, 1989). As well, we are told to heed the differences between men (who are from Mars) and women (who come from Venus) (Gray, 1994), and communicate with these gender characteristics in mind while working through the “five stages of dating” (Gray, 1997). Despite the wisdom that each of these writers impart to us in an effort to help us achieve fresh perspectives about our interactions with others, I believe it is important to listen intensely to what is happening inside of each of us.

We need to form our own questions and draw our own conclusions rather than using formulaic methods that might not fit our particular relationship needs.

(Robinson, 2006, pp. 1-2)

Thinking Aloud While Writing

“The process of translating requires the writer to juggle all the special demands of writing English” (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003, p. 282). It was here where many of my compositional skills were automatic and accessing them into a conscious representation for the purpose of this research became more difficult. Everything was momentarily a blur as I experienced the multiple layers of thinking and feeling that happened simultaneously. It was here where *magic* happened.

May 23, 2006

My article is evolving as I type. I used to write better with paper and pen, but my process on the computer now is more natural and effective. I got five pages double-spaced written today. I kept having to reassure myself that my experience in relationships was valuable...Oddly enough, my biggest battle today was about person. Should I use “we” and then “I”? Can I use these two together in this paper. This matter got in the way and I decided to shelve it until all of my ideas were in place. I want to use “we” because I want to include myself in the speaking of other, but I also needed to reference my own experiences that were not necessarily generalisable of others. I know I can do both, but for now it is awkward.

I’m including some quotations as they jump out at me, but I’ll include others as I re-evaluate the writing tomorrow. I’m probably going to cut it shorter

to make it conducive to the magazine I have in mind, but perhaps I shouldn't and find another magazine. I grapple with these issues of length and conventions as I write. However, the ideas themselves are fascinating as I finally give them voice on paper. Relationships are frequently written about, and I wonder if what I have to add will be original in any way or clearer than what someone else has written?

May 27, 2006:

I have decided not to gear myself for the Synchronicity Magazine. The space frame is too short and it is getting in the way of writing what I want to write!... I haven't referenced my outline much. My writing is taking on a life of its own. I do reference it periodically. I'm experiencing a synergy of my text with other writers as I embed citations to substantiate my arguments...I rode my bike and had a bath and as usual, this prompted a bursting forth of ideas. (pp. 117-118)

The ideas tumbled out quickly, and several different thoughts happened simultaneously, rather than in the linear and monological representation that I had written in my think-aloud journal for the purposes of describing them. I found that in order to convey ideas to another, I had to say things one word or one idea at a time; however, in my mind, these were concurrent functions happening all at once. If I were able to capture it, a better representation of it would have been to score my thinking like an orchestra where each staff represented a different instrument (line of thought). This would have better demonstrated how they all played together in harmony or dissonance, depending on the line of thinking at the time. This cacophony of ideas happening in my mind was often very distracting, but when I achieved a sense of consonance, or better yet, a congruence of

ideas, it felt exhilarating. When I felt like this, I would say to myself, “Ya! That is the idea I was looking for!” When the ensemble in my mind was all synchronized for this article, there often seemed to be no need for a metacognitive or conscious mediator—conductor. The music wrote itself.

When I finished my first draft, I was excited:

May 27, 2006:

I got so excited when I was done my first draft that I wanted to send it to everyone [I knew], but refrained. I need a cooler head to edit it tomorrow. Once I was on a roll, I really enjoyed my new found confidence as an “expert” in this topic area of relationships. I have some good ideas and I finally have the confidence to share it with others. I’m gathering all my writing into my cabinet and I intend on submitting it to publishers in the coming year. (pp. 117-118)

Having Second Thoughts

After I had time to *sit* on this article for a few days, and went back to edit it, I realized that it was much easier to be the expert and write about this topic than to live by my own words about relationships in every day life. Again, my head seemed to be talking me out of writing the article because I did not live perfectly by my own relationship ideals. I was single. It would seem that that in itself gave me little or no credibility on the topic of relationships. On the other hand, I speculated, perhaps it indicated that I was using my strategies wisely, and was waiting for the right time and the right person. I was not sure:

A writer may indeed engrave a page with wisdom, serenity, beauty, and enlightenment, and yet in everyday life remain lodged in stupidity—unwise, tormented, unenlightened and ugly. While a writer’s work might be angelic, his or

her life might be simultaneously demonic; or, as is most often the case, merely human, as awkward and clumsy and flawed as anyone else's. (Shacochis, 1995, p. 122)

However, I persisted in writing and rewriting the paper because I felt that it was important to strive for new ideals about human connections even if I had not mastered the art of choosing or being given the opportunity to have the right relationships yet.

Editing

May 31, 2006:

After editing my paper and reading it to a close friend, I found some bits that needed fixing and thought of additional things to add, but the essential parts are the same. [By writing this] I really validated myself on a topic of tremendous importance to me, and on a topic [that] I've grappled with my entire life.

Perhaps some of what I've concluded will resonate with someone else...I found that I went through some initial motivational pushing and pulling, but a lot has been distracting me in my life: two surgeries and a busy son. However, I persevered despite the beautiful weather and heavy-duty painkillers. Things don't get written if you don't put pen to page! I tend to do the references last or when I'm in a mindless more task oriented mood than a creative one. It's something I enjoy doing in the end, as if I'm sealing the deal and giving the final touches the last bit of polishing. I like this last part best. It is very satisfying. (pp. 119-120)

I found that this article required a cool-down period of time before I did my final formal editing, unlike my poem which I edited while I wrote, and my journal which I did not formally edit (although I might typically edit my journal entries for little word omissions, spelling or word choices should I re-read them and catch these type of small errors). A formal edit of an essay/paper, however, is always a much bigger undertaking for me than any other type of writing. I printed it off and let it sit. Then, when I was feeling appropriately surgical, I got out a pen to cut it apart later in the week (see Exemplar 8.1 for an excerpt of the first draft editing). I found that by editing a hard copy (as I mark my students' papers), I was (and usually am) better able to see the mistakes jumping off the page in black and white. With my pen in hand, I could be objective. I could hack out great portions of writing that did not fit or make sense and, in some cases, restructured the piece entirely. Words were tossed or replaced, and punctuation was revisited as I read aloud to *hear* the flow of the words. I have trained myself to edit *after* I spew forth some ideas like the “madman” so as not to interrupt the creative process; however, there were times in the composition of this article that my “architect”, “carpenter”, and judge” got involved while I wrote regardless of my efforts to repress them in order to make room for the creative “madman” (Flowers, 1981).

In Retrospect

A Unique Experience Within the Process

A process could be found in my interpretation of the writing of my article that resembled the “Structure of the Writing Model” (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003). For example, my revision process could be detailed to resemble the following linearly reciprocal descriptions:

These periods of planned reviewing frequently lead to new cycles of planning and translating. However, the reviewing process can also occur as an unplanned action triggered by an evaluation of either the text or one's own planning (that is, people revise written as well as unwritten thoughts or statements). The sub-processes of revising and evaluating, along with generating, share the special distinction of being able to interrupt any other process and occur at any time in the act of writing. (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003, p. 283)

However, the concept of “concurrent processes and experiences” better described my acts of writing that were making conscious my accessible preconscious and in some cases the more inaccessible unconscious 1) thinking, 2) feelings, 3) motivations, 4) physical responses and 4) spirituality. There seemed to be a frenzied creative energy of thinking and feeling all the while that my cognitive conductor attempted to orchestrate the entire writing event.

In this particular article, my conductor was concerned with the conversations that I had with myself about *metacognitive* details not unique to writing good persuasive literature: grabbing my audience with innovative ideas; having a clear structure; attending to the “rules” of writing in the APA format; and of course, integrating my citations fluently and referencing them *properly*. My audience was an imaginary editor as I considered submitting this for publication and, therefore, I was cognizant of the universal standards of good essay writing. I asked myself: “Is this interesting? Does it make sense? Is it good?” Until I was able to say *yes* to all three, I did not abandon the work. I discovered that I had a more “conscious [cognitive] control over my own [processes]” (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003, p. 286) than I used to, or than less experienced writers. In

other words, I had very clear “process and content goals” (p. 286). As well, I had established “the internalized system of rules that speakers of a language share... or, to put it more simply, the grammar in our heads” (Hartwell, 1985/2003, p. 211). Over time, I had developed a “formal, conscious, ‘knowing about’ knowledge...and [a] tacit, unconscious, ‘knowing how’ knowledge” (Hartwell, 1985/2003, p. 212). With this ever-evolving skill base came greater confidence and a greater automaticity in my act of writing which allowed for the other meta-learning domains to step forward with ease and fluency.

Automatic Thinking

I could think past the skills of writing, express ideas in my own way, and share thoughts and feelings that were meaningful to me and which motivated me to write. Because I did not have to get caught up in a clumsy consciousness of every compositional skill, I could more easily get lost in the experience of flow. The wand of flow touched me again as I wrote this article about human connections, and all the ideas suddenly became a supernatural explosion of creative energy and internal dialogue. I remembered my relationships; I felt the pain of others who had relationships; I had retained some of the lessons of my spiritual mentors about relationships; everything came to the foreground and erupted into internal dialogue. My fingers could not keep up at the computer. I remembered at one point looking up at the clock, and three hours had passed as if it had only been a half an hour. I had become lost in the spell of creativity.

As usual, when my ideas were meaningful to me, writing became an authentically engaging activity marked by a loss of time, and a feeling of purging my soul onto paper. Like the writing that I mentioned in my pre-writing and writing sections of this thesis, “The Reciprocity of Forgiveness”, “The Paper Trail” and my research article, “Am I In the

Right Relationship?: Listening to Your Inner Voice of Body, Motivation, Mind, Heart and Soul”, there was something liberating--spiritual about this immersion into these topics where the flow of the experience was a lot like running (Lamott, 1995):

And it really is like running. It always reminds me of the last lines of Rabbit, Run: “his heels hitting heavily on the pavement at first but with an effortless gathering out of a kind of sweet panic growing lighter and quicker and quieter, he runs. Ah: runs. Runs.” (pp. 9-10)

It was here, at this point of translation where I found that the act of writing also felt a lot like flying where I was *taking off* into the realm of “consciousness” (Freud, 1954). The earlier steps towards this consciousness, where I accessed my preconsciousness for the ideas lurking near to the surface, merely helped me to gain the speed and momentum, necessary to achieve the lift off of writing into my nether-world of imagination.

Conation

However, capturing into words *why* and *how* I textually “ran” and flew even when the creative terrain was challenging (and especially when I doubted my own authority on the topic), was another motivational theme that emerged again at this point of writing. What made me stay up late to finish my writing or wake up early when I had new ideas, when, in both instances, I was tired?

It is the will, distinct from the powers of thinking and feeling, which can make the difference in succeeding. Intelligence guides one to making a wise choice, the emotions guide what you would like to choose. It is conation, however, that enables one to move on the option and actually make the selection. (Kolbe, 1990 as cited by Jasinski, 2004, p. 3)

How I mustered up the energy to “strive” (Jasinski, 2004, p. 8) past any road blocks involved a self-soliloquy of encouragement that was accompanied by an action plan. I worked in small steps so that I was not overwhelmed by the enormity of the task or the deadline. I bit off what I could chew, and little by little, I accomplished my tasks. I strived to follow-through on my ideas when they were good ones, and I left behind plans that were not. I worked with priorities, and focussed my efforts on things that required my time and attention. I *cared* about what I was doing. In this instance, the affective domain seemed linked to the conative domain (although at times in any writing piece I do not *always* care about certain themes or topics, but I do it never-the-less). Conation was/is about self-discipline. It is about managing time so that there are enough hours in the day. It is about believing that I can do what I set my mind to do. Therefore, before I 1) planned to write; 2) wrote and 3) revised this persuasive essay (in a flexible process) about relationships, I reminded myself, “I *can* do this!” And then I acted on that plan.

“They can because they think they can. Fortune favours the bold” (Virgil, n.d., *Menander*, 91: 8).

