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**STORY IN CONTEXT:
A STUDY IN THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF TEACHERS'
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES**

By

Stephen A. Swidler

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Teacher Education

1995

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STORY IN CONTEXT: A STUDY IN THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF TEACHERS' PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES

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Educational research is presently beset by a fascination with things narrative. The study of teachers and teaching seems to be a locus of narrative's allure. In the effort to better access and more authentically represent the of teachers' work and life experiences, educational researchers have found story a resonant object of study and storytelling a comforting method. Unfortunately much of this interest in story has failed to take into account the rich theoretical and empirical traditions of inquiry in folkloric studies. This study draws upon the intellectual tradition of folklore and story as *performance*.

Through three detailed case studies of personal experience narratives told in a group of critical democratic educators, the author provides an ethnographic framework for studying these conversational personal narratives as performances. This performance perspective sees even the everyday conversational narrative as a form of verbal art that, despite its discrete and portable form, is inexorably bound to context. This study is concerned with the expressive narrative form, the culturally defined scene in which it is enacted, and the unique renderings of narrative in performance. Here, these are, respectively, the personal experience narrative, the context of the group life of like-minded educators centering on critical democracy and intimate conversation, and personal experience narration or storytelling. As a form of verbal art that occurs in context, the personal experience narrative performance functions as a form of persuasion that seeks dually to maintain the cohesion of the group and to stay the course

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For my parents

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completion of this work is the culmination of my pursuit to be both personally true and intellectually rigorous. Education is a field that tempts researchers to try to remedy the ills of schooling through the arrogance of research. Research and its findings are not the end of inquiry. As we should know, educational research is but a partial beginning to the intellectual and pragmatic improvements of the lives of teachers and children who are thrown into a life of mutual dependence. Understanding teachers' works and lives through the stories they tell is one way to contribute to this partial beginning. We have as much to learn from them as they do from us. Listening to how one artfully narrates one's experience has been the goal of this study. I could not have accomplished this goal without the support of following people. I owe many debts of gratitude.

I owe the greatest acknowledgment of gratitude to the members of the Teacher Forum who allowed me to join their group, participate in their conversations, record their words, ask them naive questions, and scrutinize their stories. They showed me that not only can teachers gather to talk about their work, but that they can create and maintain new worlds that help them answer the question "Who am I?" This gathering of educators showed me that teachers have the wherewithal to fend off a hostile world that would have them be something they'd rather not. I owe Clare special thanks since without her belief in this group, and that it was worthy of study, this dissertation would never have happened.

Professor Christopher Clark, my dissertation chair, took a chance on an unlikely doctoral student and became my main source of intellectual support. He allowed and encouraged me to follow a vision of what I wanted this dissertation to be. He inspired

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courage and confidence in my efforts to see story as a cultural as well as individual artifact. He demonstrated the patience of a midwife as I muddled through ideas of personal narrative as performance, that ultimately became the core of this study. Chris embodied what it means to be good to one's graduate students. I only hope that other doctoral students could experience such support in the pursuit of a personal and scholarly vision. For this I am forever in his debt.

Eliot Singer is behind this study more than any other single individual. His scholarly concerns in cultural anthropology, folklore, sociolinguistics, and literary theory are evident throughout. He was first my fieldwork teacher. From him I learned not only the technique of ethnographic inquiry but the theoretical underpinnings of the study of cultural phenomena in general. He then directed me to the field of folklore as the richest empirical and theoretical source for research on narrative. His insistence that these intellectual traditions be accessed for the benefit of educational research paid off. His availability for long conversation, often over chili dogs, and reliability for accurate feedback and suggestions were invaluable to the completion of this study.

I owe thanks to my dissertation committee. I am grateful to Doug Campbell for his close reading of this manuscript and Lynn Paine for the insightful attention to the gendered nature of teaching and of the Teacher Forum. I especially want to acknowledge the support of Helen Featherstone and Jay Featherstone. Their personal support and intellectual humility have been gifts I hope to emulate someday. I learned from these educators that the life of the mind is at the core of education and that our task is to help develop—in Jay's Deweyan phrase—habits of mind that help us create the schools and the society we want to inhabit.

I also want to thank members of my study group: David Labaree, Cleo Cherryholmes, Dirck Roosevelt, Mr. Bill Rosenthal, and Steve Mattson. This group provided an invaluable alternative space for intellectual conversation that I would not have otherwise experienced in my graduate education. They, therefore, indirectly

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supported this work. The combination of this group's playfulness and serious intellectual critique provides a guiding image for the life of an academic.

I thank Sam Hollingsworth for her unflinching emotional support. As my teacher, she showed the transformative power of conversation and the moral necessity of faith in teachers to understand and take control of their lives. She also showed me the necessity of passion and romance in an academic life.

My deepest debt of gratitude goes to my wife Ruth Heaton. She provided a model of success in completing her own dissertation of personal vision. She provided an immeasurable amount of support in her willingness to read and listen to my ideas, wanting and half-baked. If the amount of the care and concern Ruth provided me during the period of this study is in any sense a harbinger of the care and concern our child will receive I am assured that we will be all right in our life together.

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Through three detailed case studies of personal experience narratives told in a group of critical democratic educators, the author provides an ethnographic framework for studying these conversational personal narratives as performances. This performance perspective sees even the everyday conversational narrative as a form of verbal art that, despite its discrete and portable form, is inexorably bound to context. This study is concerned with the expressive narrative form, the culturally defined scene in which it is enacted, and the unique renderings of narrative in performance. Here, these are, respectively, the personal experience narrative, the context of the group life of like-minded educators centering on critical democracy and intimate conversation, and personal experience narration or storytelling. As a form of verbal art that occurs in context, the personal experience narrative performance functions as a form of persuasion that seeks dually to maintain the cohesion of the group and to stay the course

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

ART OF PERSUASION:

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No one can experience another's experience. All that we have to account for another's experience is what she tells us. What a person tells us of a given experience is not the experience itself. Rather, it is a presentation of that experience, a text, an artifice. Communication of experience is always a creation and presentation of artifice. The artifice of presented experience occurs in many forms that we as cultural beings can recognize, understand, and employ. These are shared forms to which we give validity and license, even when we acknowledge their distortion for the sake of presentation. We give ourselves over to these items of presentation and we feel we can sense what another person's experience is like. We are moved not by the experience itself, but by the presented artifice of experience, which we take to be the experience. It is the effort to move others through form, which is both artful and artificial, that is at the heart of the presentation of experience. Presentation is an aesthetic effort. It seeks to persuade others and self of the vitality and coherence of experience. It is in the vital and coherent presentation of experience, through the available cultural forms of expression, that we are able to connect with one another and feel we belong, even if momentarily, to another's life.

With these thoughts I began an inquiry into the personal experience narrative as it emerged in a small group of educators. I spent a year and a half attending the monthly meetings of a group I call the Teacher Forum. The fifteen or so members of the Teacher

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Forum meet to create and maintain an alternative conversation about the purposes of their work. This non-traditional, or at least traditionally radical, conversation centered around “critical democracy” and was enveloped in an ethos of intimate talk. The Teacher Forum, at time of data collection, had become a place where a diverse group of teachers—middle and secondary school English educators, elementary teachers, community college instructors, and teacher educators—could come to discuss their experiences and lives as educators. This discussion required them to do so in a critical way. The group’s meetings became a place to convince themselves of the validity of experience, struggle and pain to overcome the business-as-usual, functionalist, or otherwise “common” understanding of what school is for and what teaching the young is about.

As a part-time identity affiliation for its members, the Teacher Forum is what I call a folk frame of reference. This type of folk group serves as a frame of and for sensibilities and dispositions. Teacher Forum members have created, or joined, and seek to maintain a community of vital ways of speaking around these sensibilities and dispositions. The primary ways of speaking include the critical/democratic and the intimate, or “getting personal.” The personal experience narrative works with and between these primary ways of speaking as a common cultural convention of expressive utterance. Though the personal experience narrative is common, known, and used widely in our society, it comes to life and only makes sense in context. The small group context of the Teacher Forum, with explicit goals and purposes and tacit, emergent rules for conversation and sociable behavior, form the cultural and communicative matrix in which the personal narrative arises.

In this chapter I introduce my reasons for looking at the personal narrative the way I do. I present the theoretical backdrop against which I make sense of the stories I heard in the Teacher Forum. I attempt to present for the reader a view that casts the personal experience narrative as a variant of the art of persuasion in small group life. As rhetoric, the personal experience narrative must be *performed* since it dramatizes

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The Personal Experience Narrative and Group Life

Teachers getting together to talk about the nature of their work is not an uncommon phenomenon. Teachers join and form groups for various reasons, though, for the most part, groups are organized around teachers' professional development. Such organization can range from enhancement of teacher's learning around subject matter, such as mathematics (e.g., H. Featherstone, et. al., 1993) or writing. Others are formed around thinking about children and how teachers can learn from them in order to develop assessment and curriculum (e.g., Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative, 1984). They may be university-initiated study groups (e.g., through professional development schools). They may be district sponsored inservices seeking the professional enhancement of its teachers. Sometimes they are part of teacher research networks (see *Among Teachers* newsletter). And sometimes, as in the case of the Teacher Forum, teachers gather away from their schools and districts and away from university agendas.

Teacher groups are not only places for professional development and learning. A more holistic view would encourage us to look at teachers' membership in groups as more than opportunities for greater learning and increased expertise in instruction. As communities that must be created (or joined) and maintained, teacher groups can be seen, among other things, as identity resources. In other words, group affiliation helps a teacher to answer the question "Who am I?" As all identities are social in origin, a teacher draws from social groupings to which she belongs to constitute her identity as an educator.

The view of teacher groups as identity resources is a variant of the larger notion that we are all members in multiple groups. No one in modern American society belongs

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to a single group that determines identity. Though we all may belong to and associate with a primary group (e.g., ethnic), we seem to draw differentially upon our membership in various groups to constitute our identities (Bauman, 1972a). "An individual's sense of identity," notes folklorist Sandra Stahl (1989) "grows out of a variety of sources and envelops several specific kinds of sensibilities within it" (p. 34). She has identified eight folk group categories "that both teach and allow the individual to express the sensibilities which collectively help form her or his identity" (p. 35). These include the family, ethnicity, religion, place or geographic locality, age, gender, social network (aesthetic preferences or taste), and occupation.

Stahl paints with a broad brush and fails to account for the diversity or complexity within a given folk group category. Her division of primary (face to face) and secondary groupings, though, implies this is possible. I want to propose that teachers do not uniformly belong to the occupational category of "teacher" as a sufficient defining dimension of their identities. Rather, a teacher who chooses to join a group of teachers is choosing to expand and include a resource not only for her learning and development, but also for her identity. If Joseph Featherstone is right and we take to heart what many biographies and autobiographies of educators tell us, then teaching is "a life" (1993, personal communication). We can extend the notion of the occupational group to potentially multiple groupings for those teachers who opt for membership in them. We can then conceive that a teacher's identity can be significantly wrapped up in her part-time affiliation with such groups and that she can move beyond the institutionally inherited and stereotypical identity of "teacher."

This view of differential identity (Bauman, 1972a) points to the importance group membership can have for teachers. Groups take on a deeper hue as they are more complex and grounded in their social and symbolic organization than an independent variable in teacher learning and development. Groups are complex resources that must be maintained if they are to act as significant resources to help answer the question

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“Who am I as an educator?” It forces us to ask What is the nature of groups that work as identity resources for teachers? How are such groups as communities created? How do they cohere?

Ends and Means

Whatever the specific nature of a teacher group, it is faced with at least two basic tasks. One, the group must define its goals and purposes for existence adequately to sustain itself. Purposes and goals for gathering are often implicit and multiple, and they may evolve or change. Sometimes new goals emerge from the life of the group. At any given time, the majority of a group’s members will be able to minimally articulate the purpose of their group, even when those purposes seem self-evident, unreflective or commonsensical. Second, groups must develop means for fulfilling their stated purposes and meeting their goals, stated and unstated. Means must work to accommodate and negotiate a group’s goals, which maybe internally contradictory. Sometimes the very means become part of the goals of the group (e.g., sociable interaction, see Bauman, 1972b).

Groups that consistently meet over time inevitably create local and part-time cultures that articulate their purposes and goals and give rise to the means of reaching them (G. Fine, 1979). Moreover, a group creates emergent features, unique to that group, that are beyond the personalities of any of the individual members. They resemble what folklorists call “folk groups” by virtue of *shared* lore, expressive traditions, and values embodied in their social and symbolic organization (Oring, 1986). Groups develop and employ cultural expressive practices, which entail norms and rules for their use. Cultural or folk practices linked to group life serve to reach the goals a groups sets for itself while at the same time serve group cohesion and maintenance.

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Among such expressive practices is storytelling. As folklorists have long pointed out (e.g., Brunvand, 1968; Dorson, 1983), story or narrative plays an important role in folk group life. Various forms of folk narrative (e.g., folktale, legend, myth, proverb, parable) embody a group's values and transmit traditional wisdom and knowledge. As folklore, stories serve the functions of folklore. In William Bascom's (1965) classic formulation, the basic functions include entertainment, validating culture, education, and maintaining culture. Oring (1976) later persuasively integrated validation and maintenance of culture. As a whole, the functions of expressive folklore, according to Bascom, can be "grouped together under the single function of *maintaining the stability of culture*" (emphasis added, p. 297). In folkloric terms, then, the expressive practice of narrative or storytelling is implicated in the validation/maintenance of group culture and its reason for existence (purpose), while it seeks to entertain and educate.

Narrative Inquiry

To view storytelling in the service and maintenance of group life is new to educational research. The current wave of interest in narrative in education derives from the quest by researchers to understand and present particular educational experiences. More specifically, the use and study of narrative holds the potential to gain a deeper insight and meaning of teachers' lives and teaching phenomena that has eluded more discrete and detached study (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), "narrative inquiry" into teaching seeks dually to provide a method (storytelling) and phenomena (the stories of teaching/learning experience). The narrative study of teaching sees "education as construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other lives" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). For the educational researcher, storytelling is a comforting method, and story a resonant object

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of inquiry, as they provide way for readers to connect with educators lives in and out of the classroom.

Narrative inquiry in and about teaching and teachers has gone a long way to broadening our understanding of teachers' experience and how they make sense of experience. Use of narrative has the advantage of making accessible and available the experience of underrepresented, dominated, or otherwise silenced groups that may go unnoticed by researchers (see Hollingsworth, 1994). Narrative points to the storied nature of experience generally (Bruner, 1991), and specifically to the experiences of teachers who spend their lives and careers organizing complex knowledges, materials, and contexts for instruction (e.g., Goodson, 1988).¹ Despite the current interest in and proliferation of studies of narrative in education, no one has taken a close look at the role narrative plays in community creation and maintenance. The studies of teacher narrative seem to be focused on referential content—what stories are about—and function seems to be limited to the assumption that narrative is a vehicle for the teacher's "voice," often equated with "experience." I am unaware of any studies that have taken into consideration specific form or genre properties of the stories that teachers tell. Nor am I aware of any studies in education that speak to the role or function that story plays in the social life of teachers. In short, no one seems to have paid attention to the form-function relationship of story and context or the poetic and situated character of story.

The study of personal narrative presented here is an attempt to locate a specific narrative form as it arises naturally within a group of educators. It seeks to examine how the personal narrative, as a genre of oral literature, works within the Teacher

¹The range of "narrative" in educational studies is vast. Nearly everything can be viewed in one way or another as a "story." Autobiography, life history, research reports, teacher research, the list is endless. I am only pointing out here that within the explosion of interest in narrative in education, I have yet to see any research that has drawn upon the traditions of studying narrative and storytelling found in folklore and allied fields. It is not my intention, nor would it be useful to this study, to review the vast literature that can come under the rubric "narrative inquiry" in education or stories of experience, since this work has little or no theoretical connection to that which I use and explore as the poetic and functional dimensions of teachers' stories.

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Forum. Further, it explores how the personal narrative form relates to its social function and the ongoing maintenance of the Teacher Forum as an identity resource. In short, this study ethnographically explores how the personal experience narrative works poetically to keep the Teacher Forum coherent as its members maintain a place for alternative conversation about critical democracy in education.

What to Make of the Personal Narrative?

How to make sense of the personal experience story? The difficulty with exploring personal narratives is that they can be conceived in two broad, but distinct, ways. For one, the personal narrative is a *text* produced by an author. While it is not a written text, it is an oral text. And, when collected, transcribed and examined in print, we can see that it is indeed a narrative with formal properties of a genre of oral literature (e.g., Labov, 1967; Stahl, 1989). Secondly, the personal experience narrative is also a discursive *event*. Naturally occurring personal narratives typically arise in conversation. In the koan of folklorist Katherine Young (1987), story is an “enclave” in conversation. As a discursive event, personal experience narrative makes its way to and from ongoing conversation between two or more persons. At bare minimum, story is an extended turn at talk, where the regular rules of turn taking are suspended (Coulthard, 1977). A narrator must frame her utterances as story and communicate that frame to the auditors where they allow the turn (i.e., the time) to tell a story. Furthermore, the narrator and audience are in a coordinated relationship. Conversation and story are embedded in a context defining such a relationship.

These two views of the personal narrative may seem incompatible, requiring the investigator to pursue either a text-centered or sociolinguistic event-centered direction of inquiry. As text, oral stories can be regarded as items to be collected and inscribed in transcription. They can be analyzed for their narratological structure against a standard of what counts as narrative. Personal narratives do have a *form* which is recognizable

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and can be studied for their literary-ness. According to the generic properties, they need not be examined with extensive consideration of the narrator or the context. Meaning in this view is textual and resides (and, therefore, can be found) in the structure of a text.

But personal experience stories also occur in time and space as oral communication. Story is told and heard during conversation in a situation inhabited by at least two people with something in common. Personal experience narrative must mark itself off from conversation and the auditors and narrators must have mutual understanding of when a story begins and ends, when conversation is suspended, and when it is to be resumed. In this way, interlocutors must agree on the definition of the situation (Goffman, 1959). They must agree that the utterances are *keyed* (Goffman, 1974) to one discursive structure or another. In other words, personal experience narratives live a sociolinguistic life and this requires a discursive analysis of story. Like all utterances, stories as events are situated and their form and meaning are bound to the socio-cultural spaces in which they emerge. Meaning in this view is not found in the narrative text but in the shared understanding of what story is and what a story is about.

Clearly each of these views has merit. Texts show story's poetic dimensions; story events reveal socio-cultural and local significance. Focusing on their merits simultaneously reveals their drawbacks. The textual approach sees oral literature having a life of its own, disconnected from cultural spaces in which they arise. Stories are treated as discrete objects that can be detached from their socio-cultural contexts and re-situated. Out of context, stories are but partial records of situated human behavior. The sociolinguistic-event approach sees personal narratives as "expressions, reflections, or support mechanisms for cultures and social structures" (Bauman, 1986, p. 2). Stories in this view are merely "icons" of social and cultural events. The narrative, or poetic, construction of stories is subordinated to the socio-cultural

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Ethnographic Concerns

As an ethnographer interested in the stories that teachers tell, I want to look contextually at storytelling as it naturally occurred in the Teacher Forum.

Ethnographically, I assume that any organized grouping of individuals creates and sustains some patterning of their activities, and that members of any social grouping inscribe and attribute shared meaning to regularly occurring practices. Story and storytelling must then fit some regular redundancy in the Teacher Forum as a frame of reference for its members. Further, I assume that storytelling and the personal narrative exist precisely because they serve some function, that storytelling *makes sense* as a communicative and expressive device in Teacher Forum meetings. While the personal experience narrative is a ubiquitous form in our society, it works in locally meaningful ways.

Personal narrative is also rather idiosyncratic. The personal experience narrative is typically a first person account of events, to which the audience was not a party. In the Teacher Forum specifically, the members bring their experiences and narrate them for the uninitiated. The stories told are almost always new to most others in the group, and always new to at least one person. Personal experience stories in the Teacher Forum are novel in their content, which lends a novel quality to the stories. Due to their uniqueness, I do not want to reduce the stories to a common or singular voice. I want to account for the differences in the stories and show their artistic rendering. I want account for both the regular patterning of a conventional expressive form in a given context but not to diminish the individuality of the stories created by authors who are trying to elicit a reaction from an audience.

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My ethnographic concerns parallel those of the narrative text/event split. On the one hand, I want to account for the vernacular, the very local and meaningful use and function of the personal experience narrative as a naturally occurring expression. I want to show how the personal experience narrative is a useful convention in the communicative scheme of the Teacher Forum. I also want to portray how the people in the Teacher Forum understand the personal experience narrative and why they employ it as a medium for sharing experience to which they presumed others could connect. On the other hand, I hope to be able to see the unique renderings of story in the Teacher Forum. I want to examine not simply referential content, but the unique variations of the personal narrative form, as a definable and identifiable genre. I want to be able to examine the play upon the convention that the members of the Teacher Forum use to present not only new content, but to create a compelling representation of experience. Following Roger Abrahams (1972), I hope to see the relationship of individual expression in relation to the order of Teacher Forum:

Underlying the activities of all groups is the constant potential of communicative ordering...[a] latent order. As latency, order permits a certain freedom of action, an experimentation that makes the final sense of order more complex and at the same time buried more deeply in the operating mind (p. 76).

In short, I want to be able to examine the poetics of this most ubiquitous verbal expression.

The Performance Perspective

In order to deal with the seemingly incommensurable foci of the personal narrative as text *and* event, and to follow my desire to consider the contextual grounding of story and the poetic qualities of everyday personal narrative, I draw upon a substantive trend found in folklore studies. Over the last thirty years anthropologically oriented folklorists have pursued an approach to folkloric items as *performance* (e.g.,

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Briggs, 1988; Bauman, 1974; Abrahams, 1968; Georges, 1969). Broadly speaking, Abrahams (1972) calls performance

a demonstration of culture, one of the products of men getting together with other men and working out expressive means of operating together. To do this, the group stylizes their interactions, often by introducing symbolic objects and movements into their encounters so they may economically coordinate their activities (p. 75).

