

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Narrative Frames

Rosemary is learning to read. An arthritic, Rosemary has frequently been confined to her bed. To compensate, her mother reads marvelous adventure stories, practically around the clock. Some of Rosemary's favorites are *Puck of Pook's Hill*, *The Eagle of the Ninth*, *The Gladiators*, and *Last Days of Pompeii*. When Rosemary's mother wants to teach her to read she sits her down with a book about a rosy-faced family who lives next door and has cats that sit on mats. Rosemary hates this book and decides she will never learn to read. But Rosemary does learn to read while in Miss Beck's first-grade classroom. Miss Beck is a wonderful teacher who values literature as much as Rosemary. Rosemary learns to read from an old volume of Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, though she doesn't know quite how or when. She only knows that when she entered Miss Beck's Academy she could not read, and by the end of the first term, without any apparent transition, she is reading everything.

Benjie is thirteen years old, African American, poor, a seventh-grader. He attends a tough school in the heart of Harlem. He's a street-wise junkie who hates school and teachers. Benjie says teachers say one thing with their mouths while their eyes are screaming something else. He says teachers call on the poorest readers to read aloud so they can make fools of them.

Jerry attends Trinity High School. He plays football and tries to stay out of trouble. Though Jerry is no trouble-maker himself, he is often perceived as one. Jerry meets trouble head on when he accepts the challenge of one of the school's gangs and refuses to participate in Trinity's annual fund raiser.

Trinity is a private school dedicated to preparing middle-class males for college. Like many high schools, Trinity has its gangs.

And like many schools, Trinity allows them to function by ignoring their presence. It particularly ignores the presence of the Vigils.

And teachers at Trinity do their part. Especially Brother Leon. Jerry says that Brother Leon will as soon strike a student with his blackboard pointer as look at them. He also humiliates his students. For instance, in class one day, Jerry says Brother Leon made fun of Bailey and accused him of cheating because he's a straight A student. Leon told Bailey that only a genius could make all A's. And while awaiting laughter from the class, Brother Leon went on making fun, telling Bailey that he looked like a genius with his glasses, pointed chin, and wild hair.

Archer Sloane is an English professor in his fifties. He comes to his task of teaching literature with seeming disdain. He is disliked and feared by most students, and he responds with a detached and ironic amusement. While he lectures, he impatiently runs his fingers through his gray, curling hair. His voice is flat and dry, without expression or intonation.

Profiles of students and teachers? Brief glimpses of life in any school? No. Instead they are vignettes from literature, from stories of schooling, that portray with all the realism and drama the everyday lived culture of schools. Rosemary is Rosemary Sutcliff in her autobiography *Blue Remembered Hills*; Benjie is from *A Hero Ain't Nothing but a Sandwich*; Jerry is the central protagonist in *The Chocolate War*; and Archer Sloane is the teacher William Stoner most remembers in the novel, *Stoner*.¹ I was always drawn to these stories when selecting books to use in my literature methods courses. I was drawn to them long before I realized why. Students read these and other stories with eagerness, and as we began to discuss these realistic but highly imaginative books I noticed a pattern. Discussion nearly always began with students relating their personal schooling stories, either pleasant or terrible memories of situations they had encountered as students or as prospective teachers during field experience.

Rounds of storytelling then became our discussion, and it seemed that their stories were a vehicle for extending both the imaginative text and the more methodological textbook—for making meaning, often for articulating that which had not heretofore been considered, and for expanding their concepts of teaching and learning. Eventually with questions from peers about

individual experiences and with a little nudging on my part in the form of questions that might draw out deeper issues, storytelling worked its way into dealing with teaching/learning issues that began to get at how various aspects of school, in general, and the lessons we plan, in particular, are taken up by students. Reading imaginative texts alongside professional texts seemed to open up both discussion about schooling and discussion related to the teaching of literature.

Questions about expanding traditional literature curricula to include trade books (children's and young adult literature) launched my thinking about more critical pieces to add to their reading—readings that might say something about the privileging of particular texts (surrounding the most commonly discussed issue in my English department—canonicity). It was not until much later that everything seemed to come together to form the research on which this book is based.

As I continued to think about the connections students were making, I wondered what connections there were between the kinds of stories I asked students to read, even those that did not relate to schooling, and the kinds of stories they told. I played with the arrangement. I used different books for a term, trade books they might teach to adolescent readers that had little if anything to do with school but that nonetheless had teenage protagonists. Even when there were no teachers and no schools in the books we read, students still related teenage life and teenage problems to some aspect of schooling. As teachers-to-be, my students saw the potential for schooling relationships in nearly everything we read, at least in terms of the broader context that often related to effects of schooling experiences. I could bring in newspaper clippings or magazine stories and the responses were similar. When I asked students if they could speak to this reaction, their reply was simply that they were usually inundated with more standard educational texts as well as the lecture format in other classes. Students eagerly confessed that “stories,” whether from literature, film, or simply the newspaper, provided something they missed when faced with only professional readings. Stories provided a more realistic experience (and if about schooling then referential to teaching) and because the literature was imaginative, students said they tended to fantasize (if about schooling then about different situations related to school). Imagination in this case seemed directly related to reflection (albeit,

perhaps, uncritical)—to the kind of wondering about or puzzling out situations they encountered in the books we read.