CHAPTER NINE

DISCOURSE OF INTERPRETATION

Writing as Discovery Process

Upon a closer examination of my writing and revision methods, I made some important observations that are common to the three types of functional writing: poetic, expressive and transactional (although there were also some distinguishable features unique to each of these types of writing). Much of my experience also seemed to be common to other writers/writing educators, and therefore might be found to be generalisable to the degree that these thoughts might resonate with other writers or help teachers teach writing with these research findings in mind. However, it is still unclear to me whether I fit into any one existing writing process model. “While some scholars suggested that the process approach may attempt to represent the act of writing universally, other [post-process theorists] found this characterization of process inaccurate” (Breuch, 2003, p. 98). Some of the broad and general characteristics of the process writing model (Murray, 1971/2003; Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003) do seem indicative of my writing in this research: 1) I did begin in a kind of pre-writing manner, in my head, notes on paper (expressive and imaginative) and/or in the form of a web or outline (transactional), and 2) I wrote and re-wrote my compositions, sometimes in stages, reciprocally, concurrently, and/or “transactionally” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005) in order to get my ideas into some form that would be appreciated and understood by an audience. At the same time that this process appeared to explain my key writing traits (which would indicate these steps along a codified writing path), I also “experienced” an indescribable

series of “plural processes” (Kent, 1993) that were neither linear nor reciprocal. They were abstract and happening randomly and concurrently.

Many ideas were coming simultaneously out of, for lack of a better educational term, a preconscious mind. My preconsciousness appeared to be able to access my unconscious meta-processing which had risen to the surface, or some conscious ideas that had been stored in a form of re-consciousness within this preconscious state. This preconscious state seemed like a waiting room of ideas ready to go into the next room—my room of consciousness. In other words, these writing experiences were filled with *easily* accessible creative impulses and thought patterns. These ideas occurred more or less automatically and without any precise series of hierarchical formulations within this beginning, middle and ending process of my writing.

Process theorists (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003) concede that “writing often seems a serendipitous experience, as an act of discovery. People start out writing without knowing exactly where they will end up...” (p. 286). Nevertheless, they attempted to break this writing experience down into goals and sub-goals, and into a hierarchical structure in order to explain it. I understand the need to codify ideas in order to create a communicable language to encourage a shared understanding of writing. However,

[t]he problem with process theory, then, is not so much that scholars are attempting to theorize various aspects of composing, [but] that they are endeavouring (consciously or not) to construct a model of the composing process, thereby constructing a Theory of Writing, a series of generalizations about writing that supposedly hold true all or most of the time. (Olson, 1999, p. 8)

However, I acknowledged that writing is a purposeful act, and I did distinguish

characteristics of their cognitive model within my own act of writing because what they suggested made “sense”.

However, their “Structure of the Writing Model” (Flower & Hayes, 1981/2003) did not fully explain some of the chaotic explorations of my mind that happened differently each time I wrote and with each different type of writing that I composed. I was relieved to find that other writers, poets, and artists referenced a cognitive lexicon in their pursuit of a product and valued their skills and sense of a purposeful process (Atwell, 1991; Lamott, 1995; Hartwell, 1985/2003; et al.). However, they and other artists also found that some of their artistic acts were indescribable, and perhaps this indescribability was desirable (Rumi, 1995; Pastan, 2002 as interviewed by Osen, 2002; Gardner, 1991; Levine, 1995 as interviewed by Osen, 1995; Heard, 1995; Godwin, 1995 as interviewed by Osen, 1995; et al.): “Only when he no longer knows what he is doing does the painter do good things” (Degas, 2006, p. 18). The artist Cassatt captured my thoughts completely when she said in an interview, “The best work occurs when you’re almost not thinking. There’s this flow that comes out of you that connects you to a deeper place” (Johnson, 2006, p. 35). I also found that it was in this deeper place where serendipity occurred. Unusually fortuitous and unexplained events, as if help from a higher power, seemed to assist me in my creative work.

Making Sense of the World

Ironically, much of what I had written over my lifetime, in my own way, was my experiments with truth. By playing out ideas and encounters with fictional characters or images translated from reality, I was better able to understand my own internal conceptions inspired by my external world. If I wrote about it, I felt better prepared to try

some aspects of these experiences from my text in real life. Therefore, my writing was intentional in the sense that my journals set out many of my goals and dreams. My poetry captured the images that I wanted to surround myself with again and again and later sought in my further travels. It was here that I enjoyed my thoughts, feelings, senses and inspirations; however, I still incorporated them into an aesthetic form in order to better understand the passions aroused by my internal and external world. As well, my stories/novellas/novels (not demonstrated in this research) were often prophetic of my future decisions in relationships and travelling. In some instances they were vehicles for exploring my fantasies and dreams in some shape or form in the stories and lives of my fictional characters. And finally, my transactional writing tried to make sense of the bombardment of bewildering ideas that confronted me every day. It was here where I became the researcher of my life (and the life of others) going on around me, trying to interpret the world and the valuable lessons I had learned from it. It had become clear in this research that all of my writing, in some way or another (fictional or non-fictional), was my way *to make sense of the world* and to sift it through some creative practice in order to see life from a more inspired vantage point.

The poet, then, is one who has an interesting way of seeing things. He sees the same things as we see—lovers, mountains, railway engines, cats, criminals, bridges, ships, wars, daffodils, cabbages and kings—but he sees them differently.

It is his function to communicate to us, not his emotions, but his peculiar vision, and if he teaches us anything *it is to see life his way*. (Thomas, 1961, p. 20)

I discovered that when I portrayed life in my own way, I did it with the remote possibility that once I shared this creative thinking with others, it might impact the way that the

audience encountered the experience. “The artist’s work, then is very important...[I]t is he that helps us both to make order out of our lives and to see it afresh when custom has made that order dull and lifeless...The best writers of today are always leading us to a new vision...” (Thomas, 1961, pp. 22 and 24). “[A]lso at its very best it gives us a sixth sense: a sense of the invisible forces that make people more than the sum of their five senses” (Casey, 1995, p. 67). There was something utterly wonderful about sharing my sixth sense with someone else. I, like Levine (as interviewed by Osen, 2002), write “out of the joy of doing it. ... [W]hen you do it right it’s glorious and I feel then that whatever I write has to be true. My obligation is more to the poem than the reader” (p. 66).

*The Tension Between Passionate Encounter and
Intense Detachment*

I discovered in these writing exercises that there was an irresistible tension that occurred inside of me when I wrote. These voices were contradictory and urged me to jump in and passionately savour an experience so that I could really feel, smell and touch it with all of my being (in the flow of the experience), while also intensely detaching (or decentring) from it so that I could make sense of it enough to reclaim it in an appreciable art form. “The earliest description of creation as the tension generated between a single set of polarities is probably Plato’s dialogue *Ion*, with the movement of the artist between frenzy (divine inspiration) and formulation” (Emig, 1971, p. 18). This internal combustion of the creatively *hot* or “a-rational and emotive art form” (Eisner, 2005, p. 76) and the *cold* cognition that makes awareness and understanding possible (Eisner, 2005, p. 77), resulted in some electrifying creative storms in my creative writing and in my encounters with self.

Passionate Encounter

I was passionately “encountering” my world in new way as “[a]ll actual life is encounter” (Buber, 1970, p. 62) and these experiences were enhanced when I *relived* them in text. I learned that it was my *response* to this artistic encounter that was of paramount importance. I was and still am learning to risk with my whole being as

[t]his is the eternal origin of art that a human being confronts a form that wants to become a work through him. Not a figment of his soul but something that appears to the soul and demands the soul’s creative power. What is required is a deed that a man does with his whole being if he commits it and speaks with his being the basic word to the form that appears, then the creative power is released and the work comes into being...

The risk: the basic word can only be spoken with one’s whole being; whoever commits himself may not hold back part of himself; and the work does not permit me, as a tree or man might, to seek relaxation in the It-world; it is imperious: if I do not serve it properly, it breaks, or it breaks me. The form that confronts me I cannot experience nor describe; I can only actualize it...it acts on me as I act on it”...As I actualize, I uncover...(Buber, 1970, p. 60)

Heard (1995) continued this line of thinking:

...[T]o be writers, we have to be able to sit at the window and unbecome ourselves. As we’re staring out the window at the pigeons we must become them, we must leave our world and enter theirs. We must lose our personalities and

become receptors for the world. We must become what we see...(p. 67)

I also felt that I had to become my writing experience in order to act upon it and write it afresh. It was often fleeting and evasive, but the creative potential lay just below the surface when I lived in the skin of that which I wrote.

Detaching

It was also important to consider the gap of time that I took to distil these passionate encounters. Winckel (1983) indicated that “Good writers pause longer and more often than poor writers [while they are writing], yet manage, in the same amount of time, to write more words than poor writers” (p. 1) When I asked myself what I did in the “distance [that is] necessary for true understanding” (Eisner, 2005, p. 131), I reconsidered the concept of detachment. Eisner (2005) indicates that “detachment” is often equated with a disengagement from the emotions in order to seek order and control. However, I found that my detachment in my writing in order to bring some sense to the ideas continued to involve some emotion:

Emotion has long been regarded as the enemy of reflective thought: the more we feel, the less we know...When running rampant, emotions can cloud vision, impair thought, and lead to trouble of all kinds.

But perception without feeling can do the same...Detachment and distance have their virtues, but they are limited resources for understanding, and any conception that assigns them dominion in cognition misconceives the ways in which understanding is fostered. (Eisner, 2005, p. 132)

Thomas (1961) also spoke about the importance of creatively pausing. He considered the time that needs to pass between the heightened emotional happenings of

poets and the actual writing of these experiences in order to capture them anew in an atmosphere of detachment:

The poet is a man living among men. He is, of course, gifted in a particular way...Like the rest of us he is often the victim of his emotions; ...[however], [w]hile he is in the grip of the original emotion he cannot write; the act of writing about himself involves thinking about himself, and this demands detachment...To this new, detached being—to the poet, that is—the man who felt the emotion is an historical being. How did he feel a year ago, a week ago, five seconds ago? The poet sets to work to find out, and his poem is the answer, the result of an exploratory journey into his own mind. He hands you his poem and says in effect, ‘I have been looking at myself; you look too.’ The true artist does not say ‘Feel for me’ or ‘Feel with me’; he does not say, as the propagandist says, ‘Do this.’ He says simply, ‘Look!’ It is to this time-lag between the emotion and the act of composition that Wordsworth was referring when he said that poetry had its origin in emotion recollected in tranquillity. By tranquillity I take it he meant that period of detachment in which the poet is able to see himself, to find out about himself. (pp. 15-16)

It was in this distance that I could reflect on the various types of meta-processing that took place during my writing.

Implications for an Evolving Writing Model

Much of my research supported my initial Writing Experience-Process Model (see Chapter Three for Conclusion of Pre-interpretation: Writing Model as a Whole, and Figure 3.2). In general, I found that I still had a codifiable process that allowed me to

work within a loose format of “pre-writing, writing and re-writing” (Murray, 1972/2003) and a metacognitive process of “planning, monitoring, and evaluating” (Fogarty, 1994).

In many ways, this process was similar to one described by Rosenblatt (1994/2005):

[T]he transactional view of the reading and writing processes [should not] be turned into a set of stages to be rigidly followed. The writer’s drafts and final texts—or the reader’s tentative interpretations, final evocation, and reflections—should be viewed as stopping points in a journey, as the outward and visible signs of a continuing process in the passage from one point to the other. (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 27)

As a result of this fluid interpretation of process, I created dotted lines (Figure 9.1) to delineate beginning, middle, and ending points. However, there is an understanding that I/we can think beyond these lines as we are in a constant fluctuation back and forth.

I was able to speak about my writing process and relate to process language developed by previous researchers; although, by doing so, I felt that I was speaking in a one-dimensional language, overlooking all of the other creative events that were happening in my mind, and carrying on in “a spiral, transactional relationship with the very text emerging on the page” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 19). I referred to the more indescribable episodes of my writing as my writing “experience”. This experience was often evoked from different *fuzzy* and indescribable places inside of me, usually in a state of flow, as well as when decentring. However, it was most often that while I was decentring (which I did in a more heightened manner for the purposes of this research, but that I would ordinarily perform, perhaps to a lesser degree in my normal act of writing) that I was capable of selecting some meta-processing *focus* and, in turn, could broaden my

writing experience. Decentring was integral to creating enough of a distance for me to have a reflexive vantage point within the writing event.

I included the aspect of meta-processing in this model to suggest that it was happening in concurrence with my writing experience within my process or, if I shifted my perspective, this metacognition might be informing my process. All five meta-learning domains were involved in my writing event to better understand my existing Established Self, and hopefully to touch my evolving Mind. I included these last two concepts that I had not put in my previous model to be more explicit in demonstrating the connections between this model and my Meta-processing Model-2 (see Figure 9.1).