The performance-centered approach seeks a re-evaluation of the folkloric text. The text is still retained as an important record of communicative events. However, as an expressive item of communication, the text is “the product of artistic communication in small groups” (Ben-Amos, 1972). No longer the static signification of some set of social or cultural happenings, they are expressive items, symbolically ordered to work for a group of people. Texts are different than other modes of experience in that they are expressive utterances that “come to life only through the special organized and habitual action called performance” (Abrahams, 1968, p. 145). Texts are seen as expressive items that are “enacted” in culturally defined scenes (contexts) by a performer for and with an audience (Bauman, 1974). Texts in this way are emergent within group social life, not merely “out there” to be “discovered.”

More specifically, Bauman (1986) defines performance implicated in oral literature, as

a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content (p. 3).

As a form of expressive communication, the item that is performed draws attention to itself. Because a text in performance is stylized, it draws attention to itself not simply because of its content (i.e., some reported experience); it draws attention to its form, its artifice. In folklore, these are items of various ilk (e.g., the tall tale, riddles, ballads, even gossip). A narrator or performer is in a coordinated relationship with an

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audience, which forms some sort of group existence. The performer of a text indicates with and to the audience that she has assumed responsibility for enacting a text.

Performances are thus “framed” as stylized communication (Bauman, 1974; Goffman, 1971). Texts are enacted not only to deliver their referential content(s), but to display the effectiveness of the textual form and a narrator’s acumen. Therefore, a performance is “offered for the enhancement of experience, through the present appreciation of the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself;” Oral performance of a text “may be understood as the enactment of the poetic function, the essence of spoken artistry” (Bauman, 1986, p. 3).

Ethnographic Framework: Three-Fold Question

A performance perspective views narrative texts as forms of verbal art, and provides a “concretely empirical framework for the comprehension of oral literature as social action by directing attention to the actual conduct of artistic verbal performance in social life” (Bauman, 1986, p. 3). Because of the situated nature of expressive acts, performance-centered inquiry provides a three-part ethnographic framework for examining texts as artistic communication. Attention is afforded to:

- 1) *textual form*
- 2) *context* in which a text is enacted involving an audience and a performer
- 3) *performance* itself, where the expressive utterance is understood and “framed” as performance (i.e., emergence of the text in an enacted communicative event).

For this study, these dimensions are:

- A) *personal narrative* as a genre of oral literature
- B) *part-time small group* as bounded context for communicative action, interpretation and evaluation

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When the significant dimensions of form and context are established, then the “why” and “how” questions about emergence in performance can be addressed. This three part framework provides the questions that structure the inquiry of this dissertation. I outline below how these questions can be used as tools for exploring the emergence of personal narrative in a group of educators struggling with their non-traditionality, and I orient the reader to the analysis of the stories.

Personal Narrative Form

The personal narrative as textual object is constrained by our ability to define it as a genre of oral literature. As artifice, the personal experience narrative calls attention to itself as a distinctive discursive form. As such, it has been defined as having three features: 1) implied truthfulness, 2) dramatic narrative structure, and 3) the *self-same* of the story’s narrator and the story’s main character and/or its chief witness (Stahl, 1989). Though the personal narrative is a ubiquitous form of communication, with a seemingly unplanned quality, it retains generic features that identify it as personal narrative. Indeed, personal narrative can be subsumed or integrated within a number of other forms of narrative (e.g., stories of supernatural experiences or UFO abduction). But the following underlying features mark the telling of a personal narrative.

Implied Truthfulness. First, the personal experience narrative must be about “true” events. The narrator must maintain truthfulness or credibility of the implied assertion that the events recounted in the story “really” did occur. The story is also presented as idiosyncratic, in that it has more or less novel content and the events are usually not known to the audience or to at least some members of the audience. Since

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auditors do not have direct access to the events (unless they were there), and never to the narrator's experience of events (i.e., they cannot have the same experience of the events as the narrator), the narrator must use those narrative or literary devices which imply truthfulness (e.g., reported speech).

Dramatic Narrative Structure. Second, the personal experience narrative is a *narrative* and therefore must entail a minimal dramatic structure. Stories differ from broad reflections on experience in that the latter do not address action or event sequence. Reflection on experience is not necessarily the same as narration of *an* experience (see Dewey, 1934a). Though it can be argued that all story is a reflection on experience, not all reflection on experience is story. Story must have something resembling: a beginning, middle, and end; conflict or complicating action; inclusion of, or pointing to, a resolution. With regard to the conversational personal experience narrative, these are typically single episode anecdotes. Though there are competing definitions of what counts as essential components of a narrative (see Robinson, 1981), they at least agree that stories are a specific order of discourse that has complicating action of some concrete events.

Self-Same. Third, the personal experience narrative is distinct from other narratives in that the narrator is usually the chief character in the story (Stahl, 1989). To this feature I add the qualifier that if the narrator is not the chief character, she is at least a credible witness to the events. In order to claim authority for truthfulness of the story and that the events in it unfolded in a minimally dramatic way, the storyteller offers herself as intimately involved (who better to know the events than a person involved?). The personal experience narrative would seem to hinge on this attribute in that truthfulness and drama can be applied to several narrative forms (e.g., legends). Personal involvement is what makes a personal narrative personal. A personal narrative is "keyed" (Goffman, 1974) to real events that bear storyworthy significance because of the narrator's involvement.

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Narrative performance happens in observable and definable contexts. Personal experience narratives are no exception. Bauman (1986) reminds:

Oral performance, like all human activity, is situated, its form, meaning, and functions rooted in culturally defined scenes or events—bounded segments of the flow of behavior and experience that constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation, and evaluation (p. 3).

Context is vital not only for the performance perspective, but to further articulate the meaningfulness of the personal narrative. As noted, the personal narrative is probably a universal communicative form in our society. Like conversation, it is easy to talk about the personal experience story with little or no reference to context. “I heard this story the other day...” often requires little explanation of when and where. A story is a discrete thing that pops up all over the place. Paradoxically, this makes the issue of context essential to the study of personal narrative. Story performances and story forms are only coherent with a sufficient understanding of the context in which they emerge. They are situated events that take place, in Bauman’s words, in culturally defined scenes. Context determines when and whether a story can count as a native form of performance, and not a mere reflection of the analyst’s desire to see all narrative as performance.

When is a context? In order to deal with context, I invoke a definition of what context is *not*. I follow the maxim of folklorist Katherine Young (1987) that context is not the “surround.” Context consists of that which is *relevant* to the object under study. Context is not only contiguous to an item or event, but relevant to it. Not everything in the surround is relevant, and not all that is context is in the surround. A mere listing of environmental features does not a context make. Establishment of context is as much an analytic task of the researcher seeking to explain a given phenomenon as it is part of the world in which the item emerges *en parole*.

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To account for a context that addresses relevant features of personal narrative emergence, I have chosen look to the level of the social and symbolic organization of the Teacher Forum. I call the Teacher Forum a “folk frame of reference.” It is difficult to conceive of the Teacher Forum as a full blown folk group due to the long intervals between the group’s meetings and the lack of sustained communication among members outside the meetings. But the Teacher Forum does manifest features of a folk group all the same in that it brings members together and allows them a minimal amount of shared lore as it relates to their values and shared communicative forms like the personal experience narrative. The Teacher Forum acts as an identity resource for its members. As educators have multiple perceived identities in our society (by parents, students, school administrators, politicians, etc.), the Teacher Forum becomes a meaningful identity resource for its members as it publicly pursues a alternative view of teaching and schooling.

Framing the Teacher Forum. In order to conceive the most relevant features of a frame of reference, I cast the Teacher Forum as composed of “primary frames.” Primary frames make up what Goffman (1974) calls a “primary framework.” Primary frames help us organize social phenomena we encounter and which we employ. Primary frames allow “the user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences” (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). Primary frames involve explicit *and* implicit rules. They are broad and make up a *primary* framework since it “is chiefly relevant and provides the first answer to the question ‘What is going on here?’ ” (ibid., p. 25). In terms of oral communication, primary frames are frames *of* utterances, and frames *for* utterances. In other words, frames-*of* serve interpretation of utterances; frames-*for* guide the practice of utterances.

I characterize the Teacher Forum as having two primary frames that govern utterances. These frames are the context in and against which all talk occurs. First, the Teacher Forum is primarily framed by its ideological definition. That is, the group has a

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publicly defined set of goals and purposes that center around the promotion of *critical democracy* (see Goodman, 1992). The group is understood as a forum for fostering a discourse about educational practices and policies in a critical vein with an eye on democracy. Critical democracy has its roots in the philosophy of John Dewey and critical educational theorists (e.g., Paulo Freire, 1971). This discourse has a rather radical tone as it takes a critical stance to conventional views of schooling as a functionalist endeavor, serving the ends of a market economy. A critical stand sees society and the market economy as inherently unfair (i.e., racist, sexist, and classist). Schooling, in the critical-democratic view, is for raising consciousness about the social world and for promoting a healthy habit of critique of a society which students will eventually inhabit and lead.

The second primary frame is more implicit or emergent within the life of the group. This frame carries the implicit rules governing sociable interaction during the Teacher Forum's meetings. The talk in the Teacher Forum is often intimate and very personal. In such talk members speak personally about their lives as teachers and often reveal their failure and foibles. One member characterized this as "getting personal." As a primary frame, the personal requires members to regard utterances as personal and to speak personally. This leaves the impression that when one speaks in the Teacher Forum, the personal might make her/him vulnerable and open to criticism. As a primary frame, this becomes enshrined as a rule for verbal participation in the group where one *must* speak personally and intimately.

Talk in the Teacher Forum can, therefore, be characterized as necessarily conforming to the primary frames of both critical democracy *and* required intimacy (the personal). The purpose of the group is to provide a place to discuss critical democracy in educational practices. Through the frame of required intimacy, members are encouraged to speak of personal experience. Members cannot choose simply one or the other primary frames, but must respond to both. As members speak of their personal

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experience, as educators or otherwise, the talk must come around, and be connected in some way, to critical issues that are related to education. And when they speak critically of educational issues, their speech also be framed personally. Stories, therefore, must conform to both primary frames to be considered acceptable in the group.

Story is a prime medium for discussing personal issues. The personal experience narrative is *personal* and the narrator is involved in narrated events in some way as character or witness. This situates the personal narrative within the context of the Teacher Forum as a potentially perform-able. In other words, by virtue and design as *personal*, it already conforms in a minimal way to the demands of the primary frame of “getting personal” and conveys the required intimacy demanded by this frame.

Performance

Performance happens when the expressive form is made compelling in a viable context. The performer assumes responsibility for the oral presentation of a text that is by definition stylized and therefore calls attention to itself. Textual performances are patterned and conventionalized as a part of the communication system of the group in which they emerge. They are, therefore, susceptible to ethnographic description. A given text, though, is not reducible to another, and “one wants to be able to appreciate the individuality of each as well as the generalized structures common to all” (Bauman, 1986, p. 4). Each text performed will have unique aspects as it is part of a known item (genre) and general patterned scene (context) in which it emerges. Here we are concerned with the personal experience *storytelling* as enactment of text.

Performance is again a question of framing and the performance frame. The concept of the frame originates in Gregory Bateson’s (1951) profound insight that communications send not only their contents, they simultaneously send instructions on how to interpret the contents. He calls this “meta-communication,” or communication about communication (p. 209). When, for example, two or more people are in a

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conversation, they are in the midst of taking turns and alternatively assuming the floor. In order to accomplish this, interlocutors send not only the contents of their utterances, but also the message “this is a conversation.” When one of these interlocutors decides to tell a story, she must seek the floor for an extended turn at talk. For her to become the narrator and the other the audience, they both must move from the conversation frame to the story frame; they must communicate with each other and agree that “this is now a story.” Oral narrative works in this manner. The potential narrator must make an effort to shift frame and key the audience to story. The narrator closes down the conversation and opens a story.

But is telling a personal experience narrative always a performance? Bauman (1972b) has clearly shown in his study of talk in a Nova Scotia speech community that not all narration is necessarily understood as performance. Some forms of story are viewed by members of a speech community as just talking, not stylizations that draw attention to themselves. More generally, the personal narrative hardly seems to be a special mode of communication which highlights the form or the storyteller. Their everyday quality would seem not to warrant featuring the personal narrative as an item to be performed.

Again, we must consider the item being performed and the context of performance. Mastery over an expressive narrative form means little out of context. A good story on paper may have meant little to the people to which it was originally narrated. Conversely, “I guess you had to be there” is a common way to apologize for a story that fails to recreate the emotive experience of an original tale. Mastery of oral literature must be mastery *in context* in relation to an audience. In a group like the Teacher Forum where the personal is a primary frame of/for expressive utterance, the personal experience narrative is a high form of this primary frame. That is, the personal experience narrative is a highlighted and amplified version of the personal. It holds deep symbolic value; it is at the core of the group’s nature. Moreover, stories in

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the Teacher Forum must not just be mere personal stories, they must be framed critically in response to the primary frame of critical democracy that comprises the other half of the context. Competent storytelling in the Teacher Forum means a minimal mastery over the personal experience narrative genre *and* being able to render the story sufficiently intimate and critical. In order to “breakthrough into full performance,” as Hymes (1970) puts it, the narrator must be able to make good stories sufficiently personal and sufficiently critical. Personal experience narration is the strategic use of a common form that must be crafted to work within a definable context called the Teacher Forum.

Rhetoric and the Function of Personal Narrative

The performance perspective outlined above is an ethnographic one which points to questions of not only *what* (item, context) and *how* (performance), but also *why*. This is a question of function that personal narrative plays within the social space in which it emerges.

It is very difficult to point out just what the personal narrative, as genre, is for. In other words, it is difficult to point to its generic function in social life. Unlike, say, a proverb, which carries the function of social control through wise witticisms (e.g., don't bite off more than you can chew), or riddles which are forms of controlled antisocial behavior (e.g., How many ethnics does it take to put in a light bulb?), the personal narrative seems to carry no such general social function. Sandra Stahl (1989), who has most comprehensively studied the personal narrative in her book *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative*, argues that the personal narrative is a vehicle for demonstration of an individual's values, what she calls the “hidden agenda” of personal experience narration (p. 21). Furthermore, she notes that the personal narrative is a way to meet and understand the identity of the teller. While all values and identities are social in origin, Stahl does not use the personal narrative to explore the

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social through the personal. Rather, she focuses on the individual creation and reception of story. Her argument does seem valid, but incomplete; social function of the personal narrative remains unaddressed. Can we ask anything more of what the personal narrative serves other than a sociable function and a way for people to get to know one another?

Persuasion

Closely tied to the concept of performance is that of *rhetoric*, the art of persuasion (Abrahams, 1968). Persuasion is a matter of aesthetics; we are moved by an expressive item or work of art. Viewing oral literature as a form of verbal art reminds us that performances of texts are aesthetic endeavors. Performances seek to move through presentation of a coherent and vital item of expression. Accomplishment of textual performance is to have the form cohere e.g., to tell a good story. A performance seeks to move and this movement is a form of persuasion, just as it seems to be entertaining or informing. "Each item of expressive culture," reminds Abrahams (1968), "is an implement of argument, a tool of persuasion," and "the essence of persuasion resides in effective form and compelling performance" (p. 146-147). Textual performances are inherently rhetorical. In other words, they serve a rhetorical function.

Strategies. The rhetorical view of expressive items—like stories—finds its beginnings in the work of Kenneth Burke (1950). In dealing with literature and literary issues, Burke outlined a framework that has proven useful to folklorists dealing with the artistic dimensions of their materials. Roger Abrahams (1968), borrowing from Burke, introduced and enshrined the notion of rhetoric implicit in all cultural and artistic performances in his now classic essay "Introductory Remarks on a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore." Burke (1950/1989) viewed all literature, as well as ordinary expressions, as originating in some social sphere. In that sphere a speaker or writer

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Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are *strategic* answers, *stylized* answers (emphasis in original, p. 77).

Burke was speaking specifically about literary works, but his theory can be extended to artistic performances in general “as the adopting of strategies for the encompassing of situations” (ibid.). In communicative situations, a speaker has a concern, a message that he or she wants to get across. She wishes to impose an interpretation on a situation. Burke calls this the “name” the speaker would like to impose on the situation. This interpretation occurs in the face of possible opposition from others and the speaker adopts a strategy to anticipate this possibility. The speaker evaluates the setting in order to present her/his message in the most acceptable form, that is, the form most likely to succeed in getting a message across. How that speaker evaluates the setting will suggest an attitude, which in turn will suggest a “genre” that will least likely impede the message she wants to get across and which will be most acceptable to the receiver(s) of the message. Performed oral narratives, then, can be seen as strategically stylized, expressive answers, and the personal narrative a particular variation or genre.

In folkloric terms, the selection of genre involves the use of “traditional” forms to address traditional problems and situations. Similarly, in the Teacher Forum the use of the personal narrative can be viewed as a traditional and locally relevant strategy. The aesthetic, or stylization, of the personal narrative is used to express effectively within the group as it responds to the primary frames. The personal-ness of the personal narrative makes it commensurate with the primary frame of the personal. It becomes a vehicle for critically framing experiences and events. It is an expected and relevant strategy in the context of the Teacher Forum. The use of the personal narrative indicates that it not only imposes an interpretation on the situation in which it emerges (that the

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speaker evaluates the setting as amenable to telling a story), but also a strategy for presenting experience. An important purpose of oral literature, long a central focus of folklorists, is thus to argue and persuade, “and argue [the narrator] does, even when he seems to be entertaining” (Abrahams, 1968, p. 146).

Rhetoric and Group Life. But of what does the personal narrative persuade? Why do the members employ the personal narrative as an aesthetic form that is inherently rhetorical? Is the function of the personal narrative merely rhetorical? Or does rhetoric itself have a function? As Abrahams insightfully notes, the essence of artistic expression is to evoke sympathy, to move the audience who encounters it toward acceptance of the version of life or experience it presents. “For the strategy of a piece to succeed,” he states, “sympathy of the audience must be elicited” (p. 147). This elicitation is done through the selection and strategic use of relevant forms where, in Burke’s (1941/1989) terms, the audience can “identify” with (or against) various symbolic materials of the form (e.g., a story’s hero). According to Abrahams (1968),

An utterance asks for some kind of sympathetic reaction on the part of the hearer—a reaction induced by manipulation of materials in combination with technique by which the speaker relates to his audience (p. 146).

Expressive performances are aesthetic endeavors in that they seek to present coherent visions or versions of experience in appropriate forms. They need to hang together, connect (or seek to) with others, who can say “Ah, I am moved by what you say and how you say it.” The use of story seeks to elicit this sympathetic reaction for identification with (or against) what the story presents.

While all verbal art can be seen as rhetorical, in the folkloric terms I use here it is necessary to see persuasion connected to group life. Folklorists have long been concerned with marginalized and dominated groups (Briggs, 1994). These groups are typically aware of and highly concerned with threats to their existence. Structurally, members of groups live with some amount of implied threat to their well being.

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Expressive folklore, in Burke's terms, are strategies employed to deal with recurrent problems that threaten the life of the group. These threats are as much internal to the group as they are external to it. Social cohesion of a group becomes paramount and "is most fully sensed in terms of antagonism felt within the group" (Abrahams, 1968. p. 148). A group must fight internal friction and strife in order to maintain itself in the face of extinction from domination. Folk groups use "traditional" (folk) expressive forms to deal with recurrent problems that threaten the maintenance of the group. This means that members are involved in a rhetorical effort to convince themselves and each other that their effort and their cohesion is worthwhile, that staying together can be a way to deal with anxiety and perceived threats to their well being.

Members of a group argue for solidarity. Argument is embodied in expressive forms that are aesthetically acceptable and appropriate. The employment of these forms seeks to persuade members of a group of a version and vision of experience that is viable and vital. Telling stories, and the personal narrative specifically, is an accessible and acceptable form of argument, where the narrator seeks to persuade others that "What I have to say is vital for *us*.." Story, in this way, is an artful device used to remind and convince members of a group that their existence and their purposes are worthwhile. Narrative as rhetoric *in group life* serves the function of group cohesion and stability, not just persuasion for persuasion's sake, nor simply to realize the rhetorical intent of the narrator. In the Teacher Forum, the personal narrative is a strategy of communication. The rhetoric of the personal narrative, in the group, serves the role of getting personal and for framing experience in a critical light. It serves to persuade members that an ideologically critical perspective is vital to the group and that the critical can be achieved by remaining a member of the group and keeping the group together, and this can be achieved by getting personal.

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Framework of the Dissertation

This chapter has introduced the ideas that structure the organization of this inquiry. The dissertation takes a performance perspective on personal experience narratives as they relate to group life and their rhetorical dimensions. The ensuing chapters address these issues of item, context, performance, function and rhetoric.

I have divided this study into two parts. Part I (Chapters 1 through 3) presents the theoretical backdrop against which I strive to consider the personal experience narrative a form of performance in group life. Chapter 2 focuses on the issue of context of the Teacher Forum. In this chapter, I also give a brief history of the Teacher Forum. Chapter 3 describes the personal narrative as a genre of oral literature. There I explore the components of the personal experience narrative and consider the idea of story as an enclave in conversation. After defining the personal experience narrative as literary genre and oral communicative events I present an outline of the methodology I employed to make sense out of this definition. As this study is ethnographic, I outline the ethnographic methodology I used to investigate the personal narrative in the group life of the Teacher Forum.

Part II (Chapters 4 through 7) is an exploration of performances of personal narratives I gathered in the Teacher Forum. In order to address this I have chosen three stories that exemplify what it means to perform a personal experience narrative. The analysis of each of these stories is used to address an issue pertinent to personal narrative generally *and* specifically in the context of the Teacher Forum.

By way of conclusion I present concluding remarks reflecting on the larger implications of this study. I reflect on the issue of artifice (the artful and artificial nature of the personal experience narrative), rhetoric, and the form-function relationship of the personal experience narrative in the Teacher Forum. I note further the function of storytelling in the Teacher Forum specifically, and reflect on overcoming

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“text positivism” (Rosaldo, 1986) and romantic readings of teacher narrative and narration. Further, I offer encouragement to resist what I call the “mimetic fallacy.”