Lacking a kind of situational exploration of teaching and learning, students felt their textbooks were often one-sided presenting a more monolithic approach. Student often complained that ideas were presented as if all students responded the same way to school, but experience had already taught them that neither teaching nor learning was easy given the variety of baggage both teachers and learners often bring. Textbooks that taught various aspects of the English curriculum like reading and writing processes and the study of language/grammar and literature focused only on the positive. Reporting only success stories had a way of making students feel uncomfortable given what they remembered from their own experiences. They wanted to know what teachers did when things went wrong. Many had already had the experience, in their field placements, of trying something according to a textbook and finding the lesson fraught with problems they couldn't quite handle. Often the young adult literature we read explored some of those difficulties, albeit often in somewhat harsh but, perhaps, more honest detail. Imaginative literature then became a window onto what students sought for affirmation—that not all lessons succeed, not all plans are perfect, some ideas work with some students and other ideas do not. Especially when that imaginative literature dramatized the classroom, students seemed more capable of seeing the complexities of teacherwork. When they had begun to sense that they were failures if a lesson didn't work in their particular field experiences, through the reading of stories that illuminated various schooling situations, students seemed to begin to see more systemic reasons for their difficulties and they began to pose a range of possibilities for some situations. That is, with a more open-ended curriculum, students seemed more capable of articulating alternative arrangements for teachers and students, and they seemed to begin to see school within a broader social framework.

Stories then tended to help them make connections that seemed to lie somewhere between expectations predicated on future scenario planning and their experiences, both past and present. And these stories, often conceived of only at the point of utterance, seemed to suggest a kind of active theorizing about schools and curricula, teachers and teaching, and their positions within that multidimensional structure. For example, after read-

ing *The Chocolate War* and discussing the cruel nature of Brother Leon in this book,² Mary, a junior recently admitted to the teacher education program, remembered a teacher she'd had who frightened her and she shared that experience with the class:

I had this teacher once that told us how mean he was and that he was a great fan of Edgar Allen Poe. Then he went on to describe some of the torture treatments in Poe's books like sewing live rats in someone's stomach. I mean it was just awful; you didn't want to breathe in that class.

Discussion then turned to the significance of Mary's personal story and what meanings she had made of that experience. One student asked how that had "affect[ed her] learning in that class" and if she ever felt "free to contribute to discussion after that?" Another student asked if she really "believe[d] the teacher or did [she] ever think he might have just been trying to scare the class?"

After these questions from students, I asked if we thought Brother Leon was just trying to scare students and if so why? What would behavior like Brother Leon and Mary's teacher have suggested about the role these teachers perceived they had? What might Mary's teacher's behavior have suggested about how he perceived literature or the teaching of it? What occurs when teachers strike fear in the hearts of students? What does it mean for the teacher; what does it mean for the student? And how important are learning environments to students abilities to learn, particularly respective to reading and learning from literature?

I thought about Mary's story and what her telling might have suggested. First, she chose to tell this story; it was not written in her response journal (a journal for reactions, questions, and comments to class readings). Did vocalizing this experience signal something important? I wondered whether she truly believed this teacher would harm her class and how her seeming anxiety suggested by this response had effected her abilities to respond to literature thereafter. Did she perceive literature as having only "correct responses" or would she have risked connecting that literature to any lived experience the way one of our other course texts suggested?³ Or had she simply buried that experience after class that day? The fact that our reading made her recall on this day suggested something, but what? That it had affected much of her schooling or that it had been repressed until now? What would she do with this memory now? How would it affect her as a teacher?

Or would she even remember this day? Reflection on the subject, not just a response soon forgotten, seemed important. Not so much how to evoke such reflection but how to sustain it for a period and work through it making sense of all its implications would be more difficult to achieve. And how to make more critical student's reflections that seemed to automatically occur when they read imaginative texts and professional texts would, perhaps, be even more difficult given the critical theoretical texts I would want to include to help them pose even harder questions. I wondered for several months about Mary's story and others' shared both through class discussions and often in journals.

The project I worked on over the summer months had to do with double-entry journals, something I had read about as a graduate student and was reminded of again when I attended a workshop sponsored by our Literacy Coalition. Our speaker, Ann Berthoff, focused her presentation on the uses of what she called a "dialectical notebook" for helping students make connections through reflection.⁴ Berthoff used the word dialectical in this sense to mean the tension between language and thought. She described the journal as a place to record responses to readings or class discussions, take notes and so forth, and then after reflection, write a response to earlier responses, making personal connections. I believed this journal form might have the potential to promote a more critical reflection: the kind of thinking necessary for questioning assumptions and for reviewing, revising, and extending responses toward some deeper more meaningful learning experience. Consequently, I began to work on ways to use it and to determine whether a response to a response, as the double-entry notebook format suggested, would have any effect on the critical nature of reflection I might help students work toward.

In the fall I prepared and delivered a paper at a curriculum conference, raising some questions about critical inquiry and reflection, dialogue, and the dialectic that this journal format seemed to produce. At the conference several presentations legitimated my thoughts about the importance of critical reflection and the importance of teachers connecting teaching experiences to their personal lives—to understanding the relationship between one's private self and one's public teaching self. My thoughts returned to the stories of schooling and to how reflective my students had seemed sharing their stories. Flo Krall's growing up

story and her readings from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* particularly resonated with what I had been thinking.⁵

Other presentations clicked for me as well. Ann Trousdale with Ken Kantor, Sue Jungck, Ann Bennison, and Dan Marshall gave a readers' theater performance in which they shared schooling narratives from literature while video monitors showed clips from sitcoms about teachers in classroom situations.⁶ Later, Delese Wear, who teaches in a medical humanities program, gave a presentation about using literature in parity with textbooks to dramatize the emotional, indeed, more human side of any profession.⁷ She pointed out that although textbooks often *name problems* and *suggest solutions*, literature *illuminates the situation by calling forth an emotional response* from readers.