I took my initial Figure 3.2 that I used to communicate my ideas, and developed a three-dimensional format to better represent what I perceived to be a three dimensional writing event. I found that it was important to look at the model in one of two ways, the process preceding or inciting the experience (see Figure 9.1), or inverting it (turning it inside out) so that it was in fact the experience initiating the process (see Figure 9.2). In general, I found that there was a “transaction” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005) of both of these realms of process and experience and that they were interchangeable and fluctuating throughout my act of writing. For example, in the instance of my article “Finding the Right Relationships”, when I went to write it, the technical elements of the article (structure and style) were in the foreground of my thoughts, although I was also considering my topic at the same time. Sometimes, the importance of the topic superseded my consideration of the structure (see Figure 9.2). It was this constant flipping back and forth (between the two in a foreground and background) type of relationship, either in flow, or while decentring, that I was able to mitigate important ideas

spewing forth onto paper into some form that I was satisfied with and that I felt would be appreciated by an audience.

Discoveries About My Meta-Processing

Internal Dialogues

“Costa [says when] you hear yourself talking to yourself...if you [are] having an inner dialogue inside your brain and if you evaluate your own decision-making/problem-solving processes—you [are] experiencing metacognition” (Fogarty, 1994, p. xi). When I was being metacognitive, I overcame the trance of unawareness, and was able to tune into the little moments and thoughts that impacted my writing. It was affirming to know that I was not the only writer who had contended with an occasionally unquiet mind despite my metacognitive efforts:

Then with your fingers poised on the keyboard, you squint at an image that is forming in your mind—a scene, a locale, a character, whatever—and you try to quiet your mind so you can hear what that landscape or character has to say above the other voices in your mind. The other voices are banshees and drunken monkeys. They are the voices of anxiety, judgment, doom, guilt. Also, severe hypochondria...(Lamott, 1995, p. 7)

Without speculating where these voices were coming from (as that would be a large psychological research project), I started to believe that I should welcome and embrace the voices which composed my larger writing voice rather than resist them.

The trick is to become conscious of all the different needs, feelings, and forces going on inside and to expand to contain them all, without knowing how that conflict will be resolved...Embrace it all. (Gawain, 2006, pp. S. 21-23)

The more I looked away and ignored the inner conflict or the voices that were intimidating to me, the louder they became. I sought instead to consciously understand why they were there and what they were telling me without letting them unconsciously pull at me or interfere with my writing without any rhyme or reason. Instead, I hoped to orchestrate this inner dialogue happening inside of me into one singular creative voice.

Levels of Consciousness

“Plural dialogues” (Kent, 1993) were wide awake and pushing me to be aware, and in this awareness I began to think about my levels of consciousness and how they interact. When I was most creative, I found that I had the best accessibility to my various levels of consciousness and there was also seemed to be an open interaction between them. Prior to the study, my initial educational understanding was that there were three levels of consciousness: subconscious, conscious and superconscious. After further research, I could see other levels of consciousness at play in my creativity. Some were definable, and others indescribable; therefore, my interpretations leave room to evolve with potentially further research. For example, I grabbed onto the concept of “preconsciousness” (Freud, 1940/2006) as one way of describing my experience of a place between logical and a-logical thinking where “ideas were reshuffled, compared, and amalgamated in original ways...or the “shuttling” between consciousness and subconsciousness which occurs frequently during composing...” (Winckel, 1983, pp. 4 and 6). It was in a place like preconsciousness where I dreamed in wakefulness,

contemplating my creative ideas that were often ready to break open into text in their own innovative ways. Also, it was here where “haphazard observations” (Pinar, 2004, p. 51) occurred inadvertently as they made their way through my censors of consciousness.

Rosenblatt (1994/2005) referred to something like preconsciousness when she referred to as an “inner gauge” which is

an organic state, a mood, an idea, perhaps even a consciously constituted set of guidelines...Most writers will recall a situation that may illustrate the operation of an ‘inner gauge.’ A word comes to mind or flows from the pen and, even if it makes sense, is felt not to be right...The tension simply disappears when ‘the right word’ presents itself. (p. 20)

Perhaps these observations had been stored in my “re-consciousness” (Winckel, 1983) which is a place we store our memory, sometimes easily accessible and sometimes in unconscious places where it is almost irretrievable. My unconscious mind is a “mega-memory bank. It stores all of my past experiences” (Subconscious-Secrets.com, 2004, p. 2). In other cases this re-consciousness lies closer to the surface in a place of preconsciousness, which I found to be a place of conscious readiness where ideas were simply waiting to leap out into creativity. When my ideas came forward into text, they were entering my consciousness in many ways. The following definition gives a very cognitive version of consciousness:

Your conscious mind is the only part of your mind that thinks. That's why most people use their conscious mind power to solve problems and to achieve their goals. The most important conscious mind power is the power to decide...Your conscious mind also has the power to reprogram your subconscious mind, mainly

through repetition... (Subconscious-Secrets.com, 2004)

However, I found that in my conscious thinking, I was also able to grapple with my emotions, motivations, and physical responses as well.

When I was spiritually inspired and reflexive (or meta-spiritual) in this creative process, I was able to go that one step further and activate my superconsciousness. “The psychological term is turiya, ‘the fourth,’ meaning the condition beyond the states of wakefulness...” (Himalayan Academy, 2006). It was here where my meta-spiritual awakening was most significant. Another definition seemed appropriate to my experiences in this regard. Superconsciousness is “a combination of one’s spirit, soul, memory, and uniqueness” (*Cosmic Paradigm Newsletter*, 2006). In Sanskrit there are numerous terms for the various levels of superconsciousness; however, for the purposes of this research I referred to it as one whole state.

As a writer, I often live in this condition of interacting levels of consciousness, shutting out the distractions of my real life while I imagine my ideas into pictures, then words, and finally text. People have often had to snap their fingers to get my attention. Therefore, in light of this research, and in my present understanding of my meta-processing, I envision *my* interacting levels of consciousness to look something like the following diagram (see Figure 9.3). The lines simply offer a delineation to assist in explaining their definitions and functions; however, I see all of these levels of consciousness being fluid in their interaction. They do not necessarily need to appear in this order or placement in a hierarchical figure which places more importance on one level of consciousness than the other. I found that I was better in tune with these levels of consciousness when I was physically moving or doing other light tasks and not necessarily

focussing on my writing assignments at hand. However, this type of haphazard creativity occurred most often when I was motivated and ready to write.

The Meta-learning Domains

I began this research project with four meta-learning domains in mind, which included the following: 1) metacognitive; 2) meta-conative; 3) meta-affective; and 4) meta-spiritual. I confirmed that all of these elements are important as I asked myself some of the key meta-processing questions (examples of these questions were provided in Chapter Three). In the *metacognitive domain*, I discovered, in response to my metacognitive questions, that I had some very logical aspects to my writing process, and that my writing purposes, styles and structures were considerate of various audiences. This meta-learning domain required premeditated attention in the elements of good writing in light of those expectations, such as following the APA format for essay writing. I discovered what writing techniques I could do easily, such as generating examples and making connections and finding references, as well as those aspects of my practice that were more challenging, such as shifting between tenses. In the *meta-affective domain* I determined that my feelings were an integral part of what moved me to write. I determined that I wrote most often when I was experiencing intense emotion. My passion for ideas and how these lit up my mind with numerous emotive descriptions played an important part in all modes of writing outlined in this research: transactional, imaginative and expressive, not simply the latter two. As well the courage to write and overcome any inhibitions was an important state of mind that linked with my motivations for writing. The *meta-conative domain* was a recurring theme (which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter) and I learned that my tenacity to write in the presence or absence of positive feelings about my topic or

experience with the text, was important (although I am still not exactly certain what has pushed me to work so hard at my writing over my lifetime). I discovered that the more mature and disciplined I became, the less blocked I was and the more writing I saw through to completion. In the *meta-spiritual domain*, my inspirations came to me in surprising ways. The ease with which my ideas fell together felt as if I was receiving the assistance of a higher power, as unexplainable events of synchronicity appeared in my writing. Although these four meta-learning domains were described as separate domains in order to explain their features and functions, I found them to be interactive as I experienced them unconsciously in flow and more deliberately when I decentred.

The Meta-kinaesthetic Learning Domain

In this research, another learning domain surfaced as being considerably important in relation to the other four, and I began referring to it as the meta-kinaesthetic learning domain. “In the linguistic event, any process also will be affected by the physical and emotional state of the individual, for example, by fatigue or stress” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 7). In this meta-learning domain we are able to reflect on the importance of the body’s impact and response to creative writing. When I initially considered all of the aspects of self that impacted my act of writing, I was very unaware of this vital part of my creative writing practice:

Many people are so accustomed to being out of touch with the body that they live entirely in a mental world. The fact that the body and mind are interconnected might even be hard for them to believe...Unless feelings are painfully intrusive or, as with sex, extremely pleasant or intense, physical sensations can seem elusive and be difficult to recognize. This is the basic characteristic of being in a trance—we

are only partially present to our experience of the moment. (Brach, 2003, p. 98)

In the meta-kinaesthetic domain I asked questions such as, “How does being well-rested, well-fed and functioning optimally, impact my writing?”, or more interesting, “How does my writing affect my body?” The more I thought about it, the more I realized that everything about my body affected my writing work and my writing affected my body. How fast I walked, what I ate, what I drank, whether I exercised, whether I stretched, how I slept and how I breathed—all seemed critical. Breathing was most important. When I was breathing deeply and regularly, I felt better poised to write.

Higher levels of oxygen affect the brain by lengthening and slowing its waves, and this then benefits your well-being. When you’re in periods of intense mental activity and high stress, fear, or shock, the beta brainwave predominates. Beta, which at its best performs calculations and analysis, at its worst locks you into judging, critiquing, and defending—which can produce more fear and stress.

But by taking a deep breath, you can drop into a lower state, that of alpha. Alpha is the brainwave associated with calm and integrated thinking. In the alpha state, all the parts of your brain work simultaneously and in concert, which makes possible relaxed attention and openness to additional information, creativity, and flexibility. (Belitz & Lundstrom, 1998, pp. 155-156)

My body was very much alive in the experience of my writing, and when I fed my body, it fed my writing. As well, my writing relaxed me. It was cathartic, and when I purged ideas onto paper, I could feel many of my physical tensions being released.

I found it interesting that it was not until the final interpretation portion of my research that I truly realized the full impact of the three surgeries (nasal, shoulder and a

lump in my breast [the latter which I will not discuss further]) that I had undertaken while also on my academic sabbatical *after* my trip to Portugal. My rationale for having these surgeries done at the same time as my academic writing was that if I did not take advantage of this time off teaching, I would never have another opportunity to do so. The shoulder surgery, in particular, required considerable time for rehabilitation and was extremely painful. Unfortunately, a complication that occurred in conjunction with this shoulder operation was that I acquired a hip flexor injury and was in considerable pain from it as well. I determined that even though I was in pain, I would use the time to focus on my writing. Therefore, each day that I wrote, I also needed to stretch, exercise and do physio-therapy (twice a week) with ice/heat therapy. It became complicated because the more I sat at the computer, the more I hurt, and yet I needed to find a way to do both. I also had to purchase a special chair so that when I sat for too long it would not irritate my hip. My routine became a regime of writing and physical therapy for most of the late spring and summer. I could only write for certain periods/lengths and therefore when I *was* able to write, I had to turn off these physical obstacles in my mind in order to do so successfully. Although this pain (and the painkillers and anti-inflammatories used to treat it) were affecting me, I had *determined* that it would not be a factor and, as a result, I did not think to (or probably *want* to) mention it while I wrote and reflected upon my writing.

In retrospect, I believe that it did have some bearing on my experiences with the text because although the research was engaging, it sometimes became *work* to overcome these physical difficulties instead of the joy it might normally have given me. On the other hand, this academic writing was a form of an escape, and gave me another thing to focus on rather than the physical difficulties at hand. As well, the physical therapy forced me to

do more walking and exercising than I might have normally, and I found that some of my best thinking occurred at these times.

The Importance of the Meta-conative Learning Domain

It appeared that my meta-conative learning domain was one that I drew upon again and again as I participated in the pre-writing, writing and re-writing of text. The question that continued to arise in this research was the following: “*Why* do I write?” The answer seemed to always be, “Because I like it. Because it matters!”

Interest has been defined as a motivational variable, as well as a psychological state that occurs during interactions between persons and their environment, and is characterized by increased attention, concentration, and affect. In addition, the term *interest* also refers to a relatively enduring predisposition to engage with particular content, such as objects, events, and ideas. In contrast to cognitively driven motivational theories, in interest theory, interest is always considered to have both an affective and cognitive component. (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006, p. 145)

However, even though it was interesting, there were obstacles that confronted me, extrinsically and intrinsically, and yet, I still persisted. Therefore, the better meta-conative question would seem to be, “*How* did I persist with my writing especially when I found it difficult to do so?” “*How* do other writers overcome their creative difficulties?” It would be too easy to answer, “We just do.” I found few examples of writers who touched on this topic of conation. “Given the unique problems related to writing motivation (Hidi, Berndorff, & Ainley, 2002), it is intriguing that relatively few research studies have been conducted in this area” (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006, p. 144). Therefore, I relied on my own interpretations of my meta-conative experiences.