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CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEXT OF THE TEACHER FORUM

In this place, however, we are not so much concentrating our attention to the text of the narratives, as on their sociological reference. The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless. As we have seen, the interest of the story is vastly enhanced and it is given its proper character by the manner in which it is told....the sociologist should take his cue from the natives. The performance, again, has to be placed in its proper time setting—the hour of the day, and the season, with the background of sprouting gardens awaiting future work, and slightly influenced by the magic of fairy tales. We must also bear in mind the sociological context of private ownership, the sociable function and the cultural role of amusing fiction. All these elements are equally relevant; all must be studied as well as text. The stories live in native life and not on paper, and when the scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality.

Bronislaw Malinowski,
Myth in Primitive Psychology

This chapter sets out a theoretical framework for understanding small group life **that** makes up the context of the Teacher Forum. Section one provides a brief history of **the** Teacher Forum. This history informs the reader not only of the general background **of the** group, but also the theoretical description of the Teacher Forum as a part time **culture** or frame of reference for its members in section two.

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SECTION 1:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TEACHER FORUM¹

When I joined the group in the Fall of 1992, the Teacher Forum was five years old. In its current incarnation, the group meets the morning of the second Saturday of every month during the school year.² They meet for approximately two hours on the campus of what I call Midwestern University, where Teacher Forum member Clare is a faculty member. Though they meet on campus, this group is not part of any university initiated project. Clare has the means to provide in-kind support in the form of a seminar room in the building where she teaches. In this section, I briefly describe the history of this group. I also give an introduction to the members whose utterances emerge in the data presented here. This oral history provides only the briefest of overviews and is not intended to describe in detail any or all Teacher Forum constituents. I intend only to provide a background for understanding this as a group of and for conversation and story. As the units of analysis in this study are *story* and *storytelling*, not *storytellers*, this oral history is about the group as a whole. The holistic theoretical description of the group as a super-organic context will be taken up in greater length in section two of this chapter.

Getting Started

The origins of the Teacher Forum reach back to the fall semester of 1987 and the English department of Midwestern University. Two motivated graduate students, who were practicing teachers, and an university English educator formed the core of the first

¹This section is essentially an oral history of the group. The data here has been primarily drawn from a long interview (5-9-93) and several unrecorded conversations with Clare. Numerous conversations and interviews with Fatimah, Lana (esp. 4-19-93), and Zoe were also valuable contributors to this oral history.

²I use the ethnographic present to describe the 1992-93 school year, the time that I collected data from for this study.

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iteration Teacher Forum. The teachers, Zoe and Cass (who was no longer a member when I collected my data), were masters degree students enrolled in an English Education course called *Education, Excellence and Equity*. Clare, the course instructor, arrived as a new faculty member of the English education program. She had come to the university with experience and interest in democratic education and critical theory, as well as a keen interest in teachers.

Zoe and Cass were deeply affected by the course. For them, the course readings and conversations touched upon persistent concerns they held as practitioners. The course helped them to frame explanations of their concerns as a social, not merely personal. Zoe notes that she came see better that schooling difficulties are not necessarily the fault of individual teachers, but can also be viewed as local expression of historically situated tensions among competing purposes of education in a liberal democracy.

Among the course readings critiquing schooling were Sizer's *Horace's Compromise* (1984), a research report, in essay form, on secondary education. It outlines the dilemmas of schooling in a democracy, which have left us with a public education system that satisfies no one and highlights the drastic consequences this has had for teaching practice. They also read and discussed works on tracking (e.g., Oakes, 1985), a key issue for democratic educators, since tracking is inherently unfair and advances unequal educational experiences among students. And they read Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916). These readings seemed to set an early tone for the subsequent formation of the Teacher Forum group. Teacher Forum members note that it helped them to take a larger view of education and teaching as something more than just a technical endeavor for improving "learning." It helped them to see teaching as a vocation endowed with social purpose in a democracy and a set of ideas that help frame educational problems that seem to promote a social vision of equity in education.

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At the end of that semester, Zoe and Cass wanted to continue to meet and discuss the issues raised in the course. With Clare they agreed to meet one Saturday morning a month for critical conversation with anyone else who cared to attend. The first meetings in the winter and spring 1988 did not center around readings, but were an extended conversation about the issues raised in the course as they relate to teacher practices. Moreover, Zoe and Cass were to continue conversation as a way, in Clare's words, "to fill in the gaps of teachers' isolation." That is, not only were these meetings about continuing conversation of critical democratic issues, they were to establish conversations to deal with teachers' isolation from one another and to encourage a sense of common purpose about their work. Thus, at the outset, the Teacher Forum centered on having both a critical conversation about educational school practices and an inherent desire to be personal and deal with isolation.

Clare and Critical Democracy

In the second year of the Teacher Forum Clare proposed that the group become officially affiliated with the Center for Education and Democracy (a pseudonym). The Center for Education and Democracy, heretofore known as CED, is a small but national organization that has affiliates throughout the country, mainly in the middle west. Clare had known CED's directors since her graduate school days and was in regular contact with many of its members. As Clare already had a relationship CED, she found the Literacy and Democracy group an opportunity to open a new branch "office" and a way to further organize and identify the group as a *democratic* teacher group.

Center for Education and Democracy

CED is an organization of regional offices, often affiliated with a university or college, with a faculty member as a sponsor. These offices act as resources for teachers interested in "democratic education" and the "democratic movement." CED's statement

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of purpose provides perspective on its philosophy and demonstrates what the Teacher Forum is connected to:

CED is a partnership of all participants in the educational process—teachers administrators, parents and students—who believe that democratic school change must come from the heart of education.

CED promotes educational practices that provide students with experiences through which they can develop democratic attitudes and values. Only by living them can students develop the democratic ideals of equality, liberty and community.

CED works to provide teachers committed to democratic education with a forum for sharing ideas, with support of people holding similar values, and with opportunities for professional development.

These principles, while not directly attributed, are essentially Deweyan. The key words are *equality*, *liberty*, and *community*. Equality harbors the notion that education is for everybody and should not be the mechanism that distributes children unequally (i.e., by race and class) in school systems according to ability. Liberty implies the sort of critical consciousness advocated in taking a critical perspective and is often connected to a Freirean (e.g., 1971) liberatory pedagogy. And community is central to a vision of participatory democracy. To become part of community, one must be able to learn by living and participating in one. Taken together, these principles advocate that schools be places for achieving educational and social equality. A more just society can be accomplished though developing a sense of liberty in a critical consciousness about one's position in society. This can be achieved through democratic participation in learning communities, like classrooms and schools. As Clare puts it, "to able to see that understanding and thinking about the kind of society that we're going to live in *is* a focus" (emphasis in original, interview, 5-5-93). Moreover, Clare saw that her role was to not impose an agenda, but to ask the teachers what they wanted to accomplish. She

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saw her role, in her capacity as an English education professor, to help them develop that agenda apropos the commitment to CED.

In the third year of the Teacher Forum three of the Teacher Forum participants—Zoe, Olivia, and Lana—were students in Clare's master's level course for English educators. These three were still members when I joined the group. In this course Clare made the focus critical literacy (see Lankshear & McClaren, 1993). This course was entirely different from the technical rational approach that Tom put forward in the Literacy and Democracy group the year before. Zoe, Olivia, and Lana were therefore not only members of the Teacher Forum, but also Clare's students. They were experiencing not only Clare's theoretical approach and her teaching praxis in her class, but also her practice as sponsor of the Teacher Forum. At this time that Clare was able to advocate for and maintain the critical democratic focus of the group while simultaneously trying to relinquish her role as agenda-setter. As we shall see in the next section of this chapter and throughout the story analyses in Part II of this dissertation, this tension between staying the critical democratic course and maintaining a voluntary, lived agenda is a defining feature of the group.

That summer of 1989, Lana, Zoe, Olivia, and Clare went to CED's annual summer conference. CED attempts to practice its purpose every summer through a relatively small conference. It brings together mainly teachers, but also university teacher educators, administrators, and students, to exchange ideas and have conversations around making democratic education work. This is done through workshops and presentations, and many informal conversations. When Zoe, Olivia, and Lana returned, they were enthusiastic about being part of a national movement and about their ability to meet other educators struggling with similar ideas and practices. This trip, undertaken as an "office," seemed to crystallize the Teacher Forum's identification with democratic education and its relationship with the CED main office. Moreover, it solidified the overt purpose of the Teacher Forum as a forum for democratic educators.

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Overcoming Alienation and Isolation

Members of the Teacher Forum consistently refer to the Teacher Forum as a place and an effort to overcome key problems in teaching: alienation and isolation. All the teacher members with whom I spoke noted that the Teacher Forum is a place where they could “connect” with other practitioners and engage in conversation that was absent in their professional workspaces. All members mentioned that they come to the meetings for conversation and camaraderie of communal membership and a minimal mutual adherence, in theory if not practice, to democratic education. In other words, they participate to overcome isolation. As Clare puts it, “The thing [the members] particularly keyed into was the fact that teachers seemed to work in isolation and in groups that continue to meet...outside of the school are groups that help close the gaps on some of that isolation that teachers feel” (interview, *ibid.*).

Many of the Teacher Forum members have found that they are already somewhat isolated because of their political and pedagogical commitments, that they are perceived as *progressive* or non-technical educators. They tend to ask the larger questions of the aims and ends of education in a democratic society. This orientation alone makes these teachers seem as though they are different from their colleagues and that they might be troublemakers since they ask “Better teaching and learning *to what end?*” They have a lot in common, at least in terms of interest, in democratic education (those who don’t leave the group). The Teacher Forum then provides a type of refuge for like-minded outsiders. As educators who often act upon the principles like those set out in CED’s statement of purpose, Teacher Forum has the paradoxical effect of further alienating some of its members in their schools. The Teacher Forum has become a support for the alienation some members have already felt by virtue of their own pedagogical commitments. Lana, who has poignantly felt the need for a support group (see Chapter 6), puts it this way:

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A lot of us, because of the way we teach and our political beliefs and our attitudes tend not to have a lot of support among our colleagues, and you feel isolated. So it's kind of good to come together with people that understand your struggle, understand the isolation, experience some of the frustrations. So it's a good support group and sounding board (Interview, 4-19-93).

Thus, there is a shared understanding among Teacher Forum members that in addition to belonging to a group about supporting democratic education, it is also a support group for dealing with isolation and alienation in teachers' work lives.

"Teachers supporting other teachers," notes Clare, "who are trying to do things that end up getting them in trouble in schools was a big thing and a big reason for coming together" (Clare interview, *ibid.*).

Key Events in the Teacher Forum History

There seem to be two key events in the history of the Teacher Forum that further defined who they are. The first is reactive, the second more proactive.

The Doctoral Seminar

In the winter of 1991, Clare was teaching a doctoral seminar in English education. This seminar incorporated the critical and democratic perspective that is part of her intellectual repertoire. That year, she had felt that the Teacher Forum had grown sluggish and had not found a focus or a purpose for their meetings. Clare's seminar met Saturday mornings, before Teacher Forum Saturday meetings. She used the last hour of the seminar for her students to be part of the Teacher Forum meetings. Clare felt there was a gulf between the university and teachers, even between those from each community who share similar educational values like a critical or democratic perspective. She was hoping to both bridge that gap and reinvigorate the Teacher Forum.

The integration was a failure. It was organized around three conversation groups: feminist pedagogy, Foxfire curriculum methods (see Wigginton, 1985 and section two of

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this chapter), and teacher research. Clare hoped that these would be a places for networking among educators from both the university and the public schools who share common interests and pursuits. The Teacher Forum (members) resisted. They found it an imposition of agendas not of their making. Moreover, they seemed to see this imposition in terms of a hierarchy of university over schools, academics over teachers. The divisions were among doctoral students (some of whom have been teachers) who did much more work in the seminar (e.g., reading and writing assignments) and were almost required to participate in the meetings. This aggravated Teacher Forum members in that the Teacher Forum had not involved any required work, only mutually agreed upon readings and tasks. And it was a group formed of their own volition. Any reading and work that was done was from their own interest and commitment to the group, not to a university seminar.

The group almost disbanded that year and the integration attempt did not continue the following fall. This event signaled for Clare and the other members that this was a teachers' group, made up of members who set an agenda according to the goals and desires of practitioners who do the journey work of schooling. This did not result in the exclusion of university affiliated educators, but it spoke to the desire that the Teacher Forum be a group of practicing educators who have as their core concerns the lives and practices of teachers, not about or abstractions about "what works."

Lana's Ordeal

The second major event in the life of the Teacher Forum involved Lana and a struggle with her middle school and district in 1990. Lana joined the Teacher Forum the year following its inception. She also served as the group's "facilitator" as part of her practicum for her English education master's degree program. Her ordeal is taken up length at Chapter 6, so I will only outline this event. After having received a death threat from a student in her eighth grade class, Lana asked her school's administration to

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remove the student for her own safety. The school was unresponsive to her concern and even accused her of bringing the threat upon herself. She then filed a grievance with the school district. Though she eventually was successful and later promoted to head of her English department, this was a traumatic school year for Lana. The Teacher Forum played a major role in emotionally supporting her. Though some members grew frustrated with the therapeutic feel to the Teacher Forum meetings (some even left the group), the group seemed to more clearly declare itself as a place to support its members who are in crisis situations (in their professional lives) and not just to talk about democratic education. Since one of their own was under attack for her work, and was experiencing aggravating alienation from her colleagues, they felt a powerful, tacit understanding that the Teacher Forum is about personal support as much as it is about professional support.

Teacher Forum Members

By the time I joined the group in the fall of 1992, and formally collected data that following winter and spring, there were fifteen different members (including me) who attended the year's meetings. I will briefly name them (pseudonyms) and describe their teaching background.

Clare is an English professor, specializing in English education. She acts as sponsor of the Teacher Forum in that she provides in-kind support such as finding meeting space at her university. She also acts as the regional office coordinator of Teacher Forum as a member of the CED.

Darlene is a high school English teacher in a predominately black high school in a middle-sized city. She is also a doctoral student in English education at the university and Clare's student.

Donna is a humanities professor who teaches writing in an honors undergraduate program at Midwestern University.

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Fatimah is a doctoral student in English education at Midwestern University. She teaches English teacher education undergraduates courses. A Muslim, she is the only African American in the group. She is also Clare's student.

Hannah is a 4th grade teacher in a school district in the vicinity of Midwestern University. She is the sister in-law of Zoe.

Harry is a curriculum developer in Darlene's school district. He specializes in reading and language arts and does not teach.

Iris teaches at a youth detention center. She teaches adolescent males who are being held for criminal activity. She teaches social studies, writing, and literacy.

Kathy Sue is a former co-director of the CED. She makes the monthly trip to attend the Teacher Forum meetings. Having worked at the university as an instructor where CED is located, she now teaches at a progressive public school in Illinois.

Kathy had been an active member of the Teacher Forum, but attended sporadically during the time of my data collection. She teaches middle school in a suburban district in which the Midwestern University of located.

Lana is a middle school English educator and teaches in the same district as Louise. Lana's story of her death threat is examined at length in Chapter 6.

Laura is a doctoral student in English education. She also teaches English at a community college and is involved with secondary English teacher education.

Louise is also an long-term member of the Teacher Forum. She teaches middle school English and social studies in Lana's school district.

Olivia is a high school English teacher. She teaches in the same district as Lana and Louise.

Robin is a returning undergraduate student. She is completing her teacher education and hopes to teach English and psychology in secondary school.

Valerie is a community college English instructor. She is also a doctoral student in English education under Clare's tutelage.

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Zoe teaches at a Catholic, grade K through eight school in a small town, approximately 30 miles from the university. She teaches eighth grade literacy (language arts) and social studies. One of Zoe's stories analyzed in Chapter 5. She is one of the original members of the group.

Not all of these Teacher Forum member participated in every Teacher Forum meeting over the year I attended and tape recorded. Some came only once. All of them do, however, emerge in my data (see Appendix A). Zoe, Lana and Clare have stories that I examine at length in the second part of the dissertation. Others appear the discourse and narrative examples I use.

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SECTION 2:

CONTEXT AS A FOLK FRAME OF REFERENCE

How is the Teacher Forum a context? How do we account for it? How do we know when sufficient context has been described? In this study of storytelling that I claim is contextual, where the story is narrative event as well as narrative object, it is incumbent upon me to delineate that which I mean by “context.” A contextual analysis is two-folded. On the one hand, I am delineating a social and cultural space which envelops storytelling. On the other hand, I am also analytically providing a context for the reader in which to interpret stories and storytelling events. In other words, by pointing out the context where story happens, I am simultaneously providing *a context for context* and working toward an interpretive frame. Context, therefore, frames my world as it is of my research subjects. This section begins to outline the contextuality of storytelling in the Teacher Forum. I find it helpful to start from the most general level, or layering, of context as the social organization of the Teacher Forum as a sort of folk group or frame of reference. I will address the general features that are beyond any one member of the group. It is this “primary framework” that provides the “frame-of” and the “frame-for” understanding and interpretation of communicative acts, specifically personal experience narratives. This begins a description of the context of the culture of the Teacher Forum as a sub-universe of meaning for conversations and stories of education and personal experience.

What is Context?Context vs. Surround

It would seem to go without saying that context and audience influence the form and content of social interactions. But what is meant when the term context is invoked? To start, it is helpful to clarify what context is *not*. Katherine Young (1987) has made a

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keen distinction between the “surround” and “context.” She notes that too often in folkloric research the surround is confused with the context and ultimately blurs analysis. She explains it this way:

A surround is whatever is contiguous whether it bears in the event or not; a context is whatever bears on an event whether it is contiguous or not. Not only is not all of the surround context, but also not all of the contexts are in the surround(p. 70).

Surround amounts to just about anything that is in the immediate environment of the social event. The confusion between context and the surround can readily be extended to the study of most social phenomenon and indeed much qualitative research in education. The confusion between context and surround, where context is indiscriminately presumed to be everything in the surround, is perilous. It leads to an objectivist illusion that a cataloguing of features of the surround will yield context. In addressing conversational, personal narrative, for example, we can note many contexts: the content of the stories; previous stories told in the same conversation; concurrent events or events from days, weeks, or years previous; life history of the narrator; the institutional setting; audience and speaker(s) present; conversation topics; the general tone of the conversation; relationships among speakers; types of story being told (e.g., humorous, informational); the psychological state of the narrator; the stylistic competence of the narrator; the weather; and so on. The list is seemingly infinite.

As Young (1987) tells us, “Context is matter of relevance, not proximity” (p. 70). Context is defined by its relevance to the event or social phenomenon selected for study:

What is necessary is that in invoking a context, its bearing on an event is specified. Contextual analysis properly addresses relations between contexts and events not collections of contexts (Young, 1987, p. 71).

Since contexts bearing on an event are multiple, it is part of the analyst’s task to identify that which is contextually relevant, that which is important to the insiders’

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(members') shared, and usually tacit, understanding and accomplishment of utterances. Possible contexts are limitless; relevant contexts are limited. What is relevant may or may not be in the surround. Establishment of context is, therefore, an analytic task of the researcher, an attempt to show the connection or relation between the object of analysis (e.g., stories and storytelling) and context. Contexts, then, are part of the worlds of both the researcher and the researched, only the researcher has an obligation to unveil his/her criteria for selection of relevant contexts.

I begin my discussion of context with that which seems to inform and account for storytelling as not only text, but also social event. With story and storytelling that arise naturally in conversation within a group of like minded educators, I find it helpful to start with the broadest level of symbolic organization(s) that make up context. In other words, this is an effort to conceive of multiple and layered contexting of stories in terms of the social and symbolic organization of the Teacher Forum as a coordinated group of individuals with negotiated and agreed upon purposes, goals and traditions. In, short, it is helpful to think of the Teacher Forum as a form of folk group.

Group Life as Context

Differential Identity

As folklorists have pointed out (e.g., Bauman, 1972), people are living less and less in homogeneous communities and are unlikely to hold single identifying roles. It is increasingly difficult in our industrial/post-industrial society to find someone who lives completely within a single, homogeneous group. By virtue of a constellation of factors of occupation, family, ethnicity, communal affiliation, social class, and so on, a person in modern American society does not harbor one, single role which completely defines her or his identity (Abrahams, 1972). We live a fragmented existence. In what Bauman (1972) has referred to as "differential identity," persons often have more than one social sphere from which they draw to constitute an identity. People do, in

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varying degrees, identify with a main or primary social group (e.g., ethnic, religious), but they are also members of other constituencies with which they associate and from which they draw to make an identity.

The fragmentation of modern American life necessitates viewing group memberships as significant sources for identity formation and a sense of self. It is not a whimsical sort of participation in groups; people desire and seek out participation in groups of like-minded and sympathetic others. Our identities are hardly the creation of free roaming egos. As Mark Workman (1993) has eloquently said about the self in relation to similarly-disposed others:

Like the garden flower that inclines this way or that in its desire for sunshine, the poses we strike or the attitudes we assume are never purely internally motivated, but are always environmentally determined responses to the cultural world around us....all but the most cynical among us yearn for membership in folk groups... (p. 172).

A differential view of identity allows for the exploration of particular social groups which contribute partially to members' identity. Folklorists have attended to this in accounting for existence of folklore in modern society. Jan Brunvand (1968) notes briefly in his introductory folklore textbook that there are four broad kinds of folk groups—occupational, regional, age, national or ethnic—but he is not restrictive to this. Bauman (1972) has pointed out the necessity of viewing a person's full or part-time participation in folk groups. This (re)orientation of the membership of "the folk" from a homogeneous (often rural or pastoral) conception now emphasizes an individual's membership at any given time in more than one social group, or "folk group" (see Dundes, 1965). According to Stahl (1989), following Dundes (1968), the folk group is now better understood as "the identity shared by any two members of a group, which in turn becomes sufficient to support a body of shared lore" (p. 34).

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Small Group Culture

Sociologist and folklorist Gary Alan Fine (1979) further asserts that small group experience is central to the experience of culture generally. Culture is essentially a function of small group experiences and the outcome of the communicative interaction in small groups:

Most culture elements are experienced as part of a communication system of a small group, even though they may be known widely. The experience of knowing and using culture is inevitably tied to [the] contexts of group life (p. 734).