And then I began to understand much of what I had wondered about previously respective to the way students responded when we read literature. Though I had practiced a response-based approach to teaching, students had gone beyond Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory that readers who vicariously experience a text will through personal connections create their own text or "poem."⁸ Students had, it seemed, begun to fashion critical responses based on personal, emotional connections to literature, perhaps, due to their textbooks leaving out problems or simply naming them. Literature illuminated and showed possibilities; textbooks named/defined and stated solutions.

They were in a teacher education course reading teacher education materials, and they appeared to do an "educational reading" on the literary texts we read. As I attempted to pose with them many of the critical social issues confronting students and teachers, students began actively theorizing in simple form a "deconstructionist" response—that is, they began questioning the basic assumptions about teachers and students and teaching and learning and about the gendered, classed, and raced roles each played in the drama of schooling. The schooling scenarios within the books we read posed for them difficult ethical and philosophical problems related to teaching and learning. To say, however, that their questioning process alone could have produced the kind of self-conscious awareness I saw this practice fostering may be limiting. In other words, although a reader who is practiced in beneath-the-surface examinations of texts may without benefit of a literary experience engage in the same process my students

seemed to engage in with stories, it seems more likely that the human connection to educational questions evolved, perhaps, more naturally through the reading of literature—fiction and autobiography, in particular—along with other course materials.

Furthermore, though responses may vary when we consider what draws us to a good book, some responses nearly always given are that good books cause us to think or a good read puts us in a thoughtful or contemplative mood—all of which is to say we become reflective. This mood or state of thoughtfulness may then create the space to focus more critically on social, cultural, and political issues when those are raised in other texts we read.

Until now students had read about teaching approaches and had understood teaching in a more clinical manner because their textbooks did not seem to illuminate situations the way literature did. However, through imaginative texts, students can begin to balance that clinical approach with a more humane understanding of teaching and learning through what in literature is often situated in conflict and resolution. Keeping these two domains of reading separate is the usual fare for students—what is often the case when pedagogy is taught in education departments and literature is taught in English departments. Combining these forms and adding a critical dimension from theory (even small passages) opened worlds of new understandings and possibilities for both me and my students.

For example, against the backdrop of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Spinster*,⁹ a novel based upon Ashton-Warner's teaching experiences in the Maori schools for seventeen years and *Teacher*,¹⁰ her autobiography, students read Cynthia Brown's *Literacy in Thirty Hours*¹¹—a more methodological explication of Paulo Freire's literacy work in Northeast Brazil—along with a selection from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹² about nonhierarchical student-teacher relationships. The latter two books draw heavily on the problems Ashton-Warner encountered with respect to *ideological* differences around the teaching of reading—something not often dealt with in more typical reading instruction books.

Ashton-Warner argues for teaching children to read from the first words they utter by actually having them write their own books to read instead of learning to read from primers or basal readers. She makes a strong claim for children's books to match not only their language but also their color so that they learn to value their words and experiences. In *Spinster* one child writes

about Whareparita, a sister, giving birth to twins while another writes about her mother getting punched in the face.¹³ Through emotion-filled story narrative, Ashton-Warner illustrates the Freirean notion of reading and writing the word and the world and the importance of students' valuing their own words and experiences as she details her own struggle with school officials who would rather Maori children learn to read Maori literature from primers first.¹⁴

Cynthia Brown politicizes the act of learning to read by saying that the way students use their capabilities in reading will often depend on teachers' political agendas. In other words, if teachers want students to read critically then they will create an environment for that to happen. She writes:

If nonreaders learn to read by writing and read their own words and opinions, then they learn that their perceptions of reality are valid to others and can influence even those in authority. If, on the other hand, their teachers require them to learn the words and ideas in a primer which is donated by those in power, then the learners must accept that experience as more valid than their own.¹⁵

When the children write their own books, sometimes it means they actually write stories and sometimes it means they rewrite stories by inserting personal experiences into the stories that Miss Vontop reads (teacher's name in *Spinster*). In the story of "Little Red Riding Hood," for example, when the mother tells Red Riding Hood to take the basket of goodies to grandmother, the children insert that it would be okay to stop and play with Wiki or Mark, but if "Wed Wideen Hook" should see the wolf, she must walk straight past. In the middle of this story, one child interrupts to say that she likes talking to the wolf because he says funny things.¹⁶ This passage echoes another course text by Louise Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. Rosenblatt's reader response theory is articulated in this text and illustrated in Ashton-Warner's books. That theory suggests that readers create a "poem" or their response when they interpret a book through personal "lived-through" experiences.¹⁷

An example of how students' responses reflect both their understanding of the texts read and tend to be drawn from their personal experiences can be seen in David's storylike interpretation or response. David is a senior English education major who is

currently in a teacher preparation program that allows him to spend a substantial number of hours per week in field experience. In David's case that experience consists of helping his supervising teacher by tutoring students who need extra help. David's response occurs in a conversation related to the importance of validating children's own language. This conversation follows our reading of *Teacher*. In *Teacher* we see Ashton-Warner validating the language children bring to school by having the Maori children learn to read from the books they've written and also by allowing children to name the key vocabulary for each day—words they've heard and are curious about.¹⁸ Students in my class seem immediately struck by the importance of learning to read one's own words first and by their memories of how they learned vocabulary (and are perhaps even beginning to perpetuate this method in their own field experiences). David's two brief responses addressing issues of vocabulary and writing center on the larger focus of our discussion—that is, the value of learning from children. He says:

1. I remember a teacher I had in fourth grade who . . . had some very old-fashioned ways of thinking about schooling. She had long vocabulary lists that we had to memorize. I mean English is so vast; how do you hope to do it with vocabulary lists? And she also had very quiet classrooms—you could hear the hum of a beehive. She said you have to memorize these things and not a care in the world was given to whether or not we understood what we had to memorize.