Conation is derived from the Latin verb *conari*, meaning *to strive*! It refers to the act of striving, intentionality, of focusing attention and energy and acting with a purpose to achieve a goal. In other words, conation is about stickability, staying power, strength, stamina and survival. (Jasinski, 2004, p. 2)

I believe that some of my ability to “self-regulate”, an ability that I had learned from early childhood (probably my music instruction and related responsibilities), played some role in my success in this regard. “A self-regulated writer is one who can successfully manage the complexity of writing” (Hidi & Boscolo, p. 150). However, Dyer (2004) touched upon a more important concept than simply “self-regulation” “stickability” and “willpower” which in themselves are admirable qualities and have helped me on numerous occasions. He proposed a more spiritual look at how we truly connect with intention:

Having a strong will and being filled with resolve to accomplish inner goals is asking ego to be the guiding force in your life. *I will do this thing, I will never be stupid, I will never give up...* Your willpower is so much less effective than your imagination, which is your link to the power of intention. Imagination is the movement of the universal mind within you. Your imagination creates the inner picture that allows you to *participate* in the act of creation. (p. 38)

I believe that raw “willpower” helped me to overcome some of the obstacles that were occurring in my life at the time of writing this research paper. As I mentioned previously, I was having my body overhauled. In addition to this, my son was being diagnosed with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). My mother’s eyes were deteriorating with macular degeneration and she was refusing to see doctors about her heart and hip problems which required that my sister and I intervene in some instances. And my own personal life was

being pushed to the side in favour of my academic research which left me feeling a bit lonely and disheartened. Again, I found it interesting that I did not mention these difficulties much over the course of this research until the conclusion simply because I felt that they were private--matters to be *overcome* or *endured* in the name of the completion of this dissertation. The fact that I was able to write under such circumstances speaks to the power of the meta-conative domain. Because I was motivated enough, I was able to focus on what I believed was important and put aside the obstacles.

However, these difficulties were happening, and they were relevant to my creative experiences. Again, I believe in some instances, these personal complications enhanced the creative “imagining” of my work because my writing became a source of escape and vision beyond the troubles at that time. In other cases, as I mentioned before, my sense of determination may have overpowered my sense of joy and peace in the experience. Dyer (2004) confirmed for me that “[y]ou may achieve the physical goal of your individual intention. However, your imagination, that inner place where you do all of your living, won’t allow you to feel peaceful” (p. 40). Fortunately, the majority of these problems did not happen until the latter part of my sabbatical year. Therefore, perhaps both ego *and* imagination played a part in my autobiographical research as a whole. However, I believe that being determined allowed me to understand my full potential in different writing arenas as well as it allowed me to complete this dissertation little by little. With each accomplishment along this writing journey, I became more confident, and in turn, I wrote more prolifically. Some days were good days, and some days were challenging, but I believe that that is part of the reality of writing.

Writing Self-Efficacy

Despite the love of writing, especially in the state of flow, it took courage to create these three pieces of writing with the following circumstances: 1) having an academic audience; 2) overcoming some of the difficulties I mentioned earlier; and 3) some negative internal dialogue and insecurity that has accompanied me all of my life. These influences sometimes shadowed my creative light. However, I found that having an impending academic audience actually inspired me to work harder. The more I wrote on any piece of writing, the more my self-efficacy developed, and the greater my desire to write grew. “High competence in the use of strategies is likely to make a writer feel more efficacious. High self-efficacy, in turn activates a writer’s self satisfaction and may stimulate his or her interest in the writing task and writing in general” (Hidi & Boscolo, p. 150).

I found after researching my past writing in various forms and genres, as well as my past twenty-four journals, that I had become a more confident writer because I was less bogged down in the technique of writing. I had also become more experienced sharing my ideas with others than I was in my youth. As well, my ego seemed less fragile now (although I still cringed each time I thought of a disappointed reader, or worse yet, my own dissatisfaction at a piece of writing). During these three explorations in writing, I did not have to speculate as much about sentence structure, spelling or grammatical structure, as it came out more naturally than in the past. Instead, I could focus on the ideas and how they unfolded with greater ease and speed. I was no longer *mired* in the words where my confidence would often get stuck. With this faster creative pace, I found greater short term satisfaction than I might have attained twenty years ago. I was able to finish these pieces of writing in a few weeks, where in the past it might have taken me a few months.

It was still an act of courage to say that I knew enough to *re-claim* my own ideas in writing. When I was in elementary school, I thought I could write. “[T]he vast majority of students begin school believing that they can write (Calkins as cited by Pajares & Valiante, 2006, p. 166). By overcoming my fear (that developed from junior high school onward) of “being the author”, I was able to undo years of schooling that had taught me to believe as a student that I did not know enough or did not have enough credibility to define something in my own terms. How thrilling it was to finally say in the instance of my article, “I know enough about relationships that someone else might learn something from me!”

Courage does not require rappelling across rocky cliffs but rather, day in and day out, overcoming our fears by stepping outside our personal comfort zone, following our intuition, and making ourselves available to the larger plan. It means we transcend our limited self-definition to be open to new information and stretch beyond the way we’ve always done things in the past. It means we listen within and sometimes turn left when everyone else seems to be going right. It allows us to risk ridicule to create something new, or to risk rejection when we are being true to our sense of what’s right. (Belitz & Lundstrom, 1998, p. 54)

Implications for an Evolving Meta-processing Model

I found that my research supported many of my preconceptions about metacognition/meta-processing that I described in Chapter Three (see “Emerging Metacognitive Theory: Pre-interpretation and Figure 3.3 “Meta-Processing Theory Diagram”). However, I found that by creating a three-dimensional representation (see Figure 9.4 “Meta-processing Theory Diagram”), I was able to shed a bit more light on

these ideas. In the model (Figure 9.4), this solid inner cone of Mind surrounded by the Established Self is what the meta-learning domains spiral around in a

transaction [which implies the] ‘unfractured observation’ of the whole situation.

Systems of description and naming “are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to ‘elements’ or presumptively detachable or independent ‘entities’, ‘essences,’ or ‘realities. The knower, the knowing, and the known are seen as aspects of “one process.” Each element conditions and is conditioned by the other in a mutually constituted situation”” (Dewey, 1949 as cited by Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 2).

I liked this idea of a meta-processing “transaction” (to loosely borrow Rosenblatt’s term) which assumes that the meta-learning domains, other than for the purpose of distinguishing their features, all work together to provide a meta-processing experience while in the act of flow or decentring during the writing experience-process (see Figures 9.1 “Writing Experience-Process Model-2” and 9.2 “Inverted Writing Experience-Process Model”). How we focus on each meta-learning domain and bring it into the foreground of our awareness determines the type of meta-processing we are most likely to do. In the instance of some of the present school models of metacognition, students are taught to bring *metacognition* into the forefront of their writing process; and many of the other meta-learning domains are left unexplored. Therefore, it is critical to develop a variety of meta-processing strategies in order to be able to see beyond the superficial aspects of thinking about our thinking. As I indicated in my initial model, there is still the potential for “collective enlightenment” when people within a common meta-processing event can prompt the focus and enhancement of each of the meta-learning domains through

conversation and common writing activities.

Writing and Meta-Processing Strategies

Finding Calm Time

I was more able to capture the various interactive levels of consciousness during my meta-processing in the five learning domains when I was *quiet*, and I could concentrate on how my body, mind and spirit worked together. “From silence you can move in any direction. Like the conductor of a symphony, you are alert and aware, poised to begin the movement. Silence creates the space in which option is available and choice possible” (Belitz & Lundstrom, 1998, p. 154). Heard (1995) agreed: “When I don’t have quiet in my life I sometimes ignore the pull toward that chair” (p. 6). When I was quiet and contemplative in my meta-processing, it started to feel like a meditative process where I prompted myself to be in touch with many aspects of self and their resonance with my “imagination” (Dyer, 2004). I also found that I was most capable of accessing ideas when I moved, or was distracted by the mundane matters of *relaxing*, such as taking a walk, looking at scenery, reading a book, listening to music, or talking with a friend over dinner. Making the *time* to do this type of soulful reflection was also critical because I was able to access all of my creative ideas and then reflect on the importance of my five facets of learning and understanding (meta-learning domains) in my work. None of this intensive and reflexive process could be rushed. In fact, I found that if I spent more than three hours a day (usually the equivalent of three double-spaced pages of writing) working on this research (and accompanying writing) I became tired and would lose my freshness and focus. Therefore, it was important that I first made the time, and then paced myself over the course of my sabbatical year, to allow an optimal engagement with the text while also

being able to access my best creative and metacognitive efforts.

Prompting Questions

It also helped when I first allowed my creative ideas, in the form of the “Madman” (Flowers, 1981) to wander and claim the page. Then, I would begin considering from where the ideas emerged or how they were inspired. I found that I needed to prompt my metacognitive thinking with many questions. These questions changed or evolved as I wrote and were never really in any specific order. I found that the quality of my questions improved as I became more experienced with my own meta-processing in the five meta-learning domains: 1) Metacognitive: What form of writing will these ideas take? How long will this piece be? What voice/tone will I take? Who is my intended audience? What is the purpose for my writing? What ideas do I hope to convey? How many drafts will this take? Do I need an initial plan or outline? 2) Meta-affective: What feelings am I experiencing while I write this piece? What feelings am I hoping to evoke in this piece? What moves me in this piece of writing? What feelings do I want to explore in this piece? Where are these feelings coming from as I write? How can I access these feelings or get in the mood of my written piece? 3) Meta-conative: What keeps me writing? What is blocking me? What is tough about this piece? What will I have to do to be able to finish this piece? Is this piece worth all of this work? If I don’t write this piece, how will I feel? How can I finish this and stay sane? What little part of this piece must I do today to help me meet my end goals? What do I “imagine” this piece to be when I am completed? Why am I doing this writing (ego or soul)? 4) Meta-spiritual: How did all of these ideas come together in my head? What is inspiring me right now? How can I find inspiration for this work? What serendipitous events have occurred to propel me forward? What has been

easy about this writing as the path of flow is often inexplicably harmonious and filled with “a deliberate unfolding” (Belitz and Lundstrom, 1998, p. 39)? Why has it been easy?

What is helping me to write this piece at this time? 5) Meta-kinaesthetic: How does my body feel today? What do I need to do to create an optimal body experience? Must I stretch, sleep, eat, exercise, or rest? How is my breathing right now? How can I breathe better? Do I have any pain or physical distractions that I can find a way to overcome or nurture? These are examples of questions that could be considered specific to each meta-learning domain to demonstrate the type of thinking occurring within each area, but these or other questions could be interactive among the domains. All of these questions helped me to interact with my writing in more enlightened ways, and as a result of having these focussed and intentional conversations with self, I felt more compelled to do my best writing.

Dialoguing with Mentors

As well, it was important to have conversations with others to deeply access not only my thoughts about writing, but to encourage my best writing. Through my reading of the experiences of other writers, and working with my supervisor and supervisory committee, I was able to get some valuable validation and insight into the inner workings of writing as an art, science and connection with my *self*. I had some significant writing mentors in my *adulthood* (predominantly post-secondary/graduate/post-graduate education at the University of Calgary from 1993 to the present): Dr. M. Hunsberger (MA graduate advisor); Mary Frampton (creative writing instructor, mentioned with permission); Aritha Van Herk (English instructor, mentioned with permission); Dr. C. Sutherland (professor of rhetoric, mentioned with permission); and, Dr. Anni Adams

(methodology instructor, mentioned with permission). Like my significant writing mentors of the past, my post-graduate supervisory mentors were valuable in asking me important questions about my work that pushed me to think beyond my initial preconceptions and conceptions about this topic. For example, my supervisor, Dr. Chris Gordon (mentioned with permission), gave me some very valuable one-to-one instruction and her enthusiasm for and her extensive background in writing research was contagious. Her influence was more than her just simply doing her *job*. “To think of teaching as mentoring means spending time and energy on our interactions with students—listening to them, discussing ideas with them, letting them make mistakes, and pointing them in the right direction” (Breuch, 2003, p. 120). Fortunately, my other supervisory mentors, Dr. D. C. Jones, and Dr. W. I. S. Winchester (mentioned with permission) were also open to some of my more nebulous topics about spirituality and enlightenment, and encouraged me to pursue my desire to learn more about these themes arising in the context of existing and emerging writing and metacognitive research. “This type of teacher-student relationship demonstrates instruction that is collaborative and dialogic” (Breuch, 2003, p. 120) and is one of the strongest components of the post-process theory. However, Breuch continued to say that the “descriptions of one-to-one interactions [in the post-process literature] tend to be broad and abstract, leaving readers with little concrete sense of how post-process theory might apply to one-to-one instruction” (p. 120). Unlike this post-process abstract representation of mentors, there seemed no question of the value of this mentoring relationship to me for the purposes of this research and the writing of this research. My supervisory committee (Dr. Winchester, Dr. Jones and Dr. Gordon) was free and open, as indicative of the mentor models of the post-process school of thinking.