Fine (1979; 1987) coined the term “idio-culture” in order to denote small group formation and maintenance. Though groups, like Little League Baseball teams, are not full-time cultures, they do manifest certain cultural features. Fine (1979) defines the idio-culture as “a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction” (p. 734). If meaning derives from interaction, and if culture is the content of that interaction, then small group life is not only an identity resource for the participants; it is also a place where cultural resources, meaning, and content are created, maintained and transmitted for identity.

As a part-time association of educators, the Teacher Forum can be seen as a variety of “folk group.” It has a discernible set of “traditions” and identity features—sensibilities and dispositions—in its values (Stahl, 1989). The focus of the Teacher Forum as a group with its own cultural features makes this an exploration not of any one or more of the Teacher Forum members qua individuals (and their individual identities) as they are formed apropos their membership over the period of time during which I collected data. Rather, my focus is on the *shared* identity features of the group. Shared features of identity turns the question of membership and participation in a group of critical democratic educators from a psychological/individual orientation to a socio-cultural/folk one. This is, therefore, an exploration of how the group contributes to

identity features of the members and the structure of the meaning they make of their teaching experiences, specifically as these are revisited and reconstituted in personal experience stories.

Storytelling, in this view, becomes the experience of other experiences, events re-made, enacted representations of experience, in the conversation of the group. “Groups negotiate meanings, and this ongoing negotiation structures the culture of the [group]” (Fine, 1979, p. 737). The Teacher Forum mediates members’ experiences and their meaning. Things happen outside the group and are symbolically brought into the group by individual members. The Teacher Forum provides a sub-universe of meaning, where recounted experiences are re-made, in relation to the context of the group, goals and purposes, in conversation and story. As a mediator for external events, the group is a place where the meaning of external events is revisited by members in their stories (re-) made apropos its values in its frame of reference. This, in turn, helps the differentiation of the Teacher Forum group from others (other educators, other teacher groups, subscribers of other educational philosophies, etc.).

Frames of Reference and Primary Frameworks

As systems of shared meanings and symbols, groups like the Teacher Forum are what Sandra Stahl (1989) terms folk “frames of reference” (p. 89). As spheres for part-time participation and identity affiliation, they are places where “human beings form alliances with other humans and develop frames of reference within those alliances that determine to a great extent their view of the world and often their behavior in it” (Stahl, p. 33). Frames of reference are pedagogical, for they are “identifiable groups that serve to teach individuals patterns of interaction peculiar to that group” (Stahl, p. 34). Stahl notes at least eight categories of perceived identity features, including family, ethnicity, religion, place, age, sex, social network, and occupation. Stahl is interested in exploring the ways in which *individual* storytellers integrate and draw

upon shared folklore to accomplish storytelling and how this can be developed into a method of interpretation. In borrowing Stahl's notion, though, I want to focus not so much on individual storytellers and their identities, but on how the shared identity of the Teacher Forum provides a frame of reference for its members, a frame of reference *for telling stories and of interpretation of stories*. Just as Stahl describes folk groups as resources for individual identity formation and as holding certain sensibilities within them, the frame of reference is the manifestation of those sensibilities.

Primary Frameworks

Frames of references give rise to what Erving Goffman (1974) calls "primary frameworks." Primary frameworks help us to answer the question "What is going on here?" when we encounter social phenomena. They are primary in that they are the "chiefly relevant first answer" to our questions and orient our understanding to the events we encounter (p. 24). "We tend," according to Goffman, "to perceive events in terms of primary frameworks, and the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied" (ibid.). We frame our understandings of them in certain, primary ways and communicate those understandings to others with whom we are in relation. As Goffman (1974) explains:

When the individual in our Western society recognizes a particular event, he tends, whatever else he does, to imply in this response (and in effect employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretations of a kind that can be called primary....indeed a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would be otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful...Whatever the degree of organization, however, each primary framework allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms (p. 21).

Primary frameworks are composed of multiple primary "frames" since they "distinguish between the content of a current perception and the reality status we give what is thus enclosed or bracketed within perception" (Goffman, 1974, p. 3). Gregory

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Bateson (1951) first described frames as “meta-communication,” or communication about communication. Frames, Bateson held, have two characteristics, they are “exchanged cues and propositions about (a) codification and (b) the relationship between the communicators” (p. 209). In other words, frames “codify” utterances and communication as conversation, or as story, etc. They also invite or reveal an attitude toward the utterance in the relationship between interlocutors.

It is important to distinguish the primary frame from the specific frame of communication. The primary frame is broad and bends heavily toward the generic understanding—the shared, invited or revealed attitude—toward most, if not all, utterances in a given situation. The specific frame distinguishes between types of utterances, (e.g., the conversation frame vs. story frame). Primary frames, then, are the first guides brought to bear on a social event, the attitude toward the communicative action or utterance. Such attitudes reveal the relationship between interlocutors since they are the shared (“exchanged”); people together agree on the “definition of the situation,” for they agree on what counts as valid or acceptable discourse and interaction in a group. Primary frameworks are generally tacit, where “application of such a framework or perspective is seen by those who apply it as not depending on or harking back to some prior or original interpretation” (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). *Primary frames help us install general, fundamental assumptions about our utterances in a given social sphere.*

Primary Frames of the Teacher Forum

The Teacher Forum produces and is composed of two primary frames, one which is more or less external to the group and the other emergent from within the group. The *ideological* frame refers to the idea structure of the group, the publicly stated purposes and goals of the group as it relates to a set of ideas and ideals. The *interactional* frame includes those lived rules or norms for sociable interaction in the group. This takes the

form of the “required intimacy” in verbal participation. The former takes the form of “Critical democracy,” a set of ideals as they are related to educational practices and policies. The latter is a form of required intimate or personal discussion.

The Ideological Frame: Critical Democracy

Since this is not a study of Critical democracy it does not contain an exegesis of the philosophy and theory of Critical democracy. Nor is this an evaluation of how a group lives up to an ideal of understanding, promoting, and enacting critical democratic values. Rather, as ethnographic, this study seeks to examine from the *point of view of the members* of the Teacher Forum the meanings they negotiate in their conversations of Critical democracy and their stories. Apropos this concern, it is important to understand some of the origins of Critical democracy related to education as it is focus for the goals of and purposes of the Teacher Forum. In other words, how does Critical democracy support a primary frame here?

Democracy in critical democracy. Jesse Goodman (1992) notes that “Critical democracy” finds its roots in the works of John Dewey. Recent biographies of Dewey have noted that the key, consistent intellectual thread through all his work is democracy (Featherstone, 1993). Dewey (1927) severely criticized the dominant understanding (at the time) of American democracy as a republican form of government that maintains a state structure. In this reified view, “Democracy as practiced in the U.S. is seen as inherently good and has something to do with choosing representatives, having faith in the will of the majority, providing certain checks and balances, protecting the right to express minority viewpoints” (Goodman, p. 3). Dewey made clear in *Public and Its Problems* (1927), and somewhat less clear in writings like *Democracy and Education* (1916), that this is an unquestioned, common understanding of democracy. The state, according to Dewey, is really a modern, historical invention—a human construction. Though we have created institutions and social arrangements which are representative,

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he asked, are they truly democratic? Dewey calls this idea of democracy a mere “political” one that conflates democracy with some idea of the state. This view is ultimately attached to maintenance of the economic interests of a few and it effectively narrows participation of citizens in the public debate over those interests (1927). Moreover, it encourages citizens to fear democratic government as an *unnatural* apparatus that controls individual and economic liberties:

Thus fear of government and desire to limit its operations, because they were hostile to the development of new agencies of production and distribution of services and commodities, received powerful reinforcement. The economic movement was perhaps the more influential because it operated, not in the name the individual and his inherent rights, but in the name of Nature. Economic “laws,” that of labor springing up from natural wants and leading to creation of capital effective in piling up still more wealth, the free play of competitive exchange, designated the law of supply and demand, were “natural” laws. They were set in opposition to political laws as artificial, man-made affairs. The inherited tradition which remained least questioned was a conception of Nature which made Nature something to conjure with. ...laws of nature, implanted in human nature, regulated the production and exchange of good and services, and in such a way that when they were kept free from artificial, that is political meddling, they resulted in the maximum possible social prosperity and progress. Popular opinion is troubled by questions of logical consistency. The economic theory of laissez-faire, based upon belief in beneficent natural laws which brought about harmony of personal profit and social benefit, was readily fused with the doctrine of natural rights. (Dewey, 1927, pp. 90-91)

This is a radical Dewey, hostile to the status quo. Dewey claimed that this economic and so-called “natural” view has limited our sense of democracy. It is a form of political institutionalizing where citizens have been removed from participatory (democratic) processes. “For most [today],” Goodman writes, “democracy has become viewed as an artifact (governmental agencies) or a set of cultural rituals (passively voting in elections) rather than a dynamic process in which the public actively participates on a daily basis and which involves face to face contact” (p. 4). For Dewey, democracy is about living in relation to others, participation in the spheres of social life, and a recognition of common interests. Of the “democratic ideal,” Dewey writes in *Democracy and Education* (1916):

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[T]here is a deeper explanation. A democracy is more than a form of government; *it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience*. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others...is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity (p. 101, emphasis added).

“Democracy,” according to Dewey, “is the idea of community itself” (1927, p. 148). It is not difficult to see why Dewey spent energy and thought on the process of schooling and education, which include his emphases on knowledge, learning, and experience (see *Experience and Education*, 1938). If democracy is the very idea of community, then persons should not spend their time *learning about* “political” democracy. Rather, they should be *learning from* the active participatory experience of democratic communities. The terms *common*, *community*, and *communication* are hardly linguistically coincidental for Dewey (1916): If “Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common...[then] communication is the way they come to possess things in common” (p. 5). Consequently, Dewey insisted on a connection between education and democracy. As Joseph Featherstone (1993) notes, Dewey asked himself where this experience could happen for the young and answered, “Why not a school?” (p. 23).

Critical in critical democracy. Democracy is but one-half of Critical democracy. The term “critical” emanates from critical theory as it is manifested through the broad category of critical studies in education. Nominally, these have their origins in the new sociology of education (e.g., Bernstein, 1979) and in radical curriculum theories in the United States (e.g., Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1981). These strands of thought are concerned with theories of social reproduction and of meaning production, which encompass a critical analysis of society and the social order. That is, these theories have been concerned with the reproduction of the social order of capitalist societies—social class,

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gender, race, etc.— and the production of the meaning of those class identities through their relation to, and resistance to, imposed knowledges and practices (Weiler, 1988).

Critical theories arose in opposition to traditional theories of educational processes, what I refer to as “functionalist” or “efficiency” oriented educational theory. “In general,” writes Kathleen Weiler (1988), “traditional educational theory has taken the existing arrangement of society as a given, not changeable in any serious way, and desirable” (p. 4). Schools are “the means of rationally distributing individuals in what is conceived as a basically just society” (ibid., p. 5). Schools functionally serve to maintain the existing order by dividing and placing students within that order.³ Educational change, in the functionalist view, is the adjustment of fundamentally sound systems, to have them function more efficiently in the “rational” distribution and allocation of personnel within the system, ultimately in the economy. Even when, in this view, there are screams for educational change, the problem is not really seen in the rationality of the system, but in making it function more efficiently in relation to social and economic distribution.

This functionalist orientation to schools has a decidedly economic, business flavor. Schools in this view are regarded as the places for rational sorting of people for their prospective places in the economy. Calls for bureaucracy elimination, better training for workers, and higher test scores are all functions, in one way or another, of the functionalist-efficiency view of schooling. When schools fail, they fail to fulfill their assumed function of reproduction of American society. When working efficiently, schools offer the appearance of equality: they are institutions of equal opportunity for social mobility through the accrual of credentials and the knowledge these credentials supposedly represent (Labaree, 1988). This is dyed with the ideology of natural

³See Tyler (1950) and Dreeben (1968) for examples of a standard functionalist view of education.

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meritocracy where “the inadequate fail and the deserving and talented rise to their merit” (Weiler, p. 5).

Critical theories in education start with a critique of existing society as both inherently unfair and oppressive. Sexism, racism, and class division are seen as manifestations of a historically and structurally unfair society. Schools are understood to be implicated in the reproduction of existing social structures, which go unchallenged in the functionalist-efficiency view; they contribute to the ongoing reproduction of social order (social class) and culture (knowledge, identities) through school and educational policies and practices⁴. The critical perspective challenges this and calls for a certain amount of consciousness in understanding the roles that schools play as mechanisms for the system and its perpetuation (Greene, 1993; Brunner, 1994).

Critical theories are themselves often criticized, sometimes by critical theorists. Critiques have noted how they, explicitly or implicitly, disallow individual agency and consciousness of the social order. They often conclude that we are helplessly determined economically and our own understanding of it can do little to change it. Erickson (1987) notes that these economic determinist arguments presume

...an organic or mechanical view of society in which there are tight and invariant causal connections across subsystems so that the general social structure drives the actions, perceptions, and sentiments of particular actors in local scenes of action. In such a view, there is not room for human agency (p. 343).

Giroux (1988) has similarly criticized other critical theorists for not only ignoring (or annulling) agency, but more specifically denying the capacity for critical consciousness and therefore any hope for change.

⁴It should be noted that the use of the term “culture” in the critical theoretical vein is very different from that which is employed by cultural anthropologists and folklorists, and is far removed from the sense of folk group culture I am using in this study. This is one of the most neglected concepts in critical educational studies. The ignorance of the historical use and development of the theory of culture ultimately undermines the critical theorists’ use of the term, for it has come to mean little more than a generalized clump of “knowledges” or “identities” set in opposition to social structure.

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Critical theory as praxis. The abstract nature and determinist flavor of critical educational theory leads one to ask about what can one do to deal with an unfair and oppressive society. Two theorists, Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire, are often regarded as having demonstrated the importance, connection and realization of a critical theoretical perspective in educational practices (e.g., Giroux, 1988). They have asserted that the critical perspective is not merely for understanding dominating structures and institutional processes. It can also function in attaining consciousness of them, of individuals' relationships to them, and in understanding how they might be changed—how theory might be pedagogical.

Gramsci. As a social theorist and activist in the 1930's in Italy, Gramsci was imprisoned for his activities on behalf of the Italian working class. His *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, published in 1971 (in English), brought attention to him as a radical, Marxist social theorist as well as a concrete social activist. Like other critical theorists, he was concerned with power and how ideology is constructed in individual consciousness, and how consciousness is capable of critique and transformation. Gramsci brought to the fore the term and concept "hegemony." And like critical theorists in general, Gramsci was concerned with the imposition of a certain view of reality which helped maintain the existing social structure and the power and privilege of the dominant classes. This view of reality, for Gramsci, is regarded as legitimate, official and intentionally employed to subjugate others (Brunner, 1994).

For Gramsci, schools and curricula could be spaces in which to understand the historical forces of domination. Hegemony is not simply the imposition of control by the dominant (bourgeois) classes, but something more like control of one's consciousness that historical forces have left us, a world view diffused into everyday life. Weiler (1988) notes:

The complex consciousness, which Gramsci terms common sense, contains not only hegemonic ideas and residual and historically generated concepts, but also contains self-critique or *the possibility of self-critique and*

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hence the possibility of historical change through thought and action (p. 16, emphasis added).

People, in a Gramscian view, have the capacity for action and change. Gramsci was consequently concerned with education and schools as *counter-hegemonic* institutions: “The common school...shall aim to insert young men and women into social activity after bringing them to a certain level of maturity, of capacity for intellectual and practical activity” (Gramsci, quoted in Weiler, p. 14).

Freire. Similarly, the influential Brazilian educator Paulo Freire held a vision of the critical dedicated to pedagogical practice. Schooling and schools become spheres where theory and practice are not divided. His book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1971), is often considered a manifesto for critical educational practice and has had far reaching implications beyond his native Brazil. As Giroux (1988) succinctly states,

[Freire] links the process of educational struggle to the particularities of people’s lives while simultaneously arguing for a faith in the power of the oppressed to struggle in the interests of their own liberation(p. 110).

As a theorist Freire is concerned with experience and cultural production—where people make their worlds. Schools, for Freire, are but one educational site where students can learn about the structures of oppression and cultural power in society, and how they live in relation to them as they accomplish schooling and “naming” the world. Social movements should be more pedagogical, concerned with education and learning. And, conversely, education must be viewed as a political process that either contributes to the organization of an oppressive society or engages those forms of oppression of society, be they subjective or objective. Like Dewey’s concern with communication and common concerns, Freire (1971) saw the engagement between agents as a process of dialogue to achieve critical understanding (in) their lived conditions: “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is capable of generating critical thinking. Without

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dialogue, there is not communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (p. 81).

In his own work with illiterate peasants in Latin America, Freire held that one must not simply learn to read the word of a text, but also to critique the received version of reality. In Gramscian terms, this is counter-hegemonic; in Freire's famous phrase, literacy (and education more generally) is a process of *reading the word and reading the world*: "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it" (p. 76). In this educational and social vision, teachers with their students must seek to understand the contemporary and local workings of hegemony that are inscribed in their consciousness *and* the structural-historical situations into which they have been thrown. Freire's work is, thus, both theoretical and practical. It argues for operating with the understanding that persons and groups live in a dialectical circumstance between their specific, lived realities and larger cultural, historical, and structural constraints of society. This directs "the need for a passionate commitment by educators to make the political more pedagogical...[and] a deep and abiding faith in the struggles to humanize life itself" (Giroux, 1988, p.110). Freire, like Gramsci, is a conduit of critical theory to teaching practice; he is a theoretical signpost for educational change in a critical vein.

A Critical democracy. A Deweyan vision of democracy is certainly congruent with the critical educational perspective. Dewey's idea of living and learning in communities implies a form of critique of the social order. For, as Dewey has clearly addressed or intimated in nearly all his works that deal directly and indirectly with education, we cannot have a vision of the school or of the education we would like our children to have without a vision of the society we want to have. If democracy is the very idea of community, this would necessitate some reflection on what kind of community is desired by its inhabitants. Moreover, in order to envision the desired society, those inhabitants would need to understand what kind of society currently exists, and what it would take to change it. Though Dewey did not use Marxist language, employing the terms "critical" or

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“consciousness,” his concern with communication—“of conjoint communicated experience”—between citizens, in order that they may participate in the control of the institutions that structure our lives, is conceptually compatible with critical educational theory.

The ideas of critical educational theory and a Deweyan democratic concept are not mere intellectual exercises. They are both concerned with concrete practices. Dewey started his own school around his principles of learning, community, hands-on activities and scientific projects for young people (see Mayhew & Edwards, 1936). Gramsci was involved in creating counter-hegemonic schools, the formal intellectual spaces where thinkers gain legitimacy (Entwistle, 1979). Freire, of course, is widely known for his adult literacy praxis. In effect, a critical democratic perspective is not merely about thought, it is also about action. This itself poses an interesting dilemma for a group of educators, like those of Teacher Forum, who meet to discuss their work and alternative teaching ideas and practices; though it is a site of communicative action, it is not teaching practice itself.

Foxfire as an Example of Critical Democratic Practice. In the Teacher Forum, then, there is much discussion of teaching practices. How might the ideas of Critical democracy look? For example, some members variously employ “Foxfire” principles and techniques. Foxfire is the name of a school magazine project originated by Appalachian teacher Eliot Wigginton and chronicled in his book, *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience* (1985). This pedagogy involves students in the design and production of a magazine. The project typically has students do journalism and collect local history and folklore. It is a pedagogy in which the students are involved in understanding their worlds through their activities of collecting and creating (writing) stories for publication in the magazine. They learn, ideally, about their worlds as they learn English composition skills and social-historical research skills. The students, by necessity of the activity, work together in what Dewey would call a learning community.

One of the Teacher Forum members, Iris, employs what she terms “the Foxfire method.” Iris teaches adolescent male youth offenders in an county detention center. She has her students (often short-term enrollees, e.g., three months) collect and document local history through interviews, county record research, and photography of local geography and architecture. This work is then written up and “published” as a bound magazine.

Foxfire is often considered an alternative reading/writing/English pedagogy. Foxfire maintains a center in Appalachian Georgia (where it originated) for training and dissemination of its ideas and ongoing works of Foxfire educators. There are large networks across the country, some over 100 members, of teachers who identify themselves as Foxfire educators. These networks are outside of district and state teacher in-service and development; they see themselves in opposition to the mainstream reading/writing practices and official curricula that focus on skill attainment and standardized test improvement. For Foxfire educators, mainstream practices are often de-contextualized from students’ lives; too often lack purpose; are geared toward discrete skills or narrow understanding rather than connections with students’ realities; based upon a set of assumptions about students as passive and incapable of any sort of consciousness of their worlds; and often boring.⁵

The example of Foxfire is one that, in practice, can easily be viewed as a critical democratic enterprise: students work and learn together in communities with their peers (co-citizens, if you will); their work is geared toward not only learning the imposed subject matter, but toward engagement in a process where they are asked to direct their attentions and activities in a project (a great Deweyan idea) in which they learn about their social spheres as they learn reading, writing, English and conduct local historical inquiry. This leaves open *the possibility* for students and teachers of what

⁵These observations of assumptions and beliefs come from several informal discussions I had with Foxfire educators at the Center for Education and Democracy’s annual summer conference (Fieldnotes June 26-28, 1993).

Gramsci would have called a counter-hegemonic activity, to challenge the official curriculum, to challenge the official version of reality, and discover, *in communitas*, their reality.

Vis á vis functionalist or efficiency theories and educational practices, a critical democratic understanding is more idealistic (or utopian) and realistic (critical). As Goodman (1992) notes, "It presents both a vision of an ideal (and hence never completely realized) society and a process by which this vision can be pursued" (p. 7). Education, in this way, is not merely a means to a functional-efficient economic end; school is not simply preparing students for some future economic participation. That is, education is more than skill and knowledge acquisition for some presumed future experiences that a child will have. Rather, in a Deweyan sense, schooling is learning and living in the here and now. If democracy is the very idea of community, then that communal form of living and participation must be experienced and learned as a student.