2. But the high school I went to had a fairly whole language emphasis. So I didn't see a lot of rote memorization there. I can see it now in my field experience though. The instructor had a student who was having problems with commas—probably didn't notice what she had written—so she called me over, and said, "David is an English major; he can explain where commas go." She wanted me to go over the grammar rules of commas. I waited until the instructor went away, then I told the student to read the sentence out loud. She did. So then I said, "Do you remember where the spaces were when you spoke?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Put the commas there."

On the value of learning from students, Ashton-Warner often notes that at such times when children write passionately of their lived experiences, they become her "ardent" teachers, teaching her

about their lives and their abilities to communicate through reading and writing.¹⁹ From this point, students return to Freire's own words about student-teacher relationships—a partnership in teaching and learning as expressed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.²⁰

Through such reading experiences, students may come to understand connections between what Freire suggests about pedagogy and what Rosenblatt suggests about reading. Then, of course, playing what they learn from their experiences against what I learned from watching them engage in those experiences, we all more fully understand what Robert Scholes means in the statement, “Our job is not to produce ‘readings’ for our students but to give them the tools for producing their own.”²¹ Thus, my goals as I understood them then were that I wanted my students to begin to question the structures of schooling that they saw dramatized in the literature we read and to do that against their own backgrounds of experience, whatever that experience may have been. Though David, for example, seemed to recognize that the student writer knew more than the teacher gave her credit for knowing and that there might have been other vocabulary worth learning in fourth grade, he had not moved to a place where he could begin to problematize his teachers' circumstances within schooling institutions. That is, although David named what he saw as problematic, it was not obvious to me that he had begun to question the structures of schooling that might have contributed to the particular behaviors he named. Yet literature and other aesthetic materials paired with critical educational readings still seemed to offer possibilities for that kind of knowing, questioning, theorizing.

COLLECTING AND CODING STORIES OF SCHOOLING

During a sabbatical term I began collecting all the materials I could find, both literary and critical, that students might read as sites of contestation. My search included stories of schooling in books, films, television, songs, and so forth. A large corpus includes formal schooling narratives in literature, films, television, songs, and informal schooling stories in autobiographies (i.e., growing up stories about early experiences with reading and writing or students learning about themselves and their world in nontraditional settings). See the annotated bibliography for a complete list of the books used in this project.²²

Beyond identifying narratives, I coded stories for ideological centers through which meanings related to both form and content might be produced (i.e., centers of caring and connectedness, student-teacher relations, themes of resistance related to domination/subordination along class, race, and gender lines, hidden curriculum, and the knowledge question).²³ These centers are also commonly noted in the literature on feminist pedagogy and critical social/educational theory.²⁴ Also within particular cultural and ideological frames of reference, I coded passages that dealt especially with language arts *contents and processes* in critical ways.

In the professional literature from which these codes are drawn, *caring*, for example, is defined as follows: Nel Noddings refers to caring as a philosophical approach to feminine ethics and moral education. She writes, "Caring preserves both the group and the individual . . . [and] limits our obligation so that it may be realistically met. It will not allow us to be distracted by visions of universal love, perfect justice, or a world unified under principle."²⁵ In other words, according to Noddings' definition, caring seems to allow us to look through the blind spots making problematic situations of inequality without pretending that they do not exist. Noddings's principle depends on a desire to be in a "caring relation" with others.

Codes that relate to student-teacher or teacher-learner relationships are those most commonly discussed by Freire, Giroux, Apple, Pagano, and Miller and similarly defined by each.²⁶ That is, in each instance, these relations refer to power differentials grounded in patriarchal practices and institutionalized by tradition. For example, critical social theory politicizes dissension related to power as it is reflected in structural hierarchies like student/teacher/administrator and related to pedagogical practice like authoritarian teacher roles indicated by methods and instructional materials.²⁷ Although much conflict in schools arise out of the larger social context of schooling, some confrontations between people seem to be related to competitiveness among individuals.²⁸

In examining the effects of structural power or domination, resistance that is a natural by-product of power is seen as political when it becomes a struggle "directed toward putting an end to relations of domination," according to Apple.²⁹ On the other hand, Henry Giroux defines resistance that is not a part of the political project of creating alternative public spheres as the "personal space in which the logic and force of domination is con-

tested by the power of subjective agency to subvert the process of socialization.³⁰ And in *Creating Spaces and Finding Voices*, Miller defines that resistance (hers and five teachers) in terms of collaboration as she describes the constant struggle for voice in their collective efforts to challenge conventional modes of research.³¹

With respect to teachers' roles reflected in practice and selected teaching materials, Freire describes a teaching/learning relationship that is either closely tied to domination and insists on knowledge transfer rather than thinking, or he describes teachers and learners as coinvestigators.³² The former model insists that teachers deposit information into a passive student.