However, my supervisor also broached quite a few matters of content and conventions typical of the process and some post-process theories of writing. By doing so, she assisted me in the meta-processing of my research as well as the actual act of writing it.

I cannot help wondering how my writing life might be different today if I had had more of this up close and personal type of mentoring, in some cases one-to-one, in my formative schooling years in English Language Arts. It was evident that when I encountered this mentoring relationship in music with my mother, my abilities thrived. The same might have been true of my creative writing which might have resulted in fewer struggles along the way. However, these same struggles influenced me to become a teacher and to be diligent in pursuing my passion for writing. “Need and struggle are what excite and inspire us; our hour of triumph is what brings the void” (James, *The Will to Believe*, 1897).

CHAPTER TEN

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STANCE: IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Me as a Writer

How can an awareness of the writing experience-process and the act of meta-processing improve or hinder my work as a writer? The implications for me as a writer in light of this research were clear and concise once I identified key properties and found relationships among them. Not wanting to be long-winded and redundant because my ideas about my own development as a writer and discoveries about writing were explicitly laid out throughout the body of this thesis, I narrowed down what I perceived to be the important findings of this thesis to six key insights that are worded in a positive and intentional manner. I came to value the following aspects of my writing and have determined that I will continue to, or will begin to incorporate these insights into my future writing and in turn my teaching of writing (see upcoming section: Implications for Me as a Teacher of Writing):

1) *It is important to express ideas in my own voice.* Finding out who I was in all my various artistic dimensions through the lenses of the five meta-learning domains (and potentially more), was an eye-opening process. My voice was and continues to be elusive and ever-evolving, but by having a better understanding of who I was/am in my mind, heart, motivations, body and spirit, I was/am allowed a certain freedom to immerse myself in text in a more confident and enlightened way.

2) *It is important to write about what is meaningful to me.* It was obvious that when something was/is important and interesting to me, I wrote about it. This interest

incited passion and a complete absorption into the act of writing. *However, when given the opportunity to write about what is meaningful to others, I need to find the freedom and the voice in the experience to make it my own.* The importance of “choice”

(Schlechty, 2002) is something that writers learn with maturity. We may not always be able to negotiate with others what we write; but we have “considerable choice and numerous options in what [we] will do and how [we] will go about doing those things in order to learn” and grow as a writer (p. 21).

3) *It is important that I find or cultivate a place of readiness inside of myself to be creative by finding opportunities to rest, walk, travel, engage in inspiring settings, have insightful conversations with others, and read.* It was clear that I was unable to do my *best* writing until I had a sufficient amount of mental, emotional, motivational, physical and spiritual *readiness*. To achieve absolute readiness in all of the meta-learning domains may not always be possible. In my circumstances that I mentioned previously, I *urged* myself (meta-conative learning domain) to write in partial readiness, hopeful that it would lead to a larger state of readiness. Fortunately, by doing so, I was rewarded by many moments of inspiration and satisfaction in my creative, reflective and interpretive writing. As well, I felt good about my end writing products for the purposes of this research. Finding the inspiration; continuing to make time in a busy day; and seeking out the “imagination” (Dyer, 2004) that compels me to step forward in an authentically creative way will be an ongoing challenge. It is, however, an important one to continue learning about so that I can be further liberated to write more easily and more often.

4) *It is necessary to live, ponder and write deeply to “expose the unexposed”* (Lamott, 1994, p. 198). When I examined how I wrote in this research, and how I

thought about my writing through the act of meta-processing, I was more in touch with my creativity, and as a result had more time, insight and energy to expand on my ideas. It is not enough to simply render what we experience in life onto paper, nor write what we think others will want to hear. “A writer can’t afford to be lazy. The work of a writer is to refuse to accept stereotypes, to see for herself what’s really true... This insistence on the deeper layers of knowing is a way of life” (Heard, 1995, pp. 45-46). We have to add some part of ourselves or reflect on it through our own eyes in order to show the life “encounter” (Buber, 1970) in our own way.

5) *It is powerful to have a language to communicate my thinking about my five meta-learning domains, as well as the experience-process of writing.* This ability to codify some aspects of my writing and my thinking about writing is vital for me to understand what I am doing when I write and to share my ideas with others (writers, teacher-writers, and students). When I am able to dialogue with other like-minded artists about what I am doing while I write creatively, I open the door to creative collaboration about my writing, thinking about writing and my theories about both. By doing so, I have the potential of becoming a more educated and enlightened writer.

6) *The more I write and share with others, the more confident I become to write and share with others.* As a result, it feels like it is time to stop doubting myself and move beyond simply being an *aspiring* writer and start *being* a *real* writer. I need to forge ahead, take some risks and begin submitting my work for publication. “Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt” (Shakespeare, Measure for Measure, I, iv, p. 78).

In many ways, it was not until I began teaching English Language Arts that I truly

learned to be a confident creative writer. I have heard that we do not learn something until we have to teach it, and in my case, that was definitely true. The more that I expanded my teaching practices to include new strategies for engaging students in the act of writing, the more my own writing self-efficacy increased. The more secure and capable that I became as an English teacher of writing, the more apt I was to find the time—*make the time* to step into the writing arena: “April 22, 2006: ...*I always thought teaching got in the way of my writing, but in fact teaching led me to my writing [again]. I would never be the thinker and writer that I am [today] unless I had been in education...*” (Robinson, 2006, p. 78).

Implications for Me as a Teacher of Writing

The Love of Writing Comes with Writing Proficiency

How can I then rouse the hearts of educators and students to believe that there are other ways of teaching and thinking about writing? Even after all of this research, it is still a little unclear to me how I truly learned to write. It seemed to be an organically evolving process where I learned one thing from one teacher, and another from someone else—a matter of trial and error. Casey (Osen, 1995) in his interview on his thoughts about writing, responded to the question posed by Osen: “Can you teach someone to write?” He had two answers:

The first is “No”...but if it is someone who is talented to begin with, I can save her a lot of time.

The second answer is also “No”...I can’t teach someone to write, but I can sometimes teach someone to rewrite” (p. 61)

I believe that Casey responded instead to the question, “Can you teach children to be

creative?” and I agree with his response in this regard. I do not think anyone taught me how to see the world and snatch ideas from it in order to save them onto paper in a creative manner. Creative ideas came from deep within me. As a result, I am still not convinced that we can show someone else how to truly “love” (Hawley, 1993) and appreciate their experiences, or how to transpose what they understand from it into some inspired text. I do not think we (teachers/mentors) can coach inspiration or desire. We can nudge and prompt, and in some cases pester, but when it comes right down to it, if we want students to come up with their own original ideas in their own unique voices, it seems important that they generate their own text. However, once something—anything is on paper, we have something with which to work.

However, unlike Casey, I do believe that we *can* teach students to *write*, but it is questionable whether we can teach them to *love* writing as I initially indicated in the implications to my findings from my research *Looking Back, Looking Forward and Writing in Between: Reflections on My Writing Development and its Implications for Me as a Teacher of Writing* (Robinson, EDCI 638, 1994). Although, I still endeavour “to be the teacher that I love (p. 30)”, I am now not as convinced (as a more experienced teacher) that “I [can] teach my students the love of writing as I [knew] it (Robinson, 1993, p. 30)”; I believe that we can foster an environment for a love of writing, model it, hook students into it and embrace all aspects of it, but we can not *make* them love it, especially like *we* do—as experienced and mature teachers (and hopefully teacher-writers). We often assume that if we have a happy class with well-written assignments and that *we* (the teachers) love the experience, that the students also love writing. Despite our efforts to authentically engage the students so that our program has “clear meaning and relatively

immediate value to the student[s]...” (Schlechty, 2002, p. 1), they are often, at best, “ritually engaged” where the “assigned work has little or no inherent meaning or direct value [but they] associate it with extrinsic outcomes and results that are of value” (p. 1). However, I believe that this ritual engagement, when handled properly, can go one step further and show them at least a respect for writing that can eventually lead to “authentic engagement” further down the road. It is important to continue teaching students the writing skills and techniques in as innovative a program as possible, *regardless of whether they love it (or even like it)*. We need to at least encourage a *respect* for writing so that they will engage enough with our program to be well-educated in the matters of writing well. By having a strong foundation of writing knowledge, they might learn to overcome their own initial anxiety with this incredibly difficult discipline in the future.

I could compare the importance of the fluency of writing skills to the value of strong reading skills. When children read well, they are able to become engrossed in a good book and be carried away by the images, the setting, the characters—the story. The same is true of writing. “Both reader and writer...are drawing on past linkages of signs, signifiers, and organic states in order to create new symbolizations, new linkages, and new organic states” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 25). When the skills and techniques are more automatic, students are able to enter into a flow filled state. When given the gifts of these literacy skills early on, and into secondary school, students can still hope to love this experience in their later years. Otherwise, we are doing them a disservice as teachers by passing them over because we have determined that they are not “writers” and assume that they may never love writing because they do not love it in *our* classrooms. We are not helping them by concerning ourselves with making the program *fun* in an effort to

authentically engage them in *our* classrooms. Instead, we must be diligent in sharing with them *why* they are writing, *why* they need to *write well*, and then most importantly *how* to write well so that they can discover their own authentic engagement with text and *in their own time*.

Once students learn to feel the satisfaction of a creative process that involves preparation, appropriate agonizing and practising, and then executing these skills, they will have the confidence to do it again. We teach them that learning doesn't happen all at once. They need to learn to do work that is messy, redundant and un-enjoyable. Long-term gratification pays off... but if we, as art agents, are not persistent in modelling this in our classrooms, students will never know [the rewards of such efforts]. (Robinson, 2003, p. 27)

We must be dogged in our determination to *teach* (as well as facilitate) these techniques even in the philosophy of an inquiry-based classroom. I still feel as strongly as ever about my desire to teach students properly "what I felt that I had never been taught effectively in school and this was to cope with the demands of real writing" (Robinson, 1994, p. 24). We must lead them to the water of skills and technique, and students must be encouraged to meet us there and drink up these learning opportunities. They need to reach out and touch it (writing) with their own youthful hands and make it their own experience before they can truly *know* writing. Then, if they are comfortable enough with it, they might learn to love it *in time and in their own way*. Although, we may not see their love of writing in our experiences with them, it might happen to them somewhere in the future when they are better able to open their own doors into creativity and find their own meaning and voice in the flow of their own creative experience.

Help Students Find Their Own Writing Voice and Meaningful Purposes

I am not certain that English teachers really understand the difference between a true writing voice and an adopted stance or tone for the purposes of a particular piece of writing. This naiveté was true of me when I facilitated a workshop for some teachers from Southern Alberta (2003). I invited these educators to participate in an activity where they had to describe their general “writing voice” that they used most often in their writing, to the rest of us in a group. We were using this term, “voice” (which is, in light of new understandings from this research, a much deeper and more profound concept than I initially understood it to mean) interchangeably with writing tone/attitude/stance, as we often do in this provincial ELA community. Even still, the teachers were stymied as to how to explain who they were in this way in their writing. Then, after asking them to write a brief composition on a common topic, and having them read their writing aloud, I asked them the same question. They turned to each other to find out what their *voice* sounded like after they read. “Oh, you have a comic voice!”, one teacher told another. “Aren’t you sarcastic?”, said another. We were responding instead to each other’s writing *attitude* for that particular piece of writing. Even after this exercise, some teachers could not confirm their writing attitude in the context of this writing assignment. We all concluded that when we are talking to our students about including their own unique voice/attitude in their specific writing tasks (this is an important writing component that provincial markers consider carefully when grading the personal and critical response essays of students for provincial achievement and diploma exams), we need to help students find this unique element in their writing that allows their writing to stand out from the rest.