This is but the briefest and broadest sketch of critical democracy. It is, though, an accurate rendering of what supports one of the two primary frames of the Teacher Forum, its "ideological" frame. The overt or expressed purpose of the group is to maintain a forum for democratic teachers. Moreover, as noted in the brief history of the group, the Teacher Forum is a regional chapter of the Center for Education and Democracy. The Teacher Forum is thus publicly identified with what the members often call the "democratic movement." This public identification with the CED serves to reinforce the overt commitment of the group to what is variously termed democratic principles, practices, ideas, techniques and methods.

Ideologically Framed Utterances. During time of data collection, the group showed no sign of moving away from CED nor from expressed democratic principles. Critical democracy, or critical democratic ideas, revealed themselves often in the talk of the members. In terms of the purposes and goals of the group, not only do members have the right to speak in a critical democratic way, but Teacher Forum members must allow

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such talk to be expressed. That is, they have the duty to listen. While not all members equally express a commitment to critical democracy in their talk, it is the primary frame of the Teacher Forum that allows for, even requires, discussion of education, schooling and educationally related issues in a critical democratic manner. For example, this extended turn at talk by Clare is representative of critical talk:

Clare: If they [students] don't know how to conform in the business world, then they're not going to be valued. Because in the business world, they don't want a lot of thinkers. They just want, you know, they want a few upper level management people, and the rest of the people to be service...workers and service people and technical support staff, and they don't want those people making decisions....They want them to feel like they have more ownership in their jobs, but they want them to do that all without remuneration...for having ownership in their jobs. They just still want them to be satisfied with, you know, the pay of the technical support person, while they support the people at upper level, who are going to make more money and more money and more money, but yet, you know, they raise Cain all the time about attrition rates, you know, that sort of thing, among personnel. I don't think that the business world appreciates what we're doing with critical literacy. I don't think they do at all. I mean, 'cause they really just want people who can read and write and spell, and do the way they want them to do, and most of those people, which is all the big push, you know, between school and business partnerships. Most of those people say that they [businesses] should be the ones in here educating people how to work in the work force anyway, 'cause we're not doing a very good job. I mean, to me it's pretty telling when...William Raspberry writes an editorial that suggests that people in big business should be the ones coming into our classrooms and telling, you know, and teaching students how they want them to work for them, you know. In their classrooms! And that, that makes it all very sad, and feel very, feel very hopeless in some ways...that's why I think probably the best we can do for kids is what we're doing when we try to, we try to give them what, you know, give them opportunity to voice their, their, understandings, and we teach them more of the sort of social skills that, that will allow them to get along with people in communities all over. (Teacher Forum Transcript, 4-24-93)

Moments later, during the same exchange Clare continues:

But I do believe that if we teach kids to see possibilities for a different kind of world and the ways in which they learn to think, that will allow them to have that kind of social imagination. Those, those kids who have a social imagination are also likely to be those same kids who, who communicate well. So, while at the same time they may...figure out how they have to fit into...() perhaps it won't close off the chance that there's a possibility for the world to be other than it is. And so I don't see my, I

mean, I'm never satisfied to teach kids to perform in the world the way it is, because the way that it is just stinks.
(ibid.)

This critical talk in the Teacher Forum carries a direct critique of the functionalist-efficiency views of schooling. In such views children are not encouraged to think or have “social imagination,” but to conform to the demands of business and industry. Clare’s objections to business involvement with schooling is not that business would do a less efficient job. Hers are ideological objections to the hidden, and not so hidden, purposes and goals of business and industry with regard to schooling. These are indeed critical comments about the world and social order at large and how this is filtered down through the schools’ and teachers’ work.

While it is worth noting that Clare is a university professor, an academic used to extended utterances such as these containing some sophisticated critical commentary, it is not only her personality or individual stance that accounts for these and other statements. Rather, it is the context of the group that contributes to the structure of the group’s purposes and goals that allows Clare to access the right to speak this way without communal refute or sanction. In other words, the ideological frame established by the group in its overt commitment to democratic and critical practices permits such commentary to exist as a cultural feature. Expressions like Clare’s, then, reflexively return to maintain and further allow for and constrain discussion in a critical democratic manner.

The content of this interaction, in G. Fine’s (1979) terms, provides cultural features of a group. It speaks to critical democratic discourse, not as an ideal against which the Teacher Forum should be evaluated (in terms of its adherence or faithfulness thereto), but as a contextual demand feature which should be viewed culturally as a primary frame. It is an identifiable right of members to speak this way by the very nature of being a democratic teacher group. This is not to say that this primary frame *causes* individuals to speak this way. Rather, such talk is a manifestation of the defining

and structuring feature of the a primary frame—which acts as a resource and a constraint upon appropriate talk and expressed ideas in the Teacher Forum.

The Interactional Frame: Required Intimacy or “Getting Personal”

The ideological is but one half of the primary framework of the Teacher Forum. In addition to the overt, or official, purposes and goals of the group, there are the accommodated and lived features of the group. The interactional frame constitutes the ways in which the members have come to deal with each other, the meaning they impute to the rules for their interaction in the group. This second primary frame directs the Teacher Forum to conduct itself in what may be characterized as a very personal, intimate manner. The norms for full discursive participation in the group include at least a minimal amount of personal, self-disclosure. That is, in order to speak as a fully participating member of the group, one must reveal something that could be considered “personal.”

This required intimacy for participation can be seen in opposition to a purely intellectual way of speaking. As one member said, “We get personal in there” (interview, Iris, 2-16-93). Members have referred to the group as personal, intimate, empathic, “getting to know someone,” or where “someone lets you know who they are.” “Getting personal” is the second primary frame the defines and constitutes the Teacher Forum as a frame of reference.

Intimately Framed Utterances. Getting personal is the activity of verbally conveying that which appears intimate in nature. As educators, this often takes the form of telling about experiences of frustrations with students, fellow teachers, or administrators. These frustrations always hold out the possibility to be discussed as cases of the speaker’s pedagogical failings. They can also come in the form of speaking of one’s life (family or home) as they might relate to schooling and education. For example, one may speak of her/his own experiences as a student, of one’s children’s school lives,

or of one's parenting. Whatever the content of the intimate utterance, it holds out the potential to be sensitive and threatening, therefore, making the speaker appear vulnerable. It is as if someone were risking humiliation by such disclosure. For example, Hannah stated her feeling that she does not give enough attention to kids:

Hannah: Not just because one kid is talking or one kid is, or I'm talking to, it's not because one kid is talking that other kids are missing out, it's because I need to be focused somewhere else. I feel like some kids lose out (Teacher Forum, transcript 3-20-93).

Similarly, Iris expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with herself in dealing with African-American students:

Iris: I do start feeling like "I'M WALKING ON EGGS, IRIS."... I'm always starting to feel like I'm walking down this little fence. Am I going to offend them? Am I going to be okay? And it's, I feel really awkward, because when I start feeling that way, I feel like, you know, it's because I'm not very comfortable...but there's something with me that's not real comfortable with it obviously, or I wouldn't feel so awkward about the whole area. And I've only had with the Blacks, I've never had any other culture in the class that...you know, that have come out that noticeably, I guess (Teacher Forum, transcript 2-20-93).

Both these statements hold out the possibility for a harsh critique of the teachers who uttered them. Hannah could be said to not be acting in the best interest of her students, not being child-centered enough. Iris could be said to act or speak prejudicially or even in a racist manner. They are utterances that are quite personal and seem to reveal intimate fears about their respective practices.

While this may seem to have the flavor of a support group or therapy, there is a substantial difference by virtue of the fact that this is a group of educators. For one, it is uncommon for teachers to relate what may be perceived as failure (Little, 1982).

Failure may seem unprofessional. One member, Zoe, contrasted her experience in the Teacher Forum with that in a women's group which also meets monthly. In this group of "professional" women, she is the only teacher. Though she enjoys being part of a "women's group," she says she would not reveal to that group her teaching struggles. She notes she can count on an "empathic," "uncritical" and "supportive" response

from Teacher Forum members. In her women's group, she did not want to be perceived as "whining" or a "kid-basher," and of generally appearing unprofessional; "they would just not understand" (interview, 8-12-93).

Zoe's experience with another group points up two things about Teacher Forum. One, there is a sense of security in intimate or self-disclosing talk in the meetings. Second, it indicates what could be called a rule—a primary frame. Just as there is a right to express critical democratic talk, there is a similar right to disclose difficulties and troubles. And just as there is the duty to allow critical democratic talk to be heard, there is the similar duty to be a sympathetic (or empathic) and supportive listener. Part of this, of course, is due to the fact that all the members are educators and can minimally empathize with the dilemmas of teaching. But more importantly, it is due to the idio-cultural rule of being an empathic and accepting audience.

Primary Frames as Guides or Rules

"Critical democracy" and "required intimacy" or "getting personal" make up the ideological and interactional primary frames, respectively, of the Teacher Forum. The primary frames of *the critical* and *the personal* are not only frames-of interpretation and understanding utterances in the group, but also frames-for making utterances (e.g., conversation and story). That is, they provide not only ways of understanding that which is uttered, but also implicit rules or guidelines for making utterances. They are not a set of hard and fast propositions to which members must refer for each utterance. As part of a small culture frames are generally tacit; the participants are

likely to be unaware of such organized features as the framework has and unable to describe the framework with any completeness if asked, yet these handicaps are no bar to [his or her] easily and fully applying it (Goffman, 1974 , p. 21, emphasis added).

Members of the Teacher Forum must have a *sense of* these rules or guides provided by the primary frames in order to participate competently as discursive members of the group. As implicit rules for discursive conduct in the group, we can almost literally think of them as frames that bound utterances (see Figure 2.1).

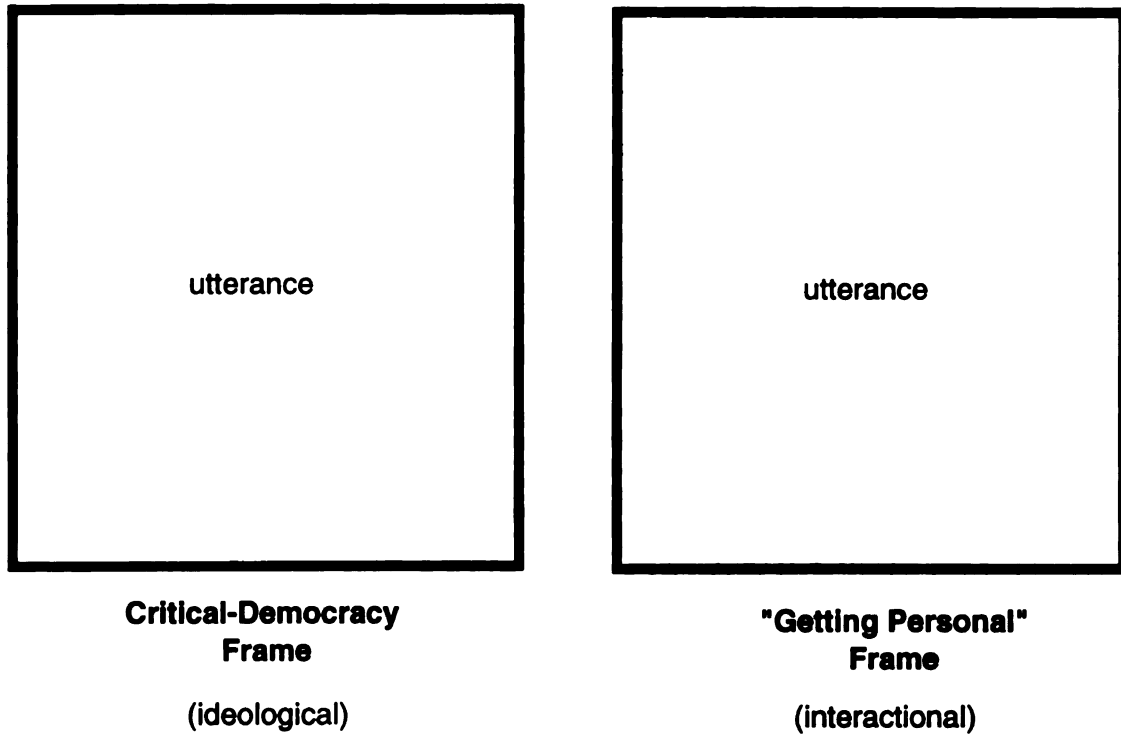


Figure 2.1

Primary frames of the Teacher Forum

Since these frames are dual, they are more accurately rendered as overlapping and interpenetrating since most utterances must conform to the demands of both frames (see Figure 2.2). The frames are not reducible to each other, but are part of the same system of organization for talk; together they are a primary framework. Interlocutors in the context of the Teacher Forum are almost literally within the frames as they speak and listen. Once immersed in the frames it is not easy, nor necessary, for members to refer formally to them, like one would to a dictionary for the precise spelling of a word or its exact definition.

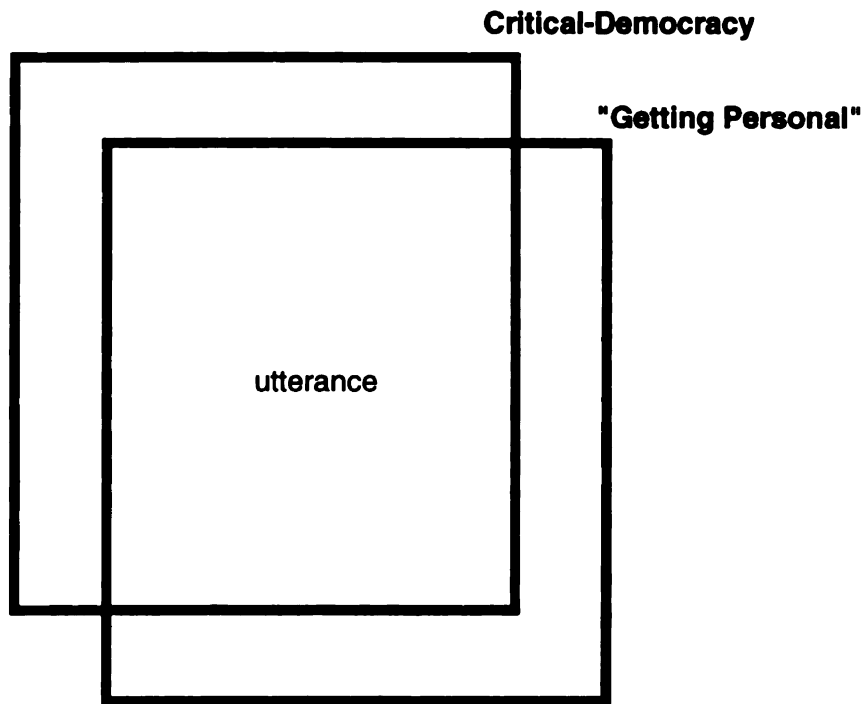


Figure 2.2

Dual primary frames of the Teacher Forum

Immersion in the frames does not make the members unconscious of them. Implicit understanding, or half-consciousness, of the rules-of and rules-for (frames) does not reduce the interlocutors to unthinking automatons. In order to deal with and work within the primary frames, a member of the Teacher Forum must have a certain amount of competence to do so. This competence is akin to what Terry Eagleton (1983) has noted in a competent reader who can apply to text certain rules for reading. Like reading, the competent recognition and use of a rule bound to a frame of reference

Seems to indicate to us the way to go, like a pointing finger; but your finger only "points" within a certain interpretation I make of what you are doing, one which leads me to look at the object indicated rather than up your arm. Pointing is not an "obvious" activity, and neither do rules carry the application on their faces: they would not be "rules" at all if they inexorably determined the way we were to apply them. Rule following involves creative interpretation, and it is often not at all easy to say whether I am applying a rule in the way that you are, or whether we are applying the same rule at all. The way you apply a rule is not just a

technical affair: it is bound up with wider interpretations of reality, with commitments and predilections which are not themselves reducible to conformity to a rule (Eagleton, 1983, p. 126).

Members of the Teacher Forum must have *a sense* of the rules or guides provided by the primary framework. Primary frames and the implicit rules point the way, but, as Eagleton notes, they still requires some active, interpretive work on the part of the uttering party. And since frames, rules, and guides are never perfect, and sometimes contradictory, the interpretation in the interaction reveals the ongoing effort needed to maintain the structure of context.

Primary Frames Together and in Relation to One Another

These primary frames of *the critical* and *the personal* indicate that verbal participation in the Teacher Forum requires individual members to conform their utterances to the demands of the context. The primary frames of the Teacher Forum are the context against which verbal utterances occur and how they are interpreted and performed by members. They are the structural, relevant features of the organization of talk in the Teacher Forum. Though the primary frames are distinguishable, to the members they are immediately experienced as undivided. As a new participant in the Teacher Forum, I was first struck by the personal-ness of the majority of the talk of the members. Given the public definition of the group, I was expecting discussion of democracy and democratic practices in a somewhat objective, critical manner. I thought the members would be critiquing school and advocating for certain preferred practices. What I encountered was an overwhelming sense of personal talk of school and life experience; “getting personal” ruled the day. It was only after being in the conversations that I realized that this talk also included critique of their experience in schools. This left the impression of a harmonious coexistence of the two primary frames.

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Contradictions and Tensions

The dual primary frames of “getting personal” and critical democracy, while seemingly compatible and mutually supportive of the goals of the Teacher Forum, do include structural tensions and contradictions. The fully participating members of the Teacher Forum must be able to deal with the competing dimensions of the frames and reconcile them into a more or less apparently integrated whole. They need to conform their utterances (including personal experience narrative) to the dual primary frameworks and attempt (or appear) to move beyond the tensions in order to maintain the group as a lived and interactional group of interlocutors, and also as a group adhering to its goals as a forum for democratic educators.

One of the clearest tensions built into the dual primary framework is that in order to be critical, to level a critique of schooling, educational practices, and society, one must enjoy a certain amount of distance and perceived objectivity. That is, to critique a thing, one must stand at a distance to it, and claim to see it from a stance from which one is not likely to incur a loss from such a critique. One must work to appear to be above and beyond the troubles of schooling and teaching, at least in the critique. One is then in a position to not support the inherently unfair system one may be a part of. Such a stance cannot involve a personal or intimate investment. Further, criticism or critique, such as Clare’s comments earlier, *requires* a non-personal stance. In other words, to critique an object which is close, personal, or intimate might seem to criticize or undermine one’s own position in relation to the object. For a Teacher Forum member to criticize, say, a teaching practice, she might seem to criticize her own practice, or worse, to personally attack those of some other group members.

The personal carries with it a different kind of burden. If one discloses one’s troubles, frustrations, or even outright failings as a teacher, the critical democratic frame would allow for criticism of those troubles, frustrations, and failings. For example, while member A may be speaking very personally about her frustration in

trying to teach, member *B* may not see the problem in terms of a personal frustration. Member *B* may see it as a failure in *A*'s teaching practices which may be efficiency or functionalist oriented. For example, if member *A* was expressing her difficulty in teaching and/or getting her students to use "standard" English, member *B* may see this as a teaching goal as inherently biased against those students whose home language is not English or is non-standard English. Member *B* might view this teacher as perpetuating a bias toward standard language instruction. This, in turn, may be connected to the standardization of teaching and learning in schools in order that they become more efficient. In this case, member *B* may perceive standard English, and member *A*'s teaching, as oppressive. Due to the personal frame, however, the speaking teacher has the right to expect to be heard and even empathized with; to critique her standard English practice would violate the frame.

Competence in Dealing With The Primary Frames

Of course, it is never quite so simple as in the scenario described above. But it points out a built in tension between the two primary frames. Speaking participants must conform the majority of their talk about schooling and education related issues to a critical frame *and* they must also conform their talk to a personal mode. It is not the mere fact that this tension or contradiction exists between the primary frames that is of interest. Rather, culturally speaking, it is how understanding the tensions and contradictions of two frames, tacitly held and consciously perceived as one configuration, get played out in the talk of the group.

The following exchange highlights the tension between the frames. At this Teacher Forum meeting (2-20-93), Lana was discussing her frustration about what seemed to her to be a group of African American students who were polarizing her school in their intimidating self-segregation.

Lana: ...But I'm just thinking about, on our team this year, of kids, we have a hundred and thirty-three kids there. There's a decent segment of Black kids who, for the first semester, were pretty well accepted. I know it changes once they get to high school, the kids talk about it, and it becomes more expected to stay among their own kind, as they say. But, they're pretty, they were pretty well integrated into the () groups in school. And then at the semester time, we got two new Black kids. Girls. One from an inner city. And all of a sudden, the Black girls are their group, and they have nothing to do with any other of the kids. But they themselves now are the threat...the two new Black girls came in, took over, and scooped up the rest of them. And they control, the two control the others through fear and intimidation. And now this group, intimidates, and threatens the other kids. So I don't know what to do about it. I don't know if you, I mean, it's almost like you can see it happen, unfolding in front of your eyes.

Iris: Well those girls, they may have come from, they're obviously scared too. When they came in new, but they may also come from a place where that's the way you did it.

Lana: Then again, it's a, it's a symptom of operating out of their anger. But it's not a constructive response to their anger.

Fatimah: When I went to high school, I went to basically a white high school in Detroit, downtown Detroit Cass Technical High School. It was an elitist institution that you had to pass tests to get into. And there was just a few black kids there, ah, the first year, the first year and a half. And we all just kind of clustered together, as ah, protection. Ah just, that THIS IS YOUR HOME. This is your only, you're isolated here amongst all these other people and this is the only place you could feel comfortable is with the same few people that came from junior high with you. So it was like ten or fifteen of us. But then as more students, black students came in, we chose the people that, you know, had the same interest that we had, and we stayed with them. Others we considered elitist or something. We ditched them (hehe). But I mean it became, I think the thing is at first they only have, we only had each other. There was like ten of us that came from the junior high school together. And as our as our high school interests developed we all, you know, stayed (in) the same kind of interest level. Some went to science some went to, and the way Cass Technical was set up you had, you had majors just like you have in college. And so my major was not the same as some of the others. So we just kind of like split off.

John: Drifted apart?

Fatimah: We drifted apart.