And finally, other codes describe what has been called the hidden curriculum or social dynamics in the classroom that tends to structure inequality; that is, the hidden curriculum is what students learn from the form or style of teaching, which frequently overrides or even causes resistance to content learning.³³ It often relates more to what is withheld than to what is taught, and it includes the knowledge question. That is, what counts for legitimate knowledge and who decides what counts? Questions of knowledge fundamental to issues of power and control, then, are central to this book.³⁴

Moreover, here, I want to bring into discussion some "possible ways forward" as Raymond Williams writes in the last paragraph of *The Long Revolution*. With Williams, I want to "open discussion, extend relationships, [and focus upon] the practical shaping of institutions."³⁵ This book then is about *reformulating* but not *formalizing* the language of the classroom—both in teacher education programs and in schools by grounding all teaching within experiential contexts and by using narrative as the pivotal frame of reference. It is about seeing both arenas—teacher education and public schools—as sites of contestation: oppositional, full of contradictions and ambiguities.³⁶ But it is not intended as a totalizing structure for the reformulation of teacher education. That is, as Williams suggests, these are but some "possible ways forward."³⁷

Finally, this book is about finding ways of helping students make connections by anchoring our lessons to the things they know and can know with whatever limitations exist. It is about not teaching in abstractions that tend to elevate and mystify that which we cannot find words to explain. It is about connecting our words to things we know from experience and can make known to others

through experience as Pagano suggests.³⁸ Although I agree here with Pagano's assumption that we can make our language and our theories concrete within the frame of our experiences, and students can do this within their own experiential realm, I do not assume that the meanings of the words we use have fixed referents. In other words, for me the signification of meaning is not only relational/referential but it is also cultural. Therefore, my voicing of meanings—my own attempts to be concrete and referential—is not without problems even though my unpacking of particularly difficult theories may ease students' minds somewhat. When we build contexts for learners, then, we need to keep in mind the cultural embeddedness of language as well. Although we may build contexts for learning that attempt to speak to particular individuals with particular experiences in particular historical moments, we need to realize also that our attempts may not provide a perfect match for students—it may, on the other hand provide a fit. Thus the variance between match and fit may account for the diversity in meanings that students and teachers understand from vast experiences that range the personal to intellectual and the sociopolitical to cultural. Yet telling our own stories and creating spaces for students to tell theirs is to understand somehow that stories provide links and that all our stories are ways of anchoring the world, of attaching meaning to words, and of knowing/articulating what we know.

I have interspersed stories throughout this text in order to illustrate how I have used schooling narratives (drawn from books, films, television, etc.) paired with critical readings to draw out students own understandings of schooling experiences—to help provide links. Occasionally, students' stories join these pairings to offer yet another layer of meaning, discussion, and debate. Their stories, however, are not intended to make the case that narrative practice necessarily engenders reflection. I mean instead to pose questions here about the possibilities for reflective practice. In other words, I wish to invite discussion, not to suggest methods or to pronounce solutions to the complex problems of educational reform.

ENTERING A WIDER DEBATE

Complex problems do not have simple solutions, and all research is not meant to provide answers. In fact, as Miller and others suggest,

much research is meant to illuminate complexities and that illumination may simply provoke thought.³⁹ See, for example, Jesse Goodman's book *Elementary Schooling for Critical Democracy* also in the "Teacher Empowerment and School Reform" series.⁴⁰

In particular, Goodman's book illuminates the complexities around the notion of educating a democratic citizenry beginning with elementary school. His contribution to this series does much to illustrate the current popularization and oversimplification of the word empowerment, and it suggests as I do here that teachers—individuals operating as a collective—are integral to any school reform project that is based on principles of educating for freedom.

Another important contribution to this series and to the school reform literature, in general, is the Schwoch, White, and Reilly text entitled *Media Knowledge*.⁴¹ Their voices, as do the voices in this text, remind that our students experience an almost overwhelming amount of popular culture through media, which, therefore, makes popular media (e.g., television, radio, film, recorded music, magazines, news, and advertising) an important pedagogical site. Their questions challenge us to consider how consumers of media texts learn and how that learning either supports or undermines American education.

Giroux, Simon, and contributors raise similar questions about the relation between popular culture and pedagogy in a collection entitled *Popular Culture, Schooling and Everyday Life* (e.g., how students become self-reflective in the process of learning vis-à-vis popular culture, etc.).⁴² In support of texts that recognize and affirm the role popular media plays in the process of learning and in the production of knowledge of both teachers-to-be and of other students, in *Work Time* Evan Watkins suggests that little of what we do in our classrooms can overcome the powerful affects of popular culture unless we in some way decide to make use of that ready resource.⁴³ He critiques, in particular, the work of English departments and of those who would see their role as substantial in the acculturation process of students. Therefore, what needs to be remembered here and in other texts that offer possibilities for reform is that these are possibilities—"possible ways forward"; the larger our pool of resources, the more capable our teaching will be in this rapidly changing technological society.