However, when I speak of helping students to find their own *voice* in the context of this research, I refer to something that is a bit deeper than the superficial voice we use to make our writing unique to its specific purposes, whether it be to sound sorrowful in a sad poem; colloquial in a short story; admonishing in a persuasive essay; or, motivating in a speech. I now refer to it as finding the *truth* inside of us that spurs us to be creative. In many ways, it was naïve of me to ask this question of teachers without truly understanding what I was asking myself. But, it was also insightful in the sense that I found out that we often turn to each other to hear ourselves. What do we sound like? Who are we? I believe that this looking in the mirrors of others is the first step to uncovering the deeper matter of finding out who we are in text. However, our authentic *lived* experiences in text convey a voice much more powerful than simply that of stance and attitude. When we read or hear a strong voice in literature, it makes us sit up tall and listen—like when my father tells stories about his childhood growing up in abject poverty on the bald-headed prairie south of Medicine Hat, Alberta, or when our local war veterans come and speak to my students on Remembrance Day and tell us what they experienced in war.

Your anger and damage and grief are the way to the truth. We don't have much truth to express unless we have gone into those rooms and closets and woods and abysses that we were told not to go in to. When we have gone in and looked around for a long while, just breathing and finally taking it—then we will be able to speak in our own voice and to stay in the present moment. And that moment is home. (Lammott, 1994, pp. 199-201)

Heard referred to a place of home as our voice or “querentia [which] describes a place where one feels safe, a place from which one’s strength of character is drawn, a place

where one feels at home” (Heard, 1995, p. 4).

Therefore, it is important to help students find their own “truth” and in turn their own voice about truth. This truth does not always have to be filled with horrifying trauma, intriguing drama and shocking secrets. It can also be filled with happy experiences that involve the simple expressions of joy, triumph and positive revelations. Whatever the truth of each person may be, it needs to be found. Teachers can help students to this sort of personal excavation, but it might not always happen in writing, or even in the class that we are teaching them at that time. As I mentioned before, we might just be one part of the puzzle that students put together over their lifetime of finding out who they are, what is meaningful to them and how to express it artistically. “Hence, the teaching of reading and writing at any developmental level should have as its first concern the creation of environments and activities in which students are motivated and encouraged to draw on their own resources to make ‘live’ meanings” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 27).

One of the best ways of starting the process of getting to the matter of finding “self”, is through much “exploratory talk” (Barnes, 1990) and dialogic activities in small groups and as a full class. “[S]peech is a vital ingredient of transactional pedagogy...” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 28). When students are able to understand that what they experience in their lives (whether it is socioeconomic and ethnic factors, or other matters of influence) is important and valuable, they can apply it much more meaningfully to their learning. “Such elements [of speech]...affect the individual’s attitude toward self, toward the reading or writing activity, and toward the purpose for which it is being carried on” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 26). It is in this type of open classroom that is rich with

conversation where there is flexibility between the “content level” (facts, intellectual, topic centred) and the “process level” conversation (feelings, emotional and reaction centered) (Gorman, 1974), that creativity flourishes:

[T]eachers, whenever they talk to pupils—individually, in groups or in full class—should show that they value their pupils’ contributions. This does not mean accepting everything, but it does mean that every teacher should accept that part of his task is to educate his pupils’ sense of relevance by encouraging them to make connections between new knowledge and old.

Another form of over-insistence on the teacher’s goals occurs when pupils are expected to adopt the style of a subject’s language at too early a stage. Once again the goals are being over-emphasized at the expense of the pupils’ journey towards them...Separating pupils from the language they use every day may be another way of separating them from their everyday knowledge, and depriving them of a sense of competence. (Barnes, 1976, n.p.)

It is here, in discussions about topics that matter to the students and in tandem with the school program, where the teacher is “no longer simply a conveyor of ready-made teaching materials and recorder of results of ready-made tests or a dispenser of ready-made interpretations. Teaching becomes constructive, facilitating interchange, helping students to make their spontaneous responses the basis for raising questions and growing in the ability to handle increasingly complex reading [and writing] transactions” (Rosenblatt, 1983 as cited by Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 28).

Trust is necessary for such interactions. Schlechty (2002) explained that one of his standards for having a positive learning environment was having a safe environment where

the classroom is a “physically and psychologically safe place...[T]here is mutual respect between and among faculty and students, and the fear of harm or harassment from fellow students and demeaning comments from teachers is negligible” (pp. 26-27). It is important that I mention that I am not advocating that the course content and the matters of skills be secondary to class dialogue and social climate, rather, I am mentioning that skills “are introduced gradually, and there should be plenty of exploratory discussion and writing without [too many initial] special stylistic demands” (Barnes, 1976, n.p.) .

Teachers need to balance the program to consider six language arts: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and representing (*Program of Studies for Senior High School English Language Arts*, 2000). Talking serves as an “extremely important medium in the classroom. Dialogue between teacher and students and interchange among students can foster growth and cross-fertilization in both the reading and writing processes” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 28) as well as the other four language arts. By becoming fluent in these six language arts in the five meta-learning domains, students develop a “metalinguistic understanding of skills and conventions in meaningful contexts” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 28) in their writing. And again, giving students the skills to write effectively within meaningful contexts ultimately allows them the freedom to write more automatically than they might otherwise, thus allowing them to focus on their ideas and inspirations rather than on the difficulty of composing written text.

It is beneficial to give students the opportunity to do some oral story telling. By doing so, they are experimenting with their voice. Stories come alive out loud where their written skills limit them. It also allows students some immediate feedback from their audience about their topics, and their manner of presenting these ideas. “The speaker thus

is constantly being helped to gauge and to confirm, revise, or expand the text. Hence, the text is shaped transactionally by both speaker and addressee [audience]” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005, p. 5). It is also valuable to get students to write expressively in text through journaling or letter writing which can then lead to other forms of writing where the voice lingers in the creative air as they unfold ideas *chosen* by them for different rhetorical purposes. Then, they may be able to write in a convincing manner for other literary purposes (educational or otherwise), chosen by them or others, where they can potentially locate some personal relevance and their own voice within the text.

Involve Students with Real Writers

Many of the ideas presented in this research about writing and thinking about writing are complex. Therefore, I believe that it is essential to “promote having more direct contact with real writers” (Robinson, 1994, p. 33) as teachers and mentors who can explain these concepts one-to-one with the students where possible:

[Mentors are] interested, knowledgeable adults who are willing to provide expertise in particular areas—in this case, writing. Typically they demonstrate enthusiasm for their field, flexibility and empathetic qualities. Under the tutelage of a mentor, students receive counselling and inspiration as well as knowledge and skills. (Mantz, 1979 as cited by Jackson, 1981, p. 837)

My biggest question is “How can we as teachers model an enthusiasm and a true respect for it, if we are not writing ourselves?” I am certain that when I was in school, very few of my own English Language Arts teachers were writers as they never referred to their own writing when they taught their course work. It is also interesting how few English Language Arts teachers that I have encountered, write, other than what they refer to as

the odd business letter/correspondence, email and journal entry. For example, when I initially asked several ELA teachers if they would participate in a qualitative study for my dissertation on the topic of their own writing and the implications of their own writing on their teaching of writing, I received little response. Therefore, I decided instead to turn to my own writing and teaching of writing experiences in the form of an autobiographical study and also consider what other writers, and in some cases teacher-writers, had written about their own creative endeavours and experiences.

In my elementary and secondary schooling, it would have made a tremendous difference to me as a student (and an *eventual* aspiring writer), if my teachers had talked about their own insights such as the ones that I uncovered in this research (see Implications for Me As A Writer) and other lessons, such as: what they wrote; what inspired them to write; how they began writing; what strategies they used to get their ideas down on paper over time; what kept them motivated to persevere to the end; how they edited their writing; how they shared their writing; how they celebrated their writing; reading samples of their writing; understanding their writing process; what they found difficult about writing in general; what they loved; what kept them writing; how to enter contests; how to submit writing to various publishers; their triumphs and tribulations—their overall passion for writing. As a result, this list of interesting author information and the insights that I learned about myself as a writer in this research (see Implications for Me as a Writer) is the subject matter that I would teach in a writing class in English Language Arts. I also believe such information should be shared with students by other English teachers, mentors or writers, regardless of the students' age, grade or ability.

It is valuable when the *teacher* in the English classroom is the writing mentor because she/he is perceived by her/his students as the leader in the class responsible for developing the program, imparting the coursework and assessing the outcomes. The students look to the teacher as the authority. Therefore, I strongly encourage non-writing English teachers to embrace the idea of discovering or rediscovering their abilities and interests in writing. However, in the instance when this is simply not possible, writing conferences, such as the annual Foothills School Division Author's Conference, provide students with multiple opportunities to come in contact with *real* writers and learn this type of information. Students have the opportunity to be engaged in writing workshops where they can participate in some of the writer's strategies, and understand the life of an artist by living it with them in discussion in a close community of like-minded students and teachers. Having attended such conferences, I believe it is important to bring this type of experience to our classrooms. By inviting writers (or the relatives or friends of students who do write) into the classroom, students are given live contacts with writers who can inspire them to write better, more often and for their own or other important purposes.

Teach the Languages of Writing and Thinking About Writing

The Language of Experience-Process

The final aspect of my teaching of writing that I would consider carefully as a result of this research is how I would include the language of writing and the language of how we think about our writing. Codifying the *process* and describing the essence of the *experience* of writing to students enables them to better understand how they can engage more deeply in the act of writing. While be cognizant that there is no one *right* way to write, it is helpful to provide students with *various* writing models (or aspects of the

models), including my own (see Figures 9.1 and 9.2). Such learning experiences would enable students to consider how they write or how they might write more effectively using a system of thinking that is successfully used by other writers. They are then able to consider various potential elements of these processes in the act of writing as opposed to the often one-step writing model many of them use which I refer to as the *write-as-much-as-I-can-and-as-fast-as-I-can-without-looking-it-over model*. Students have told me that they appreciate it when I do a sort of think-aloud demonstration of how I would tackle a writing assignment. Although it is a big and sometimes tedious undertaking, they are able to see how I grapple with the matters of generating an idea, considering my audience, choosing a form, planning the writing piece, constructing it, reshaping it and finally editing it. They can witness first hand how I jump back and forth between the various processes as well as how my ideas come alive onto paper.

Again, the down side of codifying the language of writing is that students often feel locked into a rigid procedure regardless of our efforts to explain that the language of writing is only there to help us understand how others proceed. I know this because I was one of those students. Teachers continually told me I was skipping stages or doing things the *wrong* way. I reiterate what Aoki warned us that “we become the language we speak” (Aoki, 2004, p. 25). Therefore, it becomes important for me as a teacher to continually delve into the individual experiences of students and perhaps build or elaborate on the language so that it fits them individually and a model does not become a *one-size-fits-all model*. The purpose of language is to express the experience of the communicator, and where the language limits us, to develop new terminology.

The Language of Meta-processing

Teaching students to be metacognitive has been a focus of the recent *Program of Studies for Senior High School English Language Arts* (2000/2001):

Many of the specific outcomes in this program of studies emphasize metacognition. Students recall and describe *what* they have done in a particular learning activity, and recount *how*, *when* and *why*. Students then assess the value of the strategies that they have used, make modifications to them or abandon them in favour of new approaches, and monitor the use of these reworked or new strategies in future learning situations. (p. 2)

In the wrong teaching hands, this type of metacognitive approach could be turned into a mundane and mechanical experience. Therefore, I like the general premise of meta-processing, provided that students see it as a natural act (through ordinary conversation) and one that has meaning for their own creative purposes. Again, it is important to include in these conversations not only their cognitive strategies and in turn their reflections about these strategies, but to involve all of the five meta-learning domains. In the instance of the meta-affective domain, for example, this curriculum description might resemble the following:

Students recall and describe *what they felt* during particular learning activity, and recount *how*, *when* and *why*. Students then assess the value of any affective strategies that they have used, make modifications to them or abandoning them in favour of new approaches, and monitor the use of these reworked or new affective strategies in future learning situations. (*Program of Studies for Senior High School English Language Arts*, 2000/2001, p. 2 [modified])

Although some danger lurks here for some teachers, where students might feel enabled to

be very negative and shut down the meta-reflection, this experience could be mitigated by the teachers regardless of the obstacles as they discuss strategies to overcome the emotional difficulties related to any given writing assignment.

The other meta-learning domains would be based on a similar meta-premise. Therefore, the teacher is considering the strategies and reflections of each aspect of learning (thoughts, emotions, motivations, body responses and spiritual inspirations) and the interaction of these meta-learning domains as they are often all intricately interwoven and “transactional” (Rosenblatt, 1994/2005). Giving students the language of meta-processing would enable them to dig deeply into their own learning and recognize all of the factors that play a role in how they learn to write.