(Teacher Forum transcript, 2-20-93)

This exchange is part of a general discussion of problems of racial-ethnic tension in schools. More specifically, it is also part of a discussion of the expressed "anger" of

these students in classrooms and schools. Lana enters the personal frame with “But, I’m just thinking about” to introduce what she says is a trouble with self-segregation and the alleged antagonism of a group of African-American girls at her middle school. She uses her personal experience to make a point about her disdain for these groups of girls in her school. She expresses a concern for “the other kids” who are threatened and intimidated by this group of “Black girls.” After Iris’s response (“they’re obviously scared”), Lana says that she sees their actions as a function of anger, but “not a constructive response to their anger.”

Lana’s report of personal experience is also a type of critique of what has happened in her school with regard to these Black students. In a sense, she seems to be making an effort at critical commentary about the situation, a form of racial divisiveness that is not “constructive” (though constructive of what is left unsaid). What came through in her comments, which I witnessed as a participant-observer (fieldnotes, 2-20-93), was her very emotional response to this issue that was personally troubling to her. Lana maintains the personal frame with statement “I don’t know what to do about it,” implying a burden she is facing in trying to deal with it.

But Lana seemed to want to focus on the students for this difficulty, or to blame them (at least the two new Black girls). This child-directed critique rubs up against a critical perspective that focuses on social and institutional structures that allow for certain actions, however undesirable, to occur. In other words, a critical response to the events would have included commentary on this incident as a function of racism and inequality in society at large and how the school is left to deal with them. This focus on the kids as the source of the problem actually works against a critical perspective. This is not to say the situation for Lana is not real and her anxiety is unfounded. Rather, the way she *framed* the incident was through a critique of the children, not of the racist and unfair society in which they live. She only framed the incident personally, not critically; she used the personal to convey the non-critical.

This, as we see, calls for a response by another member. As I witnessed this conversation, I was concerned that Lana's comments may have had an unintentional racist tone (fieldnotes, 2-20-93). Further, I was interested to see the response from the group's only African American member, Fatimah. The primary frame of the critical would allow for some member to access the right to challenge the statement. However, that same respondent must take into consideration the personal frame that Lana invoked. How does one respond to one frame without violating the sanctity of the other?

Fatimah enters the personal frame with "When I went to high school, I went to a basically all white high school...." This utterance of personal experiences cannot be challenged in the Teacher Forum. She tells of the loneliness an African-American student can feel and the comfort received from being with friends from similar backgrounds. In this case, her friends happened to have been African-American. In the personal frame, her comments have moral weight and validity. It gives an insider's account of what it is like to be a minority of color and the sense of "home" she felt when she was with others of the same "interest."

There is symmetry to this exchange: Lana used the personal to convey a non-critical, or anti-critical point; Fatimah used the personal to respond and succeeded in putting forward a possible alternative interpretation that might account for the actions of the Black girls at Lana's school. In other words, she accessed the personal frame and the critical frame to respond to a statement framed personally but not critically. Fatimah did not argue with Lana's experience; she did not directly challenge the events or Lana's apparent interpretation of the events. To do so would violate the personal and the duty of a listening participant. Rather, Fatimah responded in kind.

Fatimah seems to have a heightened awareness of the frames at work. She even catches herself moving from her personal experience to a criticism of Lana, when she says:

"I think the thing is at first *they only have, we only had* each other."

To invoke "they," in the present tense, would refer to the girls Lana has been criticizing in her account. Fatimah adroitly moves to the past tense "we," referring to her own personal experience, not the presumed experience of the girls at Lana's school. To do so would directly challenge Lana's interpretation and squeeze the personal frame.

In this exchange, Lana's personal experience is not invalidated by Fatimah. Fatimah deftly uses the personal frame, referring to her own experience as a student to counter what might otherwise be a racist comment. In an interview later with Fatimah (3-23-93), I asked her why she did not respond argumentatively to Lana's comments. As we are friends, I have witnessed Fatimah argue stridently in racial matters. I told her I thought the door was open (the frame was available) for her to take Lana's comments to task. She told me that since Lana was talking about personal experience she did not want to seem to negate this experience, for that is what continually happens to African Americans in this American society. Furthermore, Fatimah said that it is hard for her to respond as the spokesperson for "all African-Americans;" "Who am I to say what is right from the Black point of view?" she asked. She remarked that while she may not be able to speak for all Blacks, she can "tell a story" from her personal experience. Technically, this is not a story (see Chapter 3), but it is a personal reflection on the experience of being an African-American high school student. This experience happened to conform to the critical frame demanded by the primary framework. In effect, her frames were aligned to respond in kind and in the right, not from any metaphysical position on racial matters, but according to the primary frames and norms of the Teacher Forum. Lana did not "lose face," for her personal frame was not violated; it was implicitly challenged in the personal frame accompanied with an appropriately framed critical response. After Fatimah's reflection, no one took up the discussion on this point,

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to either challenge or concur. As I wrote in my fieldnotes after this meeting, "...it was as if Fatimah had the last word."

This is one example of how the inherent tensions between the *personal* and the *critical* primary frames are played out in the ongoing negotiation of utterances. In this instance, Fatimah does the work of integrating the two, which makes these primary frames appear as a whole view or perspective. The frames are more or less like guides that hover around Teacher Forum members in the ongoing flow of talk. What Lana's account of, and Fatimah's response to, her experience with the Black girls points out, though, is that the primary framework is made up of two frames that both must be accommodated in order to speak as a fully aligned member of the Teacher Forum. The personal becomes a way to convey the critical, and the critical comes to life through the personal.

The Personal Narrative and the Primary Frames

The personal experience narrative is a quotidian expressive form. However, in the Teacher Forum it takes on a different signification. The form of the personal experience narrative is by definition a vehicle for speaking intimately about oneself; it is *personal* narrative. If "getting personal" is a major contextual dimension of the Teacher Forum, a primary frame, the use of the personal experience narrative form carries symbolic meaning in/of the culture of the Teacher Forum. As a major communicative device, the personal experience narrative is performed in a way that seeks to support the critical democratic while holding itself in tension with the personal. It leaves a Levi-Straussian question to be explored: is the personal experience narrative the container or the contained? In other words, does the personal carry critical democratic values, the "tradition" of the Teacher Forum? Or do the values and purposes of the group, found in the primary framework, allow for personal experience

narrative? The answer is, of course, yes to both. The story analyses in Part II are explorations of how this happens.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT PERSONAL NARRATIVE IS

AND HOW I STUDIED IT

The juice expressed by the wine press is what it is because of a prior act, and it is something new and distinctive. It does not merely represent other things. Yet it has something in common with other objects and it is made to appeal to the other persons than the one who produced it.

John Dewey,
The Expressive Object

In this chapter I conceptualize the personal experience narrative in the performance perspective. In the first section, I outline and describe theoretically the personal narrative as a textual item and as a communicative event. In the second section, I provide the methodology I used to study the personal experience narrative as text *and* the event in which it occurs as narrative performance.

SECTION 1:

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVE: ORAL LITERATURE?

As noted in the introduction, the personal experience narrative is both a creative text and a discursive event. As text, the personal experience narrative is contiguous with the idea of narrative generally in which it retains, to the outside analyst, features of a genre. The personal narrative is also oral communication. As an “enclave” (Young, 1987) in conversation, the personal experience narrative in face to face communicative situations represents a discursive act. Taken together, the personal experience narrative can be viewed as a form of oral literature.

The Problems of Genre and the Personal Experience Narrative

The difficulty with genre identification is that the notion of genre is that of the researcher. It appears to be the work of an outsider imposing definitions on what may otherwise be disparate phenomena. The idea of genre originates in the world of the academic and is part of a language that academics use to communicate with each another. To call something a literary or cultural genre means bringing in definitions that natives, or insiders, may consider irrelevant distortions of certain utterances. The discussion of forms, such as stories, would seem to be part of that endeavor.

However, the notion of genre becomes slippery when we are speaking of cultural expressions like the personal narrative. Telling stories, and talking about them, is hardly a closely guarded commodity of academics; an academic does not need to tell us when a story is being told. When we tell each other stories we know that we are telling stories and we share the proposition "this is a story." Further, we, as cultural beings, know what stories are and that there are multiple varieties of them; we make distinctions between types of stories (e.g., those stories that are new and come as "news," repeated family stories, or local legends, etc.). In short, we do have *native notions* of story.

Our native notions, holds Roger Abrahams (1985), are those broad ideas that seem generally to characterize American ideas of storytelling. These are distinctions natives make between kinds of story, a form of categorization. Abrahams delineates the *personal story*, *tale*, and *myth*. He sees these in ascending order of abstraction and cultural embodiment:

In our native system of storytelling we have at least three levels of storying: 1) the informal and the ongoing personal storytelling in which the ending and the meaning are negotiable (or still under negotiation); 2) the well-made story, one capable of being retold because of its sense of the beginning-middle-end and implicit *message* or *point*; and, 3) those stories which are so well-known and so central to the existence of a group that they need only be referred to and not necessarily retold for their points to be made. The first of these is *just a story*, the second an

exemplary *tale* or *case in point*, the third approaches being a *myth*. (p. 43, emphasis in original)

My starting point is this native classification Abrahams identifies. I focus on the informal personal storytelling that has the sense of *just a story*, those stories that are closer to everyday life and interactional use. These *just stories* are the personal experience narratives that have an everyday quality in their emergence within the Teacher Forum.

This classification of native notions of story indicates that genre starts somewhere in the real world. Though speaking of genre is the work of the researcher, it is the researcher's work on an the occurrence of narrative utterances in time and space, that interlocutors themselves can identify. Native interlocutors may not explicitly call something a story, and they may not make distinctions between story types. When examined though, *just stories* are so regularly patterned and so widely used that we can see that they do have features that make them generically identifiable. That is, such utterances have features which make them *personal experience* narratives. Identification of the genre features of a cultural-folk item or expression is not simply the imposition of a predefined definition, but rather a working up from those generic features that have been identified within the personal experience narrative. Like any ethnographic endeavor, genre is part of the world of the researcher and the researched

Genre Components of the Personal Experience Narrative

Sandra Stahl (1989) has most comprehensively studied the personal narrative as a form of oral literature from a folkloric point of view. She has expounded that the single episode anecdote (Abraham's native *just story*) has literary qualities that make it narrative. This is important since not all personal accounts are stories. In other words, we can see that an utterance can be called personal narrative because it exhibits those elements that make it not only a representation of personal experience, but make it a

presentation of experience through narrative artifice. My own emphasis is on the clearly distinguishable narrative form in the single episode, personal experience story. This is, if Abrahams' intuition is correct, the personal narrative genre in American culture at large. This does not mean that I am advocating for pure analytic separation of the personal experience narrative from family stories, communal tales, life histories, local history events, and so on. Rather, I am pointing to the idea that there are those elements that can be addressed as making up the genre of the personal narrative.

Stahl identifies the personal narrative as having three components that comprise it as a genre: 1) dramatic narrative structure, 2) implied truthfulness, and 3) the *self-same* of the narrator and the narrative's protagonist. To this third component I add the qualifier that if the narrator is not the story's main character she is at least a chief witness to the story's events. Though it is possible to find this definition of the personal narrative in other forms of story, these components are the basics of the personal narrative. Since the life history, some legends and myths, and other forms of story can have any or all three of these components, my concern is with the conversational, single episode, anecdotal variety.

Dramatic Narrative Structure

A personal experience narrative is a *narrative*. As such, personal narrative must have a minimal amount of dramatic narrative structure. It is this structure which we recognize when we hear or read a story. It is the form that announces itself "this is a story," and which insiders and outsiders recognize as the discursive form that orders events and experience into meaningful wholes and creates a "taleworld" that others can enter (Young, 1987).

The demand of the narrative form is in effect an imposition of drama. The sense of dramatic movement means taking a sequence of events and formulating some sort of plot. Without this sense of drama and plot, a narrative is little more than a report of events.

Though such reports themselves are susceptible to artistic manipulation, it is the demands of the narrative from which constrain the personal experience narrative to make a drama. It is drama that makes events compelling, where we are convinced they are storyworthy. The emplotment of events into dramatic narrative has us recognize the expressive utterances as story.

The characterization of dramatic structure is hard to pin down. Stories take diverse forms and employ numerous literary or poetic devices. We can at least note that a narrative drama involves a minimal amount of complicating action (Labov, 1972; Robinson, 1981; Stahl, 1989). This complicating action involves the narrative arrangement of concrete actions, involving characters, a point of view, and some conflict leading or pointing to some form of resolution (that may or may not be known to the teller or listeners).

The necessity of drama is important for thinking about teacher narratives and stories of experience. It is important to distinguish the personal narrative from other personal accounts. Often personal accounts are reflections upon experience, not the narrative constitution of *an* experience (Dewey, 1934a). Very often, what we take to be stories of personal experience are little more than broad reflections on experience. A reflection on experience may be about specific experiences and specific events, but tend to be more abstract and lack the arrangement or sequencing of events into a plot. Though stories are a forms of personal reflection on experience, not all personal experience reflection is narration or narrative construction. A story entails the artistic manipulation of the components of a narrative into a more or less coherent, narrative whole. In other words, there is a form of emplotment in the personal experience narrative that marks itself off from other forms of personal reflection.

To highlight this distinction between the personal narrative and what I variously call personal reflection or personal account, and to discuss further the presence of dramatic narrative structure in even the shortest of conversational, personal

narratives, the examples below provide contrastive cases in point. These tellings are by the same person, Fatimah, during the same Teacher Forum meeting. They are told only moments apart, with the personal account preceding the personal narrative. (The personal account has already been examined in Chapter 2 as an instance of a contextualized Teacher Forum utterance.)

(Teacher Forum transcript, 2-20-93)

¹See Appendix B for transcription devices.

“Kwame Touré”

1 Fatimah: Well there's no doubt that their anger is really there.
2 Kwa -Kwame Touré was on campus
3 the other night.
4 I was there for his presentation.
5 Kwame Touré was a kind of () of the Black Panther Party
6 back in the sixties.
7 Um
8 And so I was there
9 cause I was the one to announce the winner of the Malcolm X essay
10 contest
11 so -which we have every year this time.
12 And so that person was going read the essay
13 and then he was going to (give a) speech.
14 And all -and these all young people in the -in the audience and
15 everything.
16 And he says
17 he'll say something like
18 "You know sometime you had to just shake someone's hand and then
19 pull out a gun and shoot them"
20 or something.
21 AND THE KIDS WERE EATING THIS UP.
22 AND IT WAS INCREDIBLE.
That man scared me.
Because he was talking out of a time that was not even
-I didn't think he was

23 Iris: [And they loved it.

24 F: They loved it.

(story 1:16)

The account I titled “When I Went to High School” is, indeed, *personal*. As I described in Chapter 2, this account was told in response to an ongoing Teacher Forum conversation in which the topic of self segregation of African-American students was starting to take on a potentially racist tone in blaming students for their own isolation. Self-segregation is a complex and difficult issue for teachers to talk about, as evidenced by this very conversation. Fatimah’s use of the personal account is clearly strategic and embodies a form of argument based upon personal experience. As I witnessed this exchange, Fatimah’s taking the floor with her reflection on experience was indeed powerful. This offering of her reflection struck a chord about what it might be like to be a minority in white school, to endure loneliness and to seek out companionship of others who help you say “This is your home” (line 12).

But “When I Went to High School” is not a story. It involves no concrete actions of any characters. It is Fatimah’s broad and abstract reflection upon experience in high school. Non-concrete discussion of personal experience (not events) is perfectly acceptable in the Teacher Forum context. This account, though, does not involve the sequencing plot with dramatic movement that would make it narrative.

This is not to say that the listener will not infer dramatic experience from such reflections. There is a *sense of drama*, of moral weight, in the recounting of the general experience of being an ethnic-minority in high school. As listeners, we regularly make inferences about other’s experience (especially those of us who have a penchant for seeing experience as storied). This is the work of the listener who imposes upon the utterances of the speaker a sense of drama. While drama may be felt by the audience in hearing personal reflection upon experience, and drama may very well be intended by the speaker, it is not necessarily *textually* narrative. When there is no emplotment of experience in narrative form, it is not a narrative text.

The account about Kwame Touré, by contrast, is a narrative. Like “When I Went to High School,” it is partly a strategic response to the ongoing conversation. After

discussing the self-segregation of African American students, the discussion turned on the “anger” of minority students and the manifestations of this anger teachers encounter. This is a particularly poignant issue for critical democrats in that, in a critical view, expressions of anger among students of color is ultimately explained as a justified, or at least an understandable, response to a racist society. This response, though, is an immediate and concrete phenomenon with which teachers must cope as they try to teach. Explaining it away as a sociological phenomenon doesn’t provide pragmatic help for the teacher, nor does it directly empathize with the experience of a teacher faced with angry students. Acknowledgment of this as a pedagogical problem whose origins reside in socially inherited inequities requires a certain amount of critical empathy for the teacher. One needs to avoid letting the conversation slip into blaming the students for this social inheritance in a world not of their making. Fatimah’s *Kwame Touré* is a personal reflection, but one which is a personal *narrative* that dramatizes *an* experience.

We see in the text of *Kwame Touré* that the story involves a specific episode. Fatimah introduces the characters (herself, Kwame Touré, and a generalized group of “students”) and introduces time and place. The story has a plot, a sense of dramatic build up and movement, even in such a short story that seems little more than a replay of events. Fatimah casts herself as an intimate and bewildered witness to what she sees as a somewhat lamentable message by a famous black activist and the embrace of that message by a group of university students. We can see how after introducing the situation, complicating action and conflict ensue²:

²I have borrowed this technique from Sandra Stahl who has used it to great effect in demonstrating the dramatic plot of some longer and more developed personal narratives. I am using it here with an even shorter, conversational personal narrative to highlight dramatic plot.

Initial situation (lines 1 -10)

- a) Kwame Touré (the African name taken by Stokely Carmichael), a famous figure in the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and 70s, comes to a university campus to speak.
- b) The Malcolm X essay contest, an African-American student event.
- c) Fatimah present to announce essay contest winner.

Complication (11-13)

- a) Fatimah explains what the event is and how it is to proceed by foreshadowing the order of events, i.e., announce winner, winner reads essay, invited speaker Kwame Touré gives speech (implies orderly without disruption or surprise).
- b) Many “young people” present (implies impressionable).

Climax (16-17)

- a) Kwame Touré says that shooting someone may be necessary. Fatimah reports his speech to indicate that this is what Kwame Touré did indeed say about explicit use of violence.

Crisis (18-19)

- a) Students respond enthusiastically, devouring his words (“eating this up”).
- b) Fatimah registering shock and fear.

The story closes with Fatimah’s dismay that the students did not contextualize what Kwame Touré was saying, that they had a misunderstanding of the historical and symbolic significance of his words and instead might be taking them more literally as an example and glorification of duplicitous violence.

Dénouement (21-24)

- a) Fatimah asserts that Kwame Touré was referring to a time and an ethos of Black activism, (Black Panthers in the sixties, lines 5 -6).
- b) Implied: shared agreement (with Iris) that students enjoy hearing about the violent expression of anger and that this is troublesome.

This story is a complicated response to a complicated and conflicted issue—how to think about student anger and expressions of that anger. This is exceedingly difficult for an African American who, by her own admission, is rather radical in her political stance on issues of race and racism in American society. But Fatimah is also a teacher educator and a member of the Teacher Forum. She is pulled between her own obvious political commitments and activism within the African American community and among African American students and her connections to the Teacher Forum and to the plight of teachers more generally. How can an African American woman convey her sense of camaraderie with white teachers about dealing with angry black students in classrooms? In this case, Fatimah tells a story of her own personal outrage of a prominent Black activist describing violent acts as acceptable, even laudable. Fatimah makes dramatic her witnessing student enthusiasm for apparent glorification of violence.

At first glance, the dramatic structure of narrative is not easily seen in this story. The events themselves do not necessarily demand a dramatic structure. To someone other than Fatimah, Kwame Touré's words and the audience response together might not warrant dramatic rendition of events. A student attending the presentation might have seen it as highly entertaining and see the violence as peripheral to the content of Kwame Touré's speech. In the Teacher Forum meeting and the conversation about student anger Fatimah uses the "the genre of the personal narrative as a directing literary strategy" (Stahl, p. 15) in order to simultaneously indicate her affiliation with African American activism and her disdain of a potentially violent dimension arising from legitimate student anger. In the story, Fatimah reduces and exaggerates Kwame Touré's words, and the students' response to them, and she symbolically condemns their implications. Fatimah provides a short story of events in which she was indirectly involved (and directly witnessed) and creates a drama where there were merely events.

Implied Truthfulness

This notion of dramatic exaggeration of events leads to consideration of the second aspect of the personal experience narrative genre, that these stories are about *real* events. Stahl succinctly notes:

For the personal narrative to function properly in any storytelling situation, both the teller and the listener must understand that the story—no matter how rhetorically enhanced—is to be accepted as true (p. 18).

In other words, the personal experience narrative needs to be understood as *not fiction*.

Other forms of story, like tall tales or jokes, rely on the mutual agreement of the narrator and audience that what is being told is not true. While it is very difficult (or impossible) for the listener to verify that the narrated events in a personal experience narrative actually happened, s/he must make the leap of faith required when hearing a personal narrative. In other words, the narrator must present a plausible account that *can be accepted as true*.

The question, then, is not whether a narrator can tell a story accurately, in every detail, in order to mimic the events that happened. Rather, this becomes a question of whether one can tell a story *convincingly*. Since the listeners have no way to check out the accuracy of the events, and it would be an ungracious listener who challenges the narrator's credibility, the listener must look to that which is presented in the story's text. This, and the necessary leap of faith in the narrator, is all that the listener has as a check for a story's veracity. Stories, then, seek verisimilitude, that the events narrated ring true. Just as the narrator must use literary devices to render a sense of drama necessary for a narrative, so must she attend to those elements that maintain the implied truthfulness, the credibility of the story.

In the story "Kwame Touré," we can see a number of these elements that work toward the implied truthfulness. First, Fatimah designates a supposedly real person arriving to speak, Kwame Touré, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael (lines 2-3).