My work then is situated within these other discourses, but it is grounded in the particular research and practice that names my

teaching project, the essence of which questions how we make sense of our public and private lives and what role narrative plays in that meaning making process. (Again, narrative is both the literatures we read—including films we watch/read and songs we hear/read—and the stories we tell as we read the world.) As I have reflected on my own experiences, I have wondered about the potential of aesthetic texts⁴⁴ to invoke reflection, to keep us questioning longer, and to keep uncertain that which is often claimed a certainty. In other words, I have wondered if a habit of reflectivity is possible, and if it is, can we link it to practices that are grounded in narrative activity? I have also considered the importance of self-reflection or reflexivity within the larger questions of reflective thinking and practice. This book then represents much of that wondering. In many ways it is a reflection on reflective practice. Though I describe the use of books, movies, television, music, and advertising in parity with professional texts (often critical theoretical works), I do not mean to suggest methodology. Rather, my intent here is to describe one possibility for narrative practice and how such practice might lead to critical inquiry and reflection. It is more a frame of reference than a particular course of study, more a surfacing of possibilities than a statement of probabilities. I do not wish to replace one orthodoxy with another; rather, I wish to offer a range of materials and some possible ways of thinking about the use of those materials that could potentially benefit any method of instruction or be adapted to any curriculum in which the goals of instruction are engagement with a subject, contemplation on both subject and experience, and meaning making. Not necessarily these particular materials but the kinds of materials these represent may illumine a possible unlit corner, thereby encouraging a wider political debate on school reform. Foremost, perhaps, is my desire to situate my teaching project among others who see teacher education as part of a larger social movement.

DISLOCATING THE BOUNDARIES OF THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

That movement, for me, is grounded in feminist principles and interpretations that suggest a move toward both/and constructs. Thus one goal here is to make a point about false dichotomies,

either/or constructs, and extremes of any sort. Tensions exist within the pages of this book. They exist partly because theories, research, and practice do seem to be more contradictory than complementary and partly because I tend to be somewhat eclectic in both my theoretical and interpretive choices. Although I am somewhat eclectic, I am also intentional.

The various interpretive methods I have used here are a rather deliberate attempt to illustrate the sort of uncertainty that accompanies contradictory practice. They are also to illumine something of my understanding of embodied narrative—narrative that takes on the presence of persons engaged with and situated in the world in a variety of ways. Drawing on my own understanding of feminist principles and practices, then, I assume narrative can be construed as a blending of public/private because the private in this society has been made public and therefore political—for example, the various ways sexuality is regulated, the structural hierarchies that govern positions of dominance and subordination in the workplace as well as in the home, the social roles implicit and often explicit within gendered categories, even the ways in which male and female students tend to be treated differently in classrooms.

Therefore, with the body at its center, narrative becomes, in part at least, a process because humans change and both condition and are conditioned by that process. In other words, as any text tends to change with its reader, narrative, as I have experienced and observed it, tends not simply to change and remain changed or fixed but to grow, to fluctuate, to shuttle back or forth recursively—the way we tend to live our lives. Narrative may also be described as an interactive practice with all the give and take of conversation when it values a multiplicity of voices and perspectives.

Moreover, unbounded by linear forms, this rendering attempts to locate the sense of narrative not narrowly as representation only, not merely a telling of events or an ordering of one's life, and not even simply as a mode of "story" knowing or imaginative play that leads to making sense of the fictive world and vicariously of the lived world. All of these and none of these may capture in its entirety the sense of complexity and range of boundless possibilities within narrative. Embodied narrative seems to be much more than the articulation of what is understood, more than the framing and understanding of one's experiences, more than play with words. I believe this applies to narratives we read, narratives we

write, and narratives we vocalize, and, indeed, even those we only think but never vocalize. Because I perceive that narrative is highly complex, it may be difficult to describe without lapsing into reductionism that limits as it defines. (What it may seem I am doing here.) If readers take this text as a model, narrative may be best characterized as expressed uncertainty; on the other hand, I would suggest no model exemplifies the range of narrative possibilities because no rendering of any such model can capture the infinite range of human possibilities.

Thus I have not chosen to remain within one theoretical framework or chosen one method of analysis because no such theory, philosophy, or method may provide the ultimate lens for making sense of this work, for writing this text, or for understanding anything today, tomorrow, or in the future. Instead I have drawn on philosophies, theories, and methods that have tended to provide the best fit within the multiple interpretations that stem from my own cultural positioning. As we each theorize our lives and understand theories against our lives, I perceive we write/read/voice/think and continually revise narratives and even meta-narratives of the gendered, raced, and classed identities our cultural positionings form and through which we forge new identities. Thus theorizing our worlds and experiences seems close to narrativizing our worlds, our experiences, and our identities.

For these reasons, then, at times I have sought to produce a class analysis on materialist culture,⁴⁵ and at times I have tended to be more psychoanalytic.⁴⁶ At other times I have examined relational contexts or cultural codes, an inquiry based in the science of signs or semiology, and sometimes I have drawn on phenomenological inquiry with an eye toward reconceptualizing.⁴⁷ Each approach works with and against the other and tends to broaden the lens on narrative through which I can make meaning. Yet I am not persuaded to deny the possibility that still other interpretations might make more sense. I defer meaning because I am uncertain and because a part of my project is to push on the boundaries of totalitarian discourses, particularly grand theory that claims some universal truth about the way the world works. The trouble with any single theory or method is its partiality.

For example, as political philosopher Michel Foucault has suggested, semiology as a study of communication tends to avoid the blood and guts of struggles/conflicts, and phenomenology seeks to locate a basis or genesis for a particular phenomenon that

does not show that phenomenon as an open-ended process that both conditions and is conditioned by (e.g., as in the effects of power within what Foucault calls “regimes of discourse” or the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse).⁴⁸ Another way to explain this is to explore what may occur when we study our present and past experiences as a means of coming to know ourselves (what seems to be a common phenomenological endeavor). It’s true; we may come to know something about ourselves, but we may not necessarily know ourselves entirely. Simply an examination of our beginnings (and even compared with present experiences and circumstances) may not necessarily take into account the various pushes and pulls of society or the ways in which we come to see ourselves with and against different social communities, positions, and relations of power. (It is because of these latter formations that knowing oneself and narrativizing one’s existence through any social or psycholinguistic formulation becomes a political question.) We may examine the mirror reflection, in other words, without examining its underside or backside. Put another way, we may not see through the looking glass, and even if we do, who we see changes continually.