Future Research Recommendations

I found there to be four key areas that had substantial room for further research. Any qualitative research, such as this, with single or multiple emerging theories and/or the development of new concepts and language, creates academic fodder for future research. First, I believe that there is considerable room to research each individual meta-learning domain as well as how these domains interconnect:

- A. It would be valuable to discover more about how we can better access the unique traits of each domain through expanding our awareness of the levels of consciousness.
- B. With an expanded awareness of each meta-learning domain, it would also be helpful to have a larger repertoire of meta-processing strategies within them

to utilize for writing and the teaching of writing.

- C. Meta-processing has the potential to enter many other educational realms, not simply creative writing, and it would be fruitful to see how it could be applied elsewhere.
- D. It would also be interesting to see if other meta-learning domains emerge and develop with further consideration of the reflexive process of meta-processing.

Secondly, I believe that the Writing Experience-Process Model can open doors to the development of other writing models or language that attempt to codify the experience/process of writing. This language could help convey novel ways of engaging with text for various rhetorical purposes. The “Writing Experience-Process Model” (Robinson, 2005/2006) suggests that all creative writing has similar features; whereas, I suspect that researchers might find that this model could expand and grow to accommodate the following:

- A. different writing concepts
- B. different modes and forms of writing.

Thirdly, although Emig (1971) did this type of think-aloud research with student participants who were somewhat less passionate than I am about writing, another research project exploring the experience-process of writing through the eyes of adults who have difficulty or a lack of enthusiasm for writing might provide some interesting information. By getting into the minds of those who struggle, researchers might get an even better sense of how to help students who are blocked and struggle with writing in a classroom setting.

And finally, an aspect of this research which I found to be a thesis unto itself was the section on journaling which I called in this research “Witnessing My Expressive Journal Writing”. In the literature, there appeared to be very little information about the inner workings of this expressive writing form. I found that my discoveries about journaling were fresh and insightful. Further research could delve into this topic in greater detail in the following areas of journaling:

- A. language
- B. point of view
- C. intended audience
- D. purposes
- E. matter of memory
- F. intentionality
- G. cathartic effects

I anticipate that I will be doing further research in this area of journaling as I have the data and the keen interest to do so.

Figure 3.1: A Creative Response to the Language of the Structure of the Writing Model by Linda Flower and John R. Hayes