She identifies him as a former member of the Black Panther Party, indicating Touré's existence in real historical time (line 5), pointing to a real political space. She then indicates that she was "there" (line 8) the "other night" (line 3) to announce the winner of an essay contest that is named after Malcolm X, "which we have every year at this time" (line 10). These orient the listener to not only the literary time and place, but to a real time and a real place, rather than fictive.

What lends the story not only its most dramatic moment but its greatest sense of verisimilitude, is when she directly quotes Kwame Touré (lines 16-17). This is the purported speech of another, not the narrator. It is what literary critics call "direct speech" in that it is a direct mimic of the speech of another (see Chapter 5). The reported words " 'You know sometimes you had to just shake someone's hand and then pull out a gun and shoot them' " is different than had Fatimah reported indirectly his speech, such as "*He said that* sometimes you shake someone's hand and. . .". In other words, Fatimah's replay of Kwame Touré words is a literary attempt to lend credibility to this story, that a real person said these real words. We are uncertain of the accuracy of these words (i.e., that these were the exact words of Kwame Touré). The listeners are implored to hear these as Kwame Touré said them, although there is probably the subtle, unstated agreement between Fatimah and the listeners that these words did not happen exactly as she reports them. This nonetheless indicates the demands of the genre that the story be accepted as true. In short, the personal narrative is a form of realism since it is purportedly about real events that truly did occur.

Contradictions. Within these parts of the genre of the personal narrative lie two contradictory demands. Dramatization inevitably involves some form of falsification or distortion in its imposition of the narrative form. Events are left out, often enhanced, and even created for the sake of providing a coherent narrative rendering of events. Since events themselves are never inherently dramatic, it is the burden of the narrator

to present her experience of these events as drama and put them together in a plot making it a narrative.

Falsification, then, is an almost essential part of realism. As the great Russian realist Dostoevsky said of artistic realism, it is necessary to distort reality for the sake of making it appear real (1954, esp. pp. 459-489). This is why, to the bewilderment of some of his readers and critics, he insisted that the fantastic is an essential part of realism. In effect, in order to create an aesthetically acceptable drama, according to the dictates of the narrative form, the author/narrator must distort “real” events in order to make the story seem real. Herein lies the tension between these competing components of the personal narrative: that it is asserted as true or real while we implicitly assent to its distortion for the sake of dramatic presentation.

Self-Same of Narrator and Character/Witness

Into this fray of the contradictory demands between implied truthfulness and the dramatic enters the third genre feature of the personal experience narrative, that the story’s narrator and the story’s main character and/or chief witness are the same. I have extended Stahl’s notion of the “self-same” to include the narrator as also a primary witness to events, not necessarily the main characters. As in the case of the story “Kwame Touré,” Fatimah is not the main character; though she is an important character, she is more a chief witness.

The personal narrative form seems to hang on this *self-same* attribute of the genre. Many narrative forms have implied truthfulness (e.g., legends and even some myths). And all narratives technically have drama. In the personal experience narrative the narrator offers her involvement in the story’s events as “the primary means of certifying the truth of the incident upon which the story is based” (Stahl, pp. 18-19). A narrator offers her own authority or integrity for the truthfulness of the story. As a character in her own story, the narrator offers her own participation in the story’s plot

to vouch that the events were not only real, but also storyworthy and dramatic events. In personal narratives the *I*-the-teller is also the *I*-the-character. In her story *Kwame Touré*, Fatimah offers herself as intimate witness to the real events (“I was there” lines 4, 8). She “was the one to announce the winner of the Malcolm X essay contest” (line 9)” and the one appalled by the carelessness of Kwame Touré’s words.

Story as Discursive Event

The forgoing discussion speaks to the personal narrative as an *item* of expressive utterance, the *textual* or literary dimensions of the form as a genre of story. The personal experience narrative is also a discursive event. In other words, the personal experience narrative occurs in time and space as oral communication (Labov and Waletzky, 1967). Personal experience stories typically arise in conversation. As such, a story must make its way to and from conversation, and sometimes mark itself off from other stories that may precede or follow it. This requires an interactive understanding of the personal story as a form of communication in which the interlocutors agree when a story begins and ends as an order of discourse. Conversants must agree on the definition of the situation (Goffman, 1951; 1974) and cooperatively understand when a speaker has taken the floor and entered the story frame and performed a story.

When story occurs, the normal rules of conversation are suspended (Coulthard, 1977). Conversation analysts speak of conversation being composed of turn taking, where speakers understand that they are in a conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1978). Story is, at its most basic, an extended turn at talk, or takes up at least two turns at talk. This idea of shifting forms of communication can be seen as an issue of framing (Goffman, 1974). As described in the previous chapter, frames and framing are issues of meta-communication, communication about communication (Bateson, 1951). Utterances not only send their contents but also information about how utterances are to be interpreted. Frames, in other words, speak to the story as an event

among other kinds of events and a relationship between interlocutors. When in a conversation frame, the speakers acknowledge their relationship as turn takers and their talk is “framed” as conversation. In the story frame, they acknowledge their relationship as narrator and listener and their talk is “framed” as story.

Katherine Young (1987) calls the story an enclave in conversation and she describes it as a frame within a frame. The “realm” conversation is the dominant utterance that envelops most informal storytelling situations. Stories are enclosed within conversation, in a “storyrealm.” We can almost literally think of these as frames within frames (see Figure 3.1)

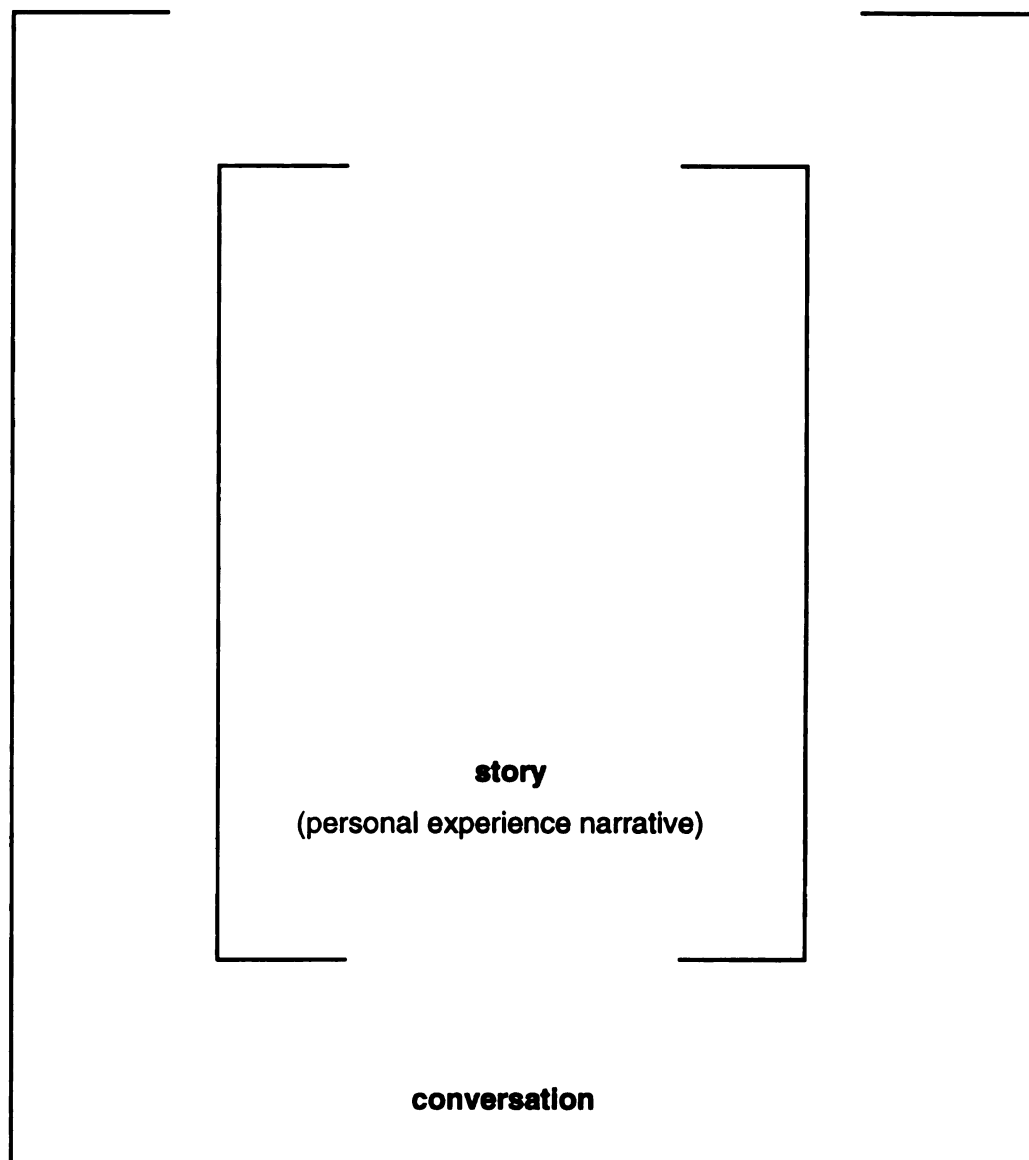


Figure 3.1

Story as enclave on conversation³

Young goes beyond this framing of story within conversation to address the world created by the story itself, what she calls the "Taleworld," that roughly corresponds to what I call the textual item (the dramatic narrative structure involving complicating action, etc.). For my purposes here, I will be addressing in a more limited fashion how

³This basic figure has been adapted from Young (1986).

stories must make their way back to the ongoing conversation. That is, how story must mark itself off from conversation.

Story Openings and Closings

The shift between the realm of conversation and the realm of story (by no means the only discursive realms available) is empirically evidenced in the talk of speaking participants. We can see that the story frame must be entered before the narrative text can be enacted by a narrator. Stories have openings and closings, that point to the beginning and end of the narrative text. Story is different than conversation in one important way in that story is a representation of events not present to the storytelling occasion. A story's events (i.e., complicating action) "are set off from the enclosing conversation by openings and closings, which mark the entries and exits between the Storyrealm and the realm of conversation" (Young, p. 31). Stories are opened and closed as an order of discourse and form boundaries between story and conversation. These are boundaries of the enclave in conversation (see Figure 3.2).

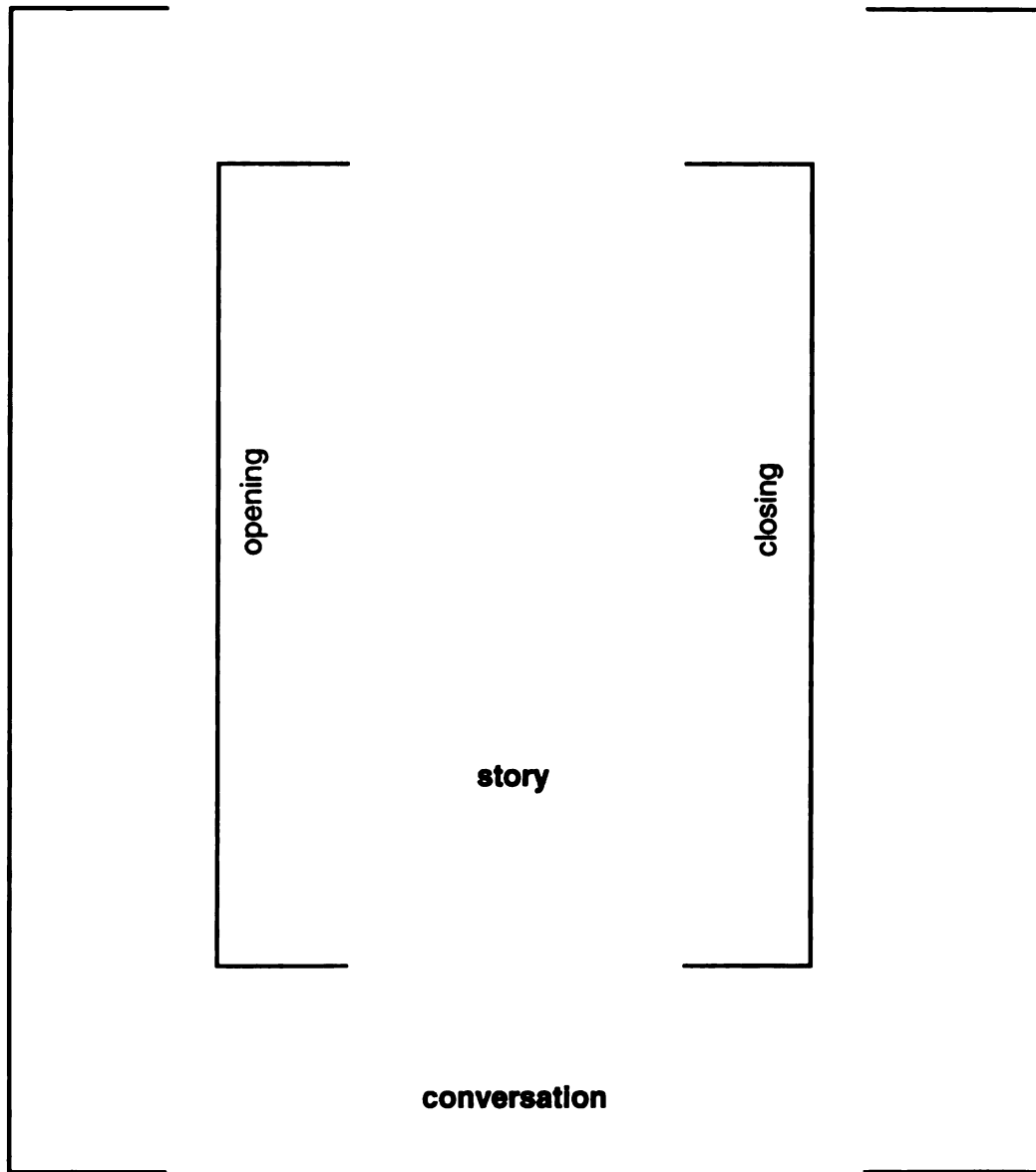


Figure 3.2

Openings and closings in story

Opening utterances are neatly aligned with story beginnings. For example, in her story *Terrible Discussion*, Clare moves from the conversational frame to the story frame:

Clare: But -but -but what it
you know the other thing is that it

it seems to suggest if only everything would move back into being the way that it was fifty or a hundred years ago all these things would be solved.

In fact it -it seems a direct reflection of "stop being gay."
Or stop being anything that's different than the way it was.
I mean even my own child.

story opening

Yesterday

we had this terrible discussion.

We -we ran into her principal from middle school
or from when she was in Valley ((Sidney's elementary school))
at -out in front of Luigi's
and Sidney is -is you know in sixth grade and trying to be really
cool so she pretends not to notice.

.....

The closing has two phrases.

(Clare:) "If -if everything you do is for a product that's going to get a grade on it." =I said "How many times have you really done what you wanted to do? =How many times has your effort been truly authentic or has it just been done because you knew the grade was the final outcome and that was what was more important than the learning experience in fact?"

closing

closing

Well the conversation just completely shut down.
Not another word after that.

(story 3:8)

Story openings and closings are similar to the formulaic expressions of *Once upon a time* and *The end* (Young). Thus, when Clare says "Yesterday/we had this terrible discussion" she is alerting the audience that she is about to tell a story; "Well the conversation just completely shut down./Not another word after that" alerts the audience that she has finished. Openings and closings mark the discontinuities between conversation and story for both listener and teller; they are part of the story while simultaneously providing a transition between the story and conversation.

Preface and Coda

Openings and closings orient the reader to the narrative enclosed within the story frame. That is, they set up the story frame as the frame-for narration and as the frame-

of listening. Openings and closings form stories and act as the boundaries of the story. The transition from story to conversation, and back again, is not necessarily smooth. Openings and closings do not themselves create the enclosure for the story enclave. This is the work of prefaces and codas, which lie outside of openings and closing, as well as bound them, making space for the story to emerge in conversation (see Figure 3.3).

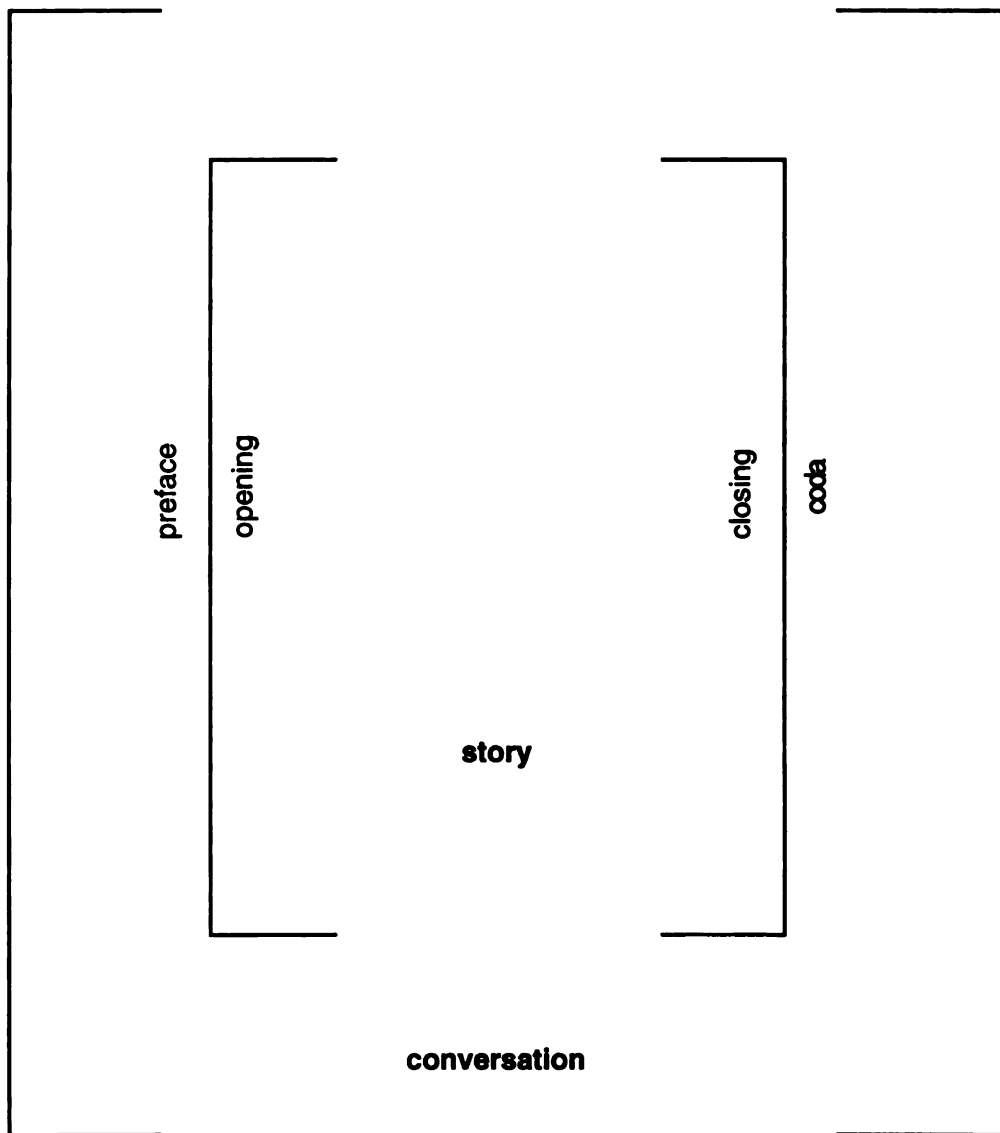


Figure 3.3

Preface and coda around story

Preface. To indicate the shift in frame from the conversation to the story, the listeners need indications or guides for making and following such shifts. Story is an extended turn at talk. Conversation turns are typically understood to end with sentences; sentence ends signal utterance completions. A story takes at least two turns to tell. At the completion of a turn, other participants will feel expected or entitled to take their own turn at talk. A speaker who wants to take the floor and tell a story needs to seek and get permission for the extended turn at talk that will be a story.

Young, following Harvey Sacks⁴, calls these requests for permission “prefaces.” She indicates these occur often in conversation and are an outright request to “produce extended talk” which, in turn, requires a “response” from others. The first speaker who is seeking the floor to tell a story stops and waits for others to respond affirmatively and then proceeds to tell the story.

We can see an example of the preface-response-opening sequence when Zoe seeks to tell a story. This happened during the habitual introduction period that opens Teacher Forum meetings. This is where a member states his or her name, teaching position, and other identifying information.

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------|--|
| | Zoe: | I'm Zoe Smith.
I teach at Ascension School in Midville
which is a fourth through eighth grade and I teach fifth through
eighth grade.
Mainly English and Reading. =And
Um |
| <i>preface</i> | | you'll be happy to know that my principal is gone. |
| <i>response</i> | Steve: | Hey alright. |
| <i>response</i> | Clare: | MY GOODNESS. |
| <i>opening</i> | Z: | I went to the priest and told him how incompetent she was
and he called all the other teachers in
and everybody told him the same thing |

⁴At the time of the publication of Young's book *Storyrealms and Taleworlds* in 1987, she cited Sacks unpublished lectures notes. These notes have subsequently been published in 1993 by Blackwell.

and she quit.

.....

(story 4:3)

To seek to tell a story at this time is even more strenuous. Zoe's story came during a round robin activity where there is a stronger implied rule that the speaker will limit use of the time (her turn) to provide identifying information. When Zoe announces that her principal is gone, she is, in effect, begging the listeners to let her tell more. She does not immediately jump to the story which (as we will see) is more common in the Teacher Forum. She stops and waits for a response before opening to story.