Yet phenomenological inquiry together with other methods may contribute much. That is, each theory and each method may contribute to an understanding of the complexities of any subject of study located with and in specific phenomena/relations. For example, each in its own way may contribute to an understanding of how the histories, forces, strategies, and mechanisms of particular phenomena/relations are connected, extended, displaced, and transformed.

Revealed then in my own desire to remain uncertain is my bent toward interrogating anything that gives the appearance of being certain. The deconstructive approach to which I refer, however, may be more analogous with an erasure than with complete dismantling. In other words, an erasure clouds the impression of something so that one can see what is/appears to be as well as what could be (the underside of the mirror, if you will) and also what is embedded that is not so easily seen.⁴⁹ I am especially interested in questioning the political nature of relationships of difference—written between the lines (the relation of student to teacher is but one example).

Interrogation, then, has not been so much for the purposes of unraveling to find myself at the beginning; rather, my questioning

has been less a disentangling and more a continual flinging out and reeling in until I catch on something that makes some sense.⁵⁰ What may seem to be comfort with uncertainty is but a reflection of what I wish were true; what I am learning, however, may be called more appropriately a patience with uncertainty. And it is perhaps this patience that encourages me to take up various theoretical perspectives even those that seem opposed. For example, Derrida, to be specific, may have little need of a sign that signifies meaning. To Derrida there may be no signification of certain meaning, no relational context that assures one of the exact interpretation (or of choosing a single theoretical perspective that explains the complexities within a particular phenomenon). Nor is he in search of origins—beginnings shift; they change just as the experiences we live change the way we think of those experiences. In fact, Derrida says explicitly, “. . . I am very mistrustful whenever people . . . say, ‘This begins here.’”⁵¹ When trying to make sense of our own lives, then, our worlds—the personal and the public—why not think of what applies, why not fling out and reel in until something catches on?

Gloria Anzaldua makes this idea explicit for me when she writes:

[We need theories] that cross borders, blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods. We need theories that will point out ways to maneuver between our particular experiences and the necessity of forming our own categories and theoretical models for the patterns we uncover. We need theories that examine the implications of situations and look at what’s behind them. And we need to find practical applications for those theories. . . . We need to give up the notion that there is a “correct” way to write theory.⁵²

Yet this may be the greatest challenge we face.

For as a professional, I have not been taught that it’s okay to be tentative, uncertain, nor have I always felt comfortable in situations that seem to require trying what works (because even what works seems relative or situationally and ethically dependent on many things). As a teacher, should I have the answers or pretend I do even if I do not? Or can I just admit that everything seems slippery, questionable, and uncertain? As a researcher, I have often looked for solutions, answers, tried to do what seemed rational, logical, even sometimes tried to follow a linear path, but then

something always nagged at me, some question popped into my head that I could not get rid of and I'd be back where I began, asking more questions, having few if any answers. Sure, I fear not being taken seriously if I admit to such circular thinking, yet that is how thinking often is. Thinking is not an exact science; it's messy. So is theorizing. Comfortable with uncertainty? Not yet. Patient? Most of the time.

Permission to be uncertain, then, largely drawn from principles of deconstruction and feminist criticism, propels this book. The theories, philosophies, and methodologies I have relied on most assume prevailing social constructionist perspectives that suggest not only language but also communities generating that language are socially construed and that knowledges like other facts, texts, rules (including rules for social orders) are community generated. Foucault notes, however, that there is also a political economy involved in the generation of facts, texts, rules, and so on and that "the problem is not one of changing people's 'consciousness' or what's in their heads; but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth."⁵³ Therefore, because as Michael Ryan states, "philosophy cannot be apolitical and politics often rests on philosophic,"⁵⁴ my decision to remain eclectic is largely political and has much to do with an understanding of feminism that suggests, even promotes, border crossings.⁵⁵

Perhaps, Barbara Eckstein's description of deconstructive practice is most apt for my purposes here because it seems integrally tied to a notion that feminist inquiry seeks to reveal the political order within relationships that perpetuate oppression. She sees the process more in terms of examining the "tain of the mirror, the underside, the inside of political structures housed in private homes and public buildings."⁵⁶ Thus by focusing on differences *within* rather than differences *between*, internal differences, Barbara Johnson suggests one may begin to disclose sources of struggle for power that seem dependent on the desire for certainty—the desire for certain difference.⁵⁷ And Gayatri Spivak suggests questioning that discloses contradictions, or what she calls *complicities*, may actually work against the *will* to certainty, which creates only more oppositions.⁵⁸ Here I do not intend to suggest bipolarization necessarily by suggesting relations of difference though they do seem oppositionally positioned (e.g., mother to child, student to teacher, employee to employer, woman to man). What I do wish to suggest, however, is that it

may not be the nature of opposition per se but the nature of political codes that are culturally embedded within our language that tends to set one against the other.