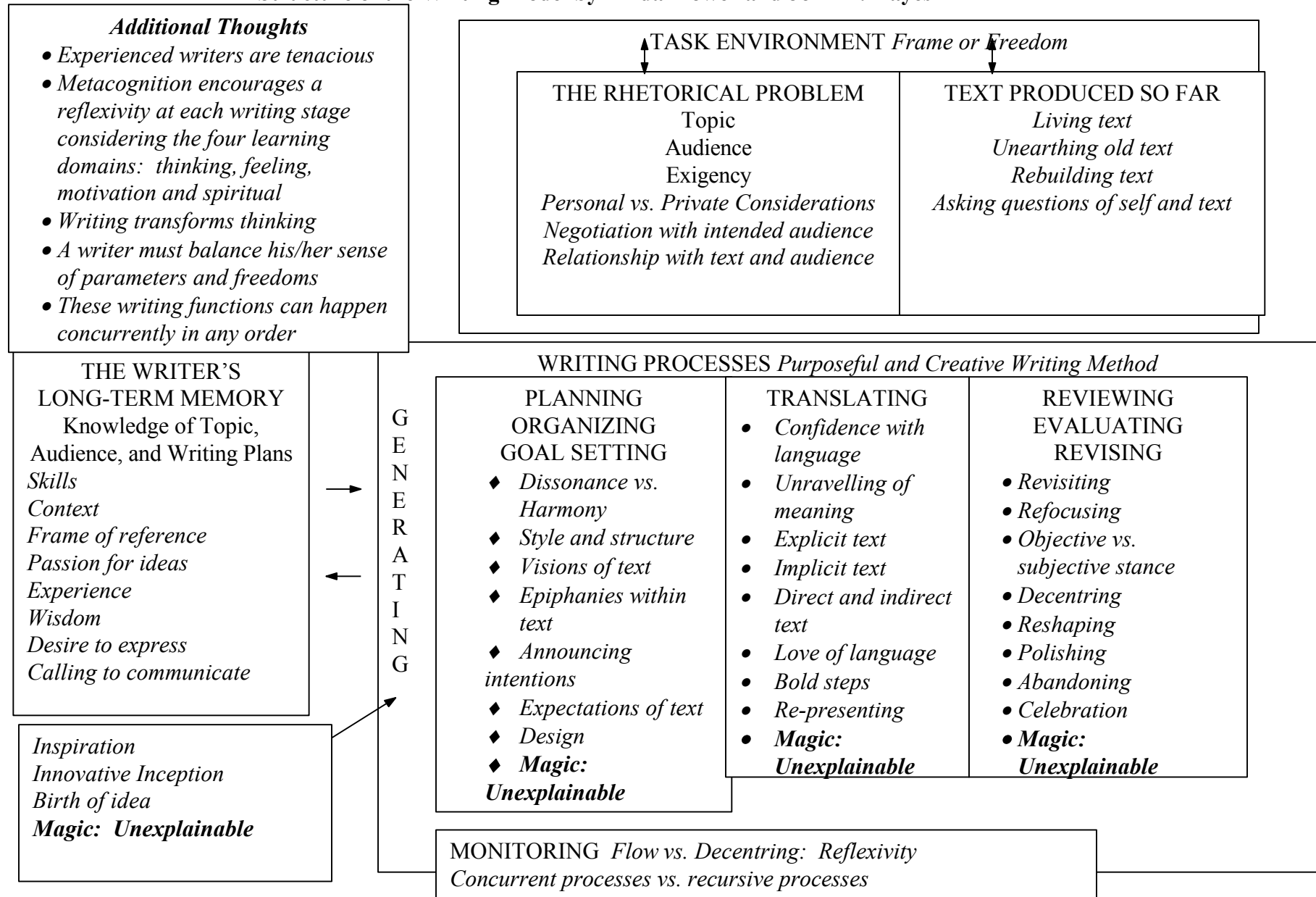


Figure 3.2: Writing Experience-Process Model
Shelley Robinson

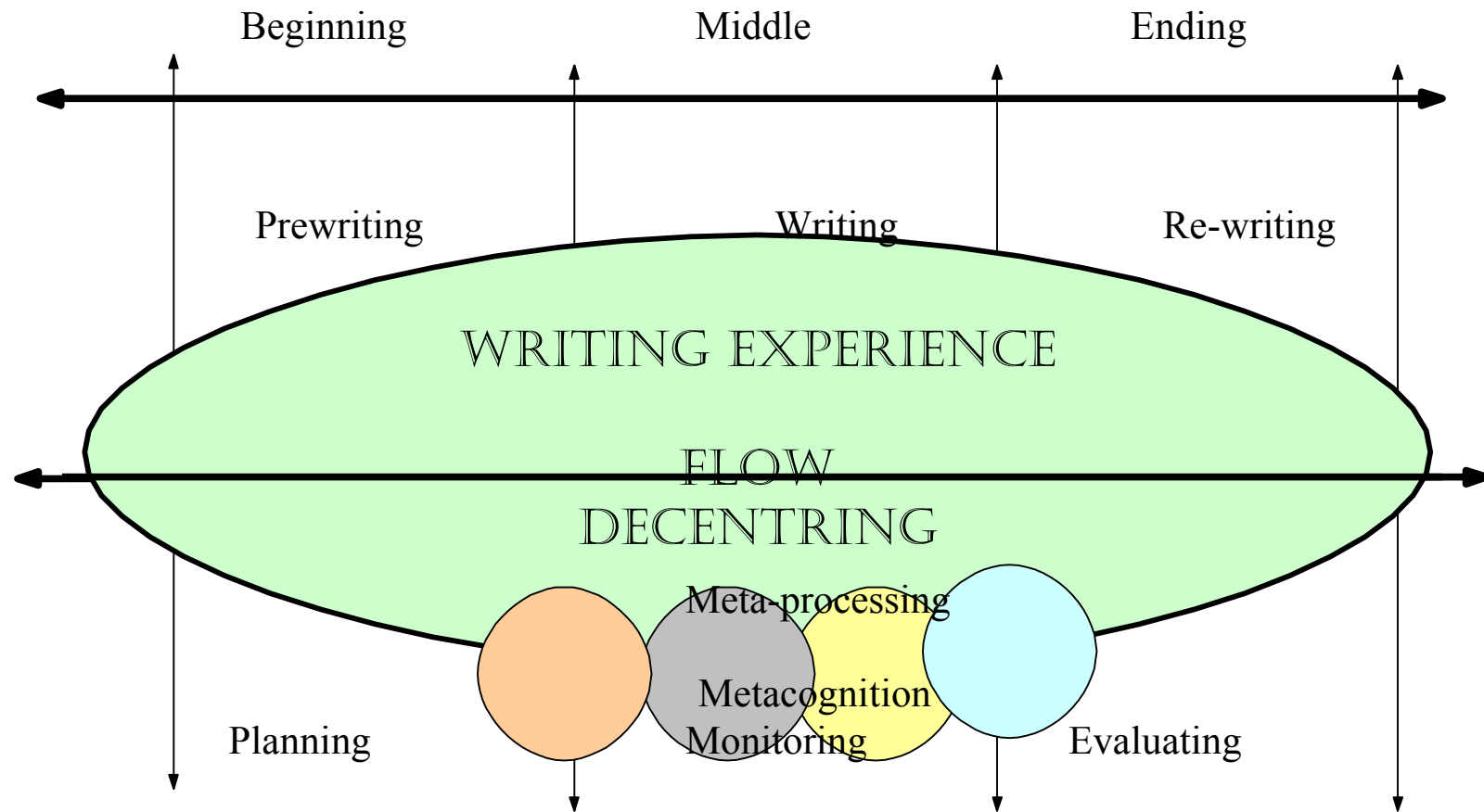


Figure 2.3: Meta-Processing Theory Diagram by S. Robinson

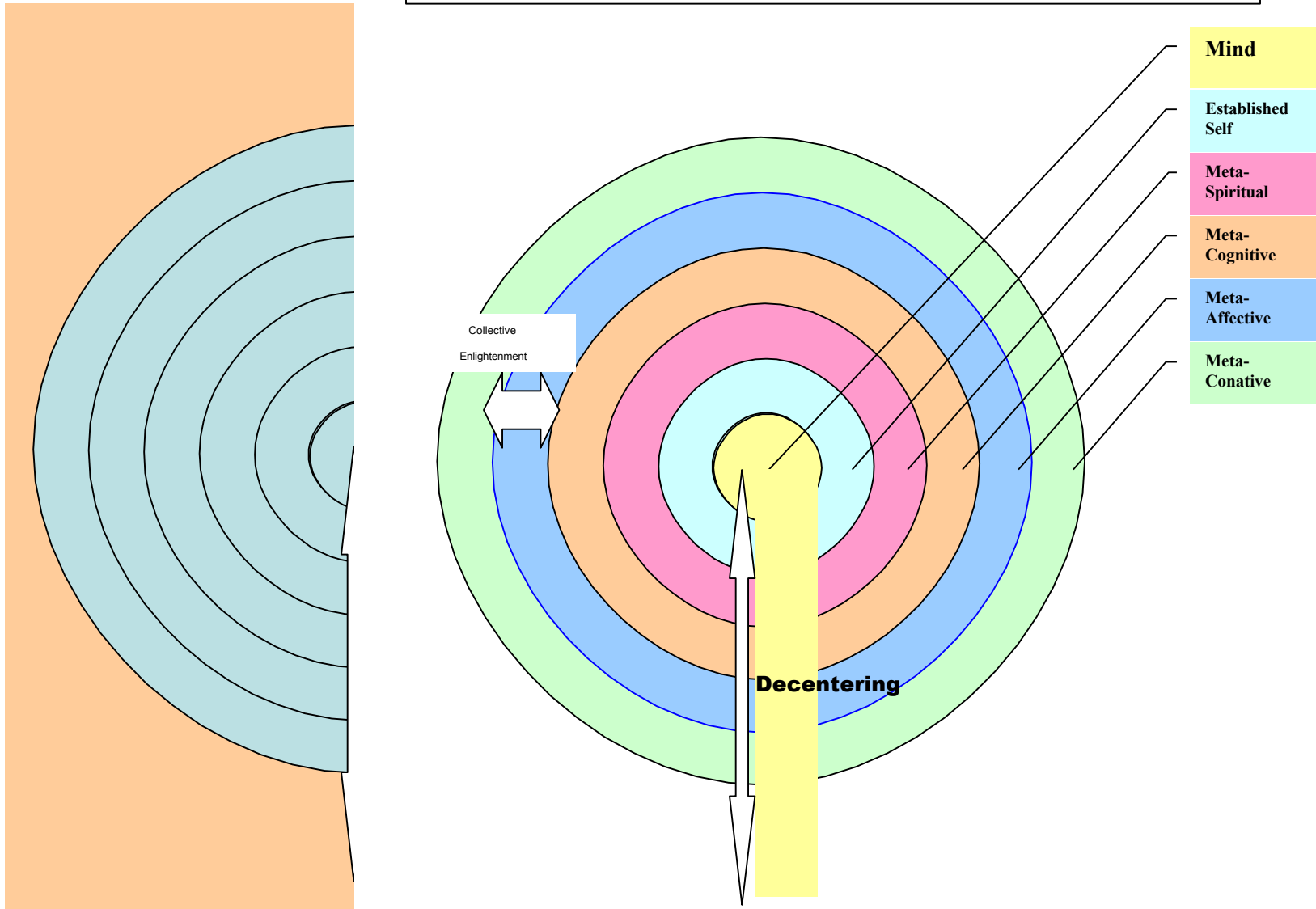


Figure 3.4: Circle of Consciousness

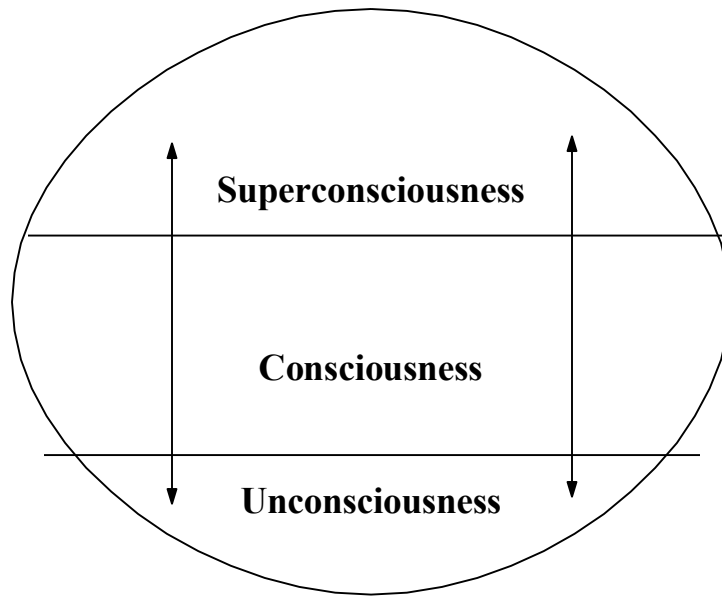


Figure 9.1 **Writing Experience-Process Model - 2**

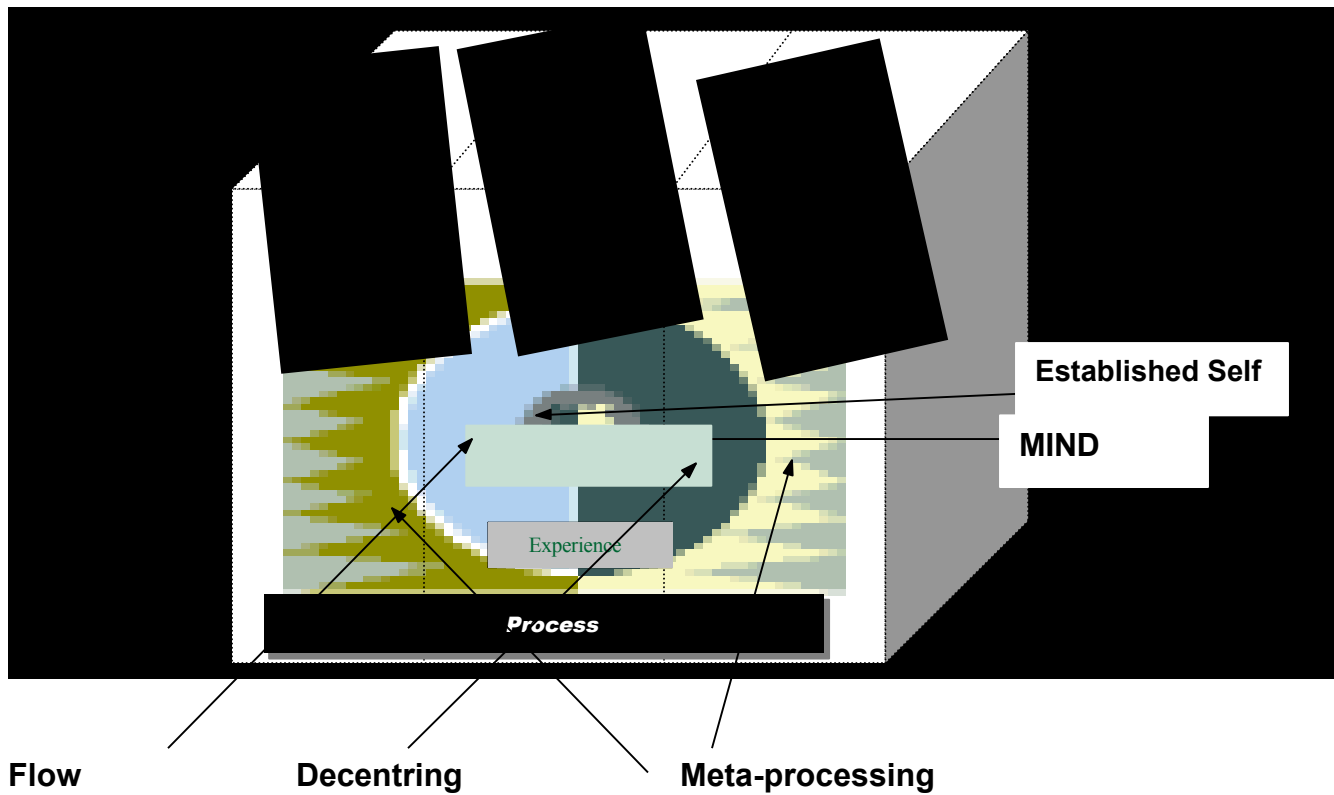


Figure 9.2 **Inverted Writing Experience-Process Model-2**

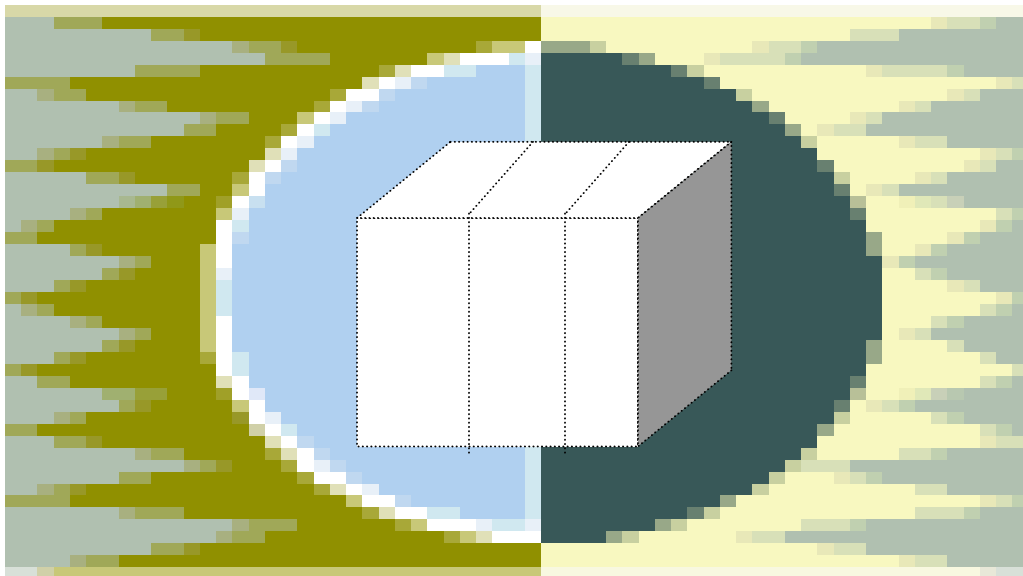


Figure 9.3 Widened Circle of Consciousness

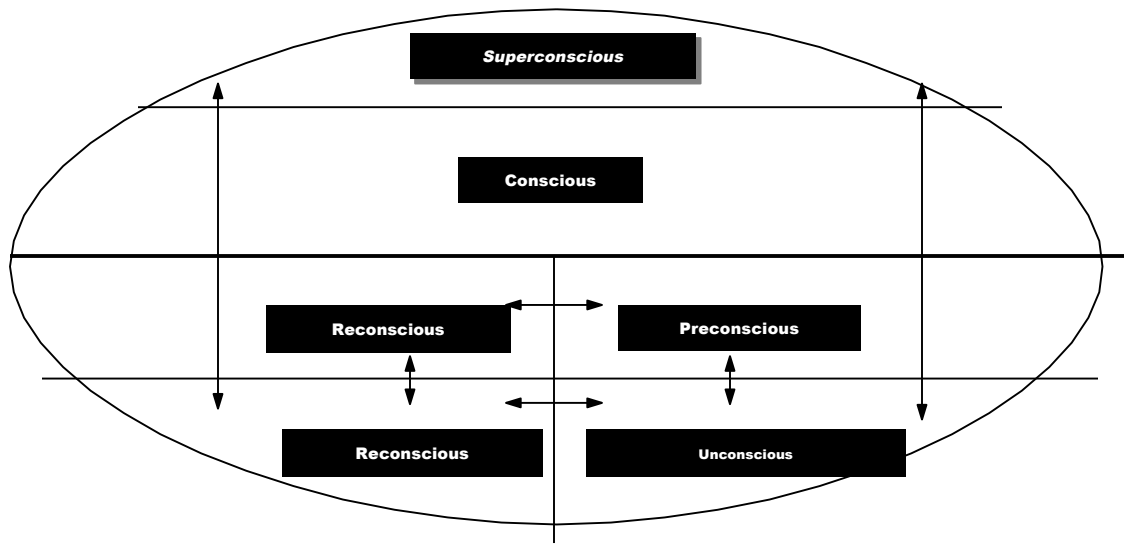
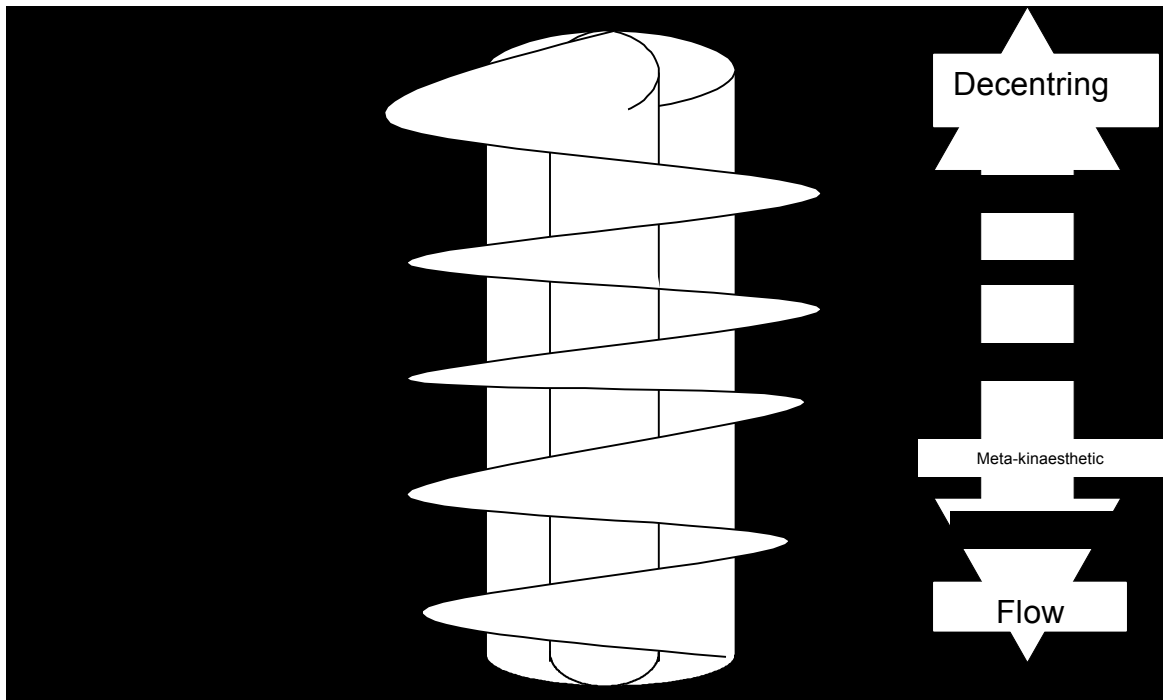


Figure 9.4

Meta-Processing Theory Diagram-2



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