Occasionally, Teacher Forum stories are invited by others. In this case, *preface-response-opening* sequencing can be accomplished in two turns, where the preface is housed within the requesting speaker's question. For example, I asked Lana to say more about an allusion she made to a death threat she received (this narrative is treated to an extended analysis in Chapter 6). I was unsure of whether she would have followed through on the allusion. In that I wanted to hear about the death threat, I directly asked her if she would tell about it, and I prefaced my question which would allow her the turn to tell a story if she so pleased (I had foreknowledge of Lana's experience and her sensitivity to it). My preface allowed for a shocking story opening.⁵

Lana: Oh I know. =This new CREEP⁶ business from the state.
 You know that dichotomy between the administration and the
 teachers all that crap that I went through with the death threat
 a couple of years ago.
 You know.
 And I finally got into the um
 off -the office.
 I said "You have a luxury down here of being able to deal with a
 child on a one on one basis.
 And yes I feel sorry for this child's background

⁵N.B. I do not include this graphic story here for shock value. I examine this story in its entirety in Chapter 6 and I feel that it is worth using it as an example of prefacing in that it may aid the reader to hold in mind that story is still a conversation event and not just a text.

⁶State mandated standardized testing.

I realize he is a troubled teenager
 bu -bu -bu and I hope he -
 you know
 but he does not have the right to come into that classroom
 and threaten the teacher's life
 and disrupt the class
 and so on.
 When I am in that classroom my decisions are based on what's best
 for the majority. =As much as I care about that individual
 the majority takes precedence."
 Well we went round and round and round on that issue
 and the board of education finally decided that -
 /
 um
 you know that difference between -and again it's that power
 structure
 hierarchical
 //
 deal.

*preface/
 response*

Steve: So you got a death threat from a student?
 Can I ask about that?

opening

Lana: Oh this -this was (hehe) a topic of conversation several years ago.
 Um
 Yes there was a note
 ah left on my table.
 And ah
 it was in a letter or some such thing
 and um
 this particular child was going to
 cut off my tits
 and shove one down my throat
 the other up my cunt
 and throw my body into the front yard of my house so that my
 husband and children could see what a bitch they lived with.

(story 2:5)

The *preface-response-sequence* is uncommon in the Teacher Forum and happens in less than one-fifth of the stories. This may be due to my failure to account for paralinguistic features such as a nodding of the head or raising of the eyebrows that might indicate some form of listener response. And it is possible that I was unable to audio record some very low verbal responses such as "Ummm" or "Uh huh" which would constitute a preface response, though I was able to capture nearly all verbal utterances.

Abstracts. Because prefacing-response sequencing is infrequent in the Teacher Forum, the prefaces that do occur are more like preludes, a tastes of stories to come. In this way, the utterances leading up to a story take the form of what Labov (1972) calls the “abstract” of a story, which is made up of “one or two clauses summarizing the whole story” (p. 363). Abstracts “can be used as openings for stories where they do to elicit responses but only offer instructions about how to monitor the story for its end” (Young, p. 42). These do not belong to the story proper, as these utterances are not immediately part of the complicating action or dramatic sequencing of events. Nor is the abstract a condensed version of the story, to be used in lieu of the story, like a story index. Abstracts do much work in the service of frame shifting and moving from the realm of conversation and to the realm of story and creating the space for the story to proceed.

The following excerpts from Teacher Forum stories highlight the movement from the conversation frame to the story frame through use of abstracts. Here Lana’s abstract orients the listener to her ensuing story about a faculty meeting about standardizing her school curriculum according to state objectives driven by standardized testing.

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---|
| | Zoe: | The exact same line. |
| | Clare: | But the idea that -that she would think
just already in sixth grade
that it's -this is the way it's always been
therefore it must be right
is the attitude I think
the majority of adults have. |
| <i>abstract
opening</i> | Lana: | Well I just was involved with a mee -scary meeting on grading.
Um.
A number of us in the district
building principals
department chairs
this type of stuff
was brought into a meeting to have demonstrated for us this new
um
program -computer program |

that comes already equipped with thirty seven thousand multiple
choice questions
that with your district objectives
.....

(story 3:9)

Similarly, we can see Valerie seeking to tell about her daughter's school experience.

Zoe: I don't really care who types it, at the seventh and eighth grade
level.
However
I want that work to be theirs.
You know?
And it makes them mad
but they do it.

*abstract/
opening*

Val: One of the teachers at this school
I have -I have a tenth grade daughter
or she was tenth grade last year when this happened.
And
they had a
um
term paper that was
a collaboration between the biology class and the English classes.
=They had to do an experiment.
Which is a great idea.
.....

(story 4:9)

Abstracts are metacommunicative framing devices about how to listen to the ensuing story. Because abstracts do not require the overt verbal response for the continuation of the narrator's extended turn at talk, they also constitute the opening of the story frame, that, in turn, leads to the beginning of the story proper. The use of abstracts over the preface-response-opening sequence, I think, can best be explained by the general ethos of the Teacher Forum in which "getting personal" is so accepted and encouraged that speakers do not need to ask for overt permission to tell a personal story, or, for that matter, to provide a personal reflection upon experience that is not story. Listeners do not need to overtly indicate that they approve of the abstract interest arouser. There is an implicit understanding within the Teacher Forum that unless

another speaker interrupts the one who is seeking the floor through a preface, or otherwise assumes a turn at talk after the preface has been offered, this itself constitutes a response in the affirmative; no response is not a negative response.

Coda. Prefaces are designed to arrange for the suspension of regular turn taking during conversations. Conversely “codas” are designed to restore or resume the turn taking of conversation (Labov, 1972) . Because of the discrete character of story, as an order of discourse which is understood to have an ending, the end of a story also signals the return to conversation. Sometimes this closing is unclear to the audience and the narrator signals a return to conversational turn taking. Codas are devices that help narrators and listeners when there might be difficulty when story endings do not obviously complete story openings.

In Clare’s story about her discussion with her daughter, we can see that her story closing is not immediately picked up by anyone. She pauses with “Um” and then returns to the conversation which started the story, which is about that we think so little about our common sense assumptions of how the world is organized. Zoe picks up with a comment on seeing the movie *Huck Finn* and how the idea of “the way its always been” was a part of the movie.

(Clare:)	I said “If -if everything you do is for a product that’s going to get a grade on it.” =I said “How many times have you really done what you wanted to do? =How many times has your effort been truly authentic or has it just been done because you knew the grade was the final outcome and that was what was more important than the learning experience in fact?”
<i>closing</i>	Well the conversation just completely shut down. Not another word after that.
	Um
<i>coda</i>	But You know The idea that -that was a long way around getting to the main thing that I thought was so interesting and the idea of being that this has always been the way it was. =And even a sixth grader.
Zoe:	Take her to Huck Finn.

You know?

C: Oh I know.

Z: You know.

C: Oh I know.

Z: Huck Finn they use the line they use that line two or three times.

C: [Yeah that exact same line.

Z: The exact same line.

coda C: But the idea that -that she would think
just already in sixth grade
that it's -this is the way it's always been
therefore it must be right
is the attitude I think
the majority of adults have.

(story 3:8)

Clare provides two codas, the second coming in the conversation itself. (These are also evaluative utterances that indicate the “point” of the story”, see Chapter 4). Using a second coda (“just already in sixth grade”), Clare is not only maintaining a return to conversation, but a direction in which she wants the conversation to go, namely not about movies, but about real life and real children assuming the attitude “this is the way it’s always been.” This coda points back to the preceding story in order to point the conversation forward in a particular direction.

Similarly, the story *Kwame Touré* seems to have a natural ending. Iris appears to recognize that story is over and that she may return to conversation about the issue of student anger. When Fatimah does not complete her first phrase of why Kwame Touré scared her and restarted, Iris took this to signal the end of the story. Fatimah’s second and third coda (“They loved it” and “Right”) are also responses to Iris’ utterances.

*abstract/
opening* Fatimah: Well there's no doubt that their anger is really there.
Kwa -Kwame Touré was on campus
the other night.

I was there for his presentation.
 Kwame Touré was a kind of () of the Black Panther Party
 back in the sixties.
 Um
 And so I was there
 cause I was the one to announce the winner of the Malcolm X essay
 contest.
 So -which we have every year this time.
 And so that person was going read the essay
 and then he was going to (give a) speech.
 And all-and these all young people in the -in the audience and
 everything.
 And he says
 he'll say something like
 "You know sometime you had to just shake someone's hand and then
 pull out a gun and shoot them"
 or something.
 AND THE KIDS WERE EATING THIS UP.
 AND IT WAS INCREDIBLE.
 That man scared me.
 Because he was talking out of a time that was not even
 -I didn't think he was

closing
coda

Iris: [And they loved it.

coda

F: They loved it.

Lana: Yeah.

I: I'm not sure that it's just Black kids. When I -because of where I
 work
 maybe I'm at a very disportion ()
 but I see kids getting very angry
 period.

coda

F: Right.

L: Loving power and violence
 Loving it.
 White kids coming in droves that are that way.

(story 1:16)

From these examples, we see that codas serve to "close off the sequence of complicating action and that none of the events that followed were important to the narrative text" (Labov, 1972, pp. 365-66). Codas are not needed to finish a story, this is the job of the story endings or closings. Rather, codas "have the property of bridging the gap between the moment of time at the end of the narrative proper and the present.

They bring the narrator and the listener back to the point at which they entered the narrative" (ibid., p. 365). Codas help the listener to see that a story has ended; they point *back* to the narrated events and point *forward* to the realm of conversation.

This sometimes painfully focused attention to minute discourse detail may seem irrelevant for a discussion of personal experience narrative. It does indicate, however, that stories are not simply texts that just happen. Personal experience narratives are discursive events; both audience and narrator must make the shift from the conversation frame to story frame *and* they must communicate their understanding of such frame shifting. This is empirically evidenced in the talk of the speaking participants where we can see story openings and closings, prefaces and codas. Prefaces and codas in a textual view of personal narrative are nothing more than, say, an orientation or a form of story exposition. But such discourse markers must be attended to if we are to understand that they serve important functions for how stories to get told in the first place. This provides us with an interactive view of personal experience narrative where interlocutors engage in a communicative relationship that must be maintained if stories are to happen at all. Personal stories are more than mere texts.

The notion of story as a discursive event is critical to an understanding of story as performance. Textual enactments of a genre of oral literature must be seen as more than simple re-tellings. The personal experience narrative is so bound to conversation that we cannot understand its emergence without at least a theoretical understanding of it as communications, as a frame within frames. The framing of stories in conversation allows the personal story, identified and grounded in its generic features, to happen. This is crucial since the personal narrative is a performed item in the Teacher Forum. It helps us to see that stories require the narrator to *breakthrough* into performance (Hymes, 1975). As I have indicated previously, story is a high form of the personal and a deep symbolic embodiment of the context of the Teacher Forum. Therefore, storytelling is more than just another discursive event, it is a performance event. Thus,

understanding story as event means understanding story as implicated in the ongoing rhetoric of the communication the Teacher Forum and its role in maintaining a significant social setting for its members.

SECTION 2:

AN OUTLINE OF A METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING THE EMERGENCE OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
NARRATIVE

To study the personal experience narrative as both an expressive textual item and sociolinguistic event—a performed genre of oral literature—I necessarily followed a research methodology that can bring these two together as performance. The framework of this dissertation that I set out in Chapter 1 follows the threefold ethnographic question about the expressive cultural item, its context, and its performance. I have defined each of these as the (1) personal experience narrative form as a genre of oral literature, (2) the life of a small, part-time group, and (3) conversational narration or storytelling. My methodology followed these questions to yield the data I analyzed and present here.

Data Collection

I attended Teacher Forum meetings for one and a half (school) years, from September, 1992 to February, 1994. I tape recorded four meetings. Specifically for discourse and narrative analysis I used the recorded talk from the four Teacher Forum meetings of February, March, April, and May 1993. My participant observation, fieldnotes, and conversations with members took place over the entire seventeen months. The number of personal experience narratives in each meeting ranged consistently from fifteen to seventeen. Though I have only included parts of some, and only four entire stories in this document, I have indexed the total sixty-two stories in Appendix A.

This is an ethnographic study. It, therefore, flows from the theories of culture which structure such studies (e.g., Clifford, 1988). In other words, this study examines the cultural practice of everyday storytelling in a specific context. This means that I employed a methodology that speaks from a cultural point of view. That is, I sought a methodology that seeks the “insider” perspective of what it means to narrate in the

Teacher Forum as well as provide a more detached portrait of, in Mary Douglas' (1973) words, the rules and meanings of verbal interaction and the enactment of story.

My methodology is not merely a "collection" of stories as datum, but also analytic tools. Therefore, I craft ethnographic methods to get at the poetic textual dimensions of story and why it makes sense as a ubiquitous expressive form that is locally meaningful. I employed the standard ethnographic tools of participant observation, formal interviews and conversations, and tape recordings of the group's conversation in the meetings. Of central importance are the transcriptions of these recordings.

Participant-Observation

Ethnographers have been rather consistent in their confession that their research is, for all its effort to be science (e.g., Pelto & Pelto, 1978), still a subjective enterprise (see Sanjek, 1990). In the end, the only stable (perhaps reliable) research tool is the ethnographer him/herself. Fieldnotes, analytic memos, and any other textual objectifications of the objects/subjects under study is little more than an extension of the ethnographer's interest and commitment. Participant observation is the foundational method of the ethnographer. S/he must work at providing him/herself with the experience of *being there* in order that s/he can convince her audience that s/he has *been there* (Geertz, 1988).

I attended Teacher Forum meetings for one and a half (school) years, from September, 1992, to February, 1994. I joined the Teacher Forum at its first meeting (of the school year) in the Fall, 1992. Prior to this I had been talking with Clare about my interest in teacher stories and in teacher groups that meet on their own time out of their own interest. She was enthusiastic and supportive. She said she felt that groups like the Teacher Forum need studying and that the educational world needs to know more about groups that set and follow their own agenda, especially around the theme of critical

democracy. I literally paid my dues, \$10 I believe, and became a member. As an open forum for educators, I could rightly join as a former teacher and a beginning teacher educator. This did not mean I could rightly study the group and its members. I needed to gain entry and acquire the trust of the members if I were to make them and their meetings, and their words, the objects of my study.

At the January, 1993 meeting of that year I made my pitch to the group to study their talk. When they agreed, my own sense of my role didn't change much, though I am sure it did for the members. I was still a member and I still participated in the conversations of the meetings; I did not take my chair to the back of the room, turn on a tape recorder, and take notes. I became more formally a participant-observer. In that I was interested (and members knew that I was interested) in the "naturally occurring" talk and stories, I tried to remain more participant than observer. I consciously tried to take few notes. However, as is evidenced in tape transcriptions, I did consistently express an interest in story and members narrating their experiences. In formal terms, I found myself making responses to what could conceivably have been "prefaces." In other words, I wanted to hear stories. However, I do think it fair to say that my presence and honest admission in my desire to hear stories did not alter the substance of the dialogues nor the essential discursive practices of conversation and story. My presence was hardly stronger than the culture of the group. If anything, I was more compelled to accommodate myself to the group than the group was to me.

In order to formalize my role as participant observer in data collection, I wrote fieldnotes of the meetings. Since I took very few notes during the meetings, conscientiously trying to not draw attention to myself or my data collection efforts, I scurried off after the meetings and typically typed fieldnotes for three to five hours. These notes became my referents for coming to understand the context of the group, as made up of primary frames, and the place of storytelling events in the conversations of the group.

Tape Recordings and Their Transcriptions

Since I was interested in the personal experience narratives as texts and as sociolinguistic events, audio-tape recordings were essential methodological tools. They are the single most important data source in this study.

Sociolinguistically, I needed to capture the entirety of the talk in a given meeting. In considering stories as events, it was important to not only record, but accurately transcribe the talk in the group's meetings. Once a transcription was made (with a word processing program), I went through at least two listenings of each entire Teacher Forum meeting. This was done for two reasons. One, I revisited the meetings to verify or supplement my overall impressions I recorded in my fieldnotes. Second, I edited typing or listening mistakes and marked the conversational stories.

After editing the transcripts and marking the personal experience narratives in each of the four recorded meetings, I then extracted the stories electronically and pasted them into a new word processing document. These extracted stories were, in turn, "formatted" in the form that appears in this dissertation. This is where the story event-text consideration merges. In order to render the stories as events that can in some minimal way display the sense, feel or rhythm of the stories, I borrowed and adapted transcription methodologies. For the most part, my transcription devices (see Appendix B) are taken from Dennis Tedlock's (1978) *Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indian*. These devices, in a minimal way, display the general prosodic quality of American speech. Tedlock was after Zuni narratives and made an effort at rendering the unfamiliarity of his informant's stories, to make the strange familiar. My application of it to familiar, mostly middle-class speech is a similar attempt to convey the feel of speaking in clauses and/or sentence utterances, to make the familiar strange. I also borrowed parts of Katherine Young's (1987) similar methodology as a way to

mark the finer sociolinguistic dimensions of the stories (e.g., preface, coda, abstract, etc.).

Taken together these transcription adaptations try to show the complexity and poetry of mundane talk in the Teacher Forum. More specifically, they also provide an order in which to see and examine empirically the textual, literary dimensions of the stories. All three of the extended analyses work from the transcriptions as texts which are sociolinguistic events that have achieved “breakthrough into full performance” (Hymes, 1975); these analyses try to get at the inseparability of *story-as-text* and *story-as-event*.

I realize well the severe limitation of transcription (see E. Fine, 1984). I do not consider them the actual speech, but the best representations I could make apropos my efforts at capturing the conversational stories. My concern was not to present sterilized version of these stories (i.e., what a polished version would have looked like had the narrator had the time to write down the story and then tell it). I was after the everyday, provisional, and imperfect use of speech and story in conversation.

Interviews and Conversations

Last, I conducted interviews and conversations I had with Teacher Forum members. I formally interviewed Fatimah and Clare on two occasions, which I audio-tape recorded. I also interviewed Lana, Iris, and Zoe. Of equal importance were the numerous conversations I had with these members where I made an effort to record in notes their words and their sense of their experience of participation in the Teacher Forum. These included phone conversations as well as conversations before and after each Teacher Forum meeting. I considered Clare my major informant. Lana and especially Fatimah were available for quick chats with informative and helpful words

These three data sources comprise the methodological triumvirate I used to follow my commitment to the ethnographic framework of studying narrative performances. I used interviews, conversations, and my fieldnotes primarily to get at the larger features of the context of the part-time culture of a small group, the shared understandings and the insider's view of "what is going on" in there. These led me to consider this context a primary framework of and for the members.

The story transcription and formatting were the indispensable sources for analyzing the stories as texts. These worked as tools for demonstrating the poetic or literary dimensions of story, and they help me argue that such stories are culturally enacted, not just dispensed out of a narrator's repertoire. This method of analysis helps me to look closely at the subtleties of this most ubiquitous of story forms.

PART II:

NARRATIVE PERFORMANCES

CHAPTER 4
WHEN STORY MEETS CONTEXT:
A TERRIBLE DISCUSSION

But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin
yarns be excepted), and like him the meaning of an episode
was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale
which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in
the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are
made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

Joseph Conrad,
Heart of Darkness

The personal narrative is a genre of oral literature with an identifiable form that is a communicative frame-of and a frame-for narrative utterances. The form of the personal exerts constraints on the narrative utterance. These constraints have been identified as the genre dimensions of (1) implied truthfulness, (2) dramatic narrative structure, and (3) the *self-same* of narrator and the chief protagonist in/witness to the narrated events. These elements must work together in order to accomplish, in a minimal way, the performance of personal experience narration. Among these dimensions, the necessity of a dramatic narrative structure is what distinguishes, textually, the personal experience narrative from the personal account or personal reflection on experience. As noted, in chapter 3, the narrator must attend to the creation of a dramatic plot if the utterance is to be performed as a narrative, rather than some narration that is merely reflection upon experience. Therefore, the narrator must attend to plot elements resembling a beginning, middle, end; complicating action; and some form of resolution (or pointing thereto, though this is not always known to the narrator or audience). But since personal narratives are also forms of communication that happen in time and space, between two or more people who have something in

common, a personal experience story is contextually bound. The narrator must strategically employ the narrative form in a viable context. The flexibility of the personal narrative, as a near ubiquitous form, makes this a readily accessible and useful communicative item; a narrator can breakthrough into performance quite readily. However, when a context is more circumscribed than the broadly shared cultural norms and communicative assumptions that govern everyday, conversational stories, breakthrough becomes a more complicated issue. The personal narrative form must work at meeting, or conforming to, the context in which it occurs. The narrator is placed in a more precarious position of making a story work in context.

What happens when the personal experience narrative form meets a definable context? When does the narrative form conflict or compete with a context in which it arises? This chapter examines the narrative *Terrible Discussion*. In it Clare necessarily transforms her story to meet the demands of the primary framework of the Teacher Forum. In order to make her story sufficiently critical, following the primary frame of critical-democracy, Clare necessarily transforms her story that is in the form of a joke. Though the story is, I argue, subtly critical (thus meeting the demands of the primary frame of critical-democracy), it seems that Clare finds the point of the joke overly nuanced. On the surface, it is a story that is apparently intended for its thematic humor and irony, but is then subverted by context to become a story whose theme returns more overtly to the concerns of the ideological dimensions of the Teacher Forum. In this transformation, the story and its central character, Clare's daughter, moves from hero to victim of everyday, commonsense ideology.

Breakthrough Into Performance

The story *Terrible Discussion* arose during the seventh Teacher Forum meeting of the year in April. At that meeting six members were present, Olivia, Fatimah, Clare, Hannah, Zoe, Lana, and myself. The story emerged approximately thirty minutes into the

meeting. The topic of conversation was homosexuality and gays in the military (this was around the time President Clinton was failing to deal straightforwardly with the issue) and discrimination in general. Clare was attempting to frame much current discrimination on a "conservative backlash, that would blame women being out of homes for all of these" social problems (transcript, 4-24-93). It was an unfocused conversation that had little to do with education. It was more generally a discussion of social problems and "reactionary" thought, a type of discussion sanctioned by the primary frame of the critical. The only connective utterances to schooling was Lana's comment that she has many single-parent children in her classes and that sometime there are unwarranted causal connections between youth trouble and single parent households, "more than half of the children that I get in classroom come from single-parent homes. I don't necessarily equate...that's what's wrong with the kids" (transcript, 4-24-93). At this point, Clare introduces her story and returned to this issue of gays.

"Terrible Discussion"

1 Clare: But -but -but what it -you know the other thing is -is that it
 2 it seems to suggest if only everything would move back into being the way
 that it was fifty or a hundred years