Julia Kristeva's work provides some understanding here respective to the oppositional positioning of "otherness" established within semiological codes—cultural codes that help us read and categorize various (including political) ways of being in the world.⁵⁹ What Kristeva calls *otherness*, she seems to suggest may be a notion or concept of difference that could be radically altered if issues of power were not at the center of the relationship "driving" it then necessarily into certain difference rather than difference in question. She suggests it may be the political code or order—the way we see and come to mean or know in relation to power—that needs to be changed. Her use of *otherness* then suggests another way of viewing cultural codes—codes of powers, codes that signify value, codes that signify place and identity, how knowledges are invented, and so forth, indeed, a blurring of boundaries between margin and center. Here Kristeva suggests that a rupture or "scission" of the symbolic or what marks a threshold between opposing ("heterogeneous") realms, a "unity divided into signifier and signified," is always possible because of the ambiguity of language.⁶⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa describes this rupture as "explod[ing] the neat boundaries of the half dozen categories of marginality that define us and . . . bring us [face to face] with our own [histories]."⁶¹ In describing the break between signifier and the signified, Kristeva is also describing a break that represents a vision of new possibilities, turning the inside out, reversing or inverting the order of things. Her analysis of otherness suggests the need for different understandings of what particular signs signify, indeed, of what they are capable of signifying.

Kristeva's description of other or otherness is not unlike Simone de Beauvoir's description of her own otherness in the service of seeking a more authentic self—an otherness that became vulgarity to her family when she denounced her father's bourgeois ideals and took a position against the status quo.⁶² For though Kristeva's "other" is often defined in Lacanian terms⁶³ as the "place of the signifier," she suggests signification is more a process and the "place" to which Lacan refers more a boundary with social implications than a base—a kind of "social censorship"—positioning the other away from whatever symbolizes the status quo. The "split unification" symbolized by the mother/child—an

embodied both/and construct—is “always produced by a rupture and is impossible without it. . . . Not only is . . . this division . . . the result of a break [in cognitive psychological processes] . . . *preceding meaning and signification* [emphasis mine] . . . [it is] already regulated [by] drives. . . . That language is a defensive construction reveals its ambiguity.”⁶⁴

An example from Frederick Nietzsche’s study of the evolution of morals may help to explain Kristeva’s concern over what seems in social practice to be a kind of fixed cultural encoding. In his historical account, Nietzsche wrote that words like *noble* and *good* could be traced to aristocratic origins; thus, words like *common* and *plebeian* and *low* were translated into the concept of bad.⁶⁵ But Kristeva’s notion of scission suggests breaking with a fixed referent or signification so that, for example, words such as *low* or *common* no longer refer to a particular concept, and otherness is open to multiple interpretations—in other words, an epistemological break, a rupture that inverts meaning. And to this notion Derrida extends writing as a specific case in which language escapes signification.⁶⁶ Kristeva’s “drives” that function beneath the surface of the semiotic (what in my reading extends the semiotic beyond structural linguistics) may then account both for her notion of rupture as well as for Derrida’s sense in which writing escapes signification, because as Kristeva claims, social practices inscribe notions of sameness and difference and writing is but expressed social practice.⁶⁷

Kristeva’s work provides links with poststructuralists’, deconstructionists’, and French feminists’ perspectives and suggests that social practices that regulate language (and also mark its ambiguity) are both united and split at the threshold of desire—on the one hand, desire for power (e.g., power to prevent change); on the other hand, desire for change (e.g., change that emasculates power). That is, language itself does not seem to prevent progress; rather, social practices (based in desire) are responsible for concepts like otherness referring to that which is outside the mainstream, the dominant culture, the norm—that is, other than white male privilege, other than heterosexual, other than politically right, other than teaching that which upholds patriarchy and tradition, and so forth.

In addition to those scholars who have informed my understanding of feminists’ methods of inquiry and those who have offered various lenses for reading and interrogating words and

worlds are the scholars whose philosophies and theories have served as underpinnings for this project on embodied/imaginative narrative as a linguistic act of knowing and way of framing educational inquiry. For example, as regards the constitutive nature of language for purposes of world making, Alfred Schutz's philosophy of multiple interpretations of reality has particularly guided my thinking.⁶⁸ His notion of "wide-awakeness"—that is, to be deliberate and open to possibilities—describes for me the necessary prerequisite to understanding and accepting multiple interpretations. Maxine Greene's work also references notions of wide-awakeness as "committed rationality," deliberate action, and surfacing possibilities especially through the study of imaginative literatures and in dialogue with others.⁶⁹

Additionally and with respect to linguistically constructed multiple realities, I follow Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogical processes that suggests that multiple voices—that is, discourse communities and individual speakers and writers—act on and contribute meanings/understandings that construct discursive practices.⁷⁰ A distinction is made in this text between dialectical processes and dialogical processes primarily because of Bakhtin's emphasis on multiplicity. Yet I admit this sets up a somewhat false dichotomy because opposition/tension seen in traditional dialectics no doubt arises in any dialogue that is based on difference and multiplicity. In traditional dialectics, for every thesis there is its opposite, a radical antithesis, an alternative thesis standing in opposition—thesis and antithesis at polarized extremes. But dialogical processes suggest multiple meanings/possibilities arising from multiple voicings (with self and others), which create tensions that may be entertained, taken up, considered, and multiple paths chosen rather than a singular path. Though Raymond Williams offers what may appear to suggest a kind of thesis/antithesis interplay, his notion of emergent meanings and practices that combine and extend traditional (residual) meanings suggests, perhaps, not replacement of one idea or way of being for another but an opening up of possibilities integrating old with new.⁷¹ Or as Foucault suggests, a kind of reassembling of "the sets of transformations in the regime of discourse necessary and sufficient for people to use [different] words . . . for people to be able to look at things from such and such an angle and not [just] *one* [angle]." ⁷²—a dynamic process suggesting a wide range of possibilities rather than a fixed entity and instead of "one" alternative, what seems closer to both/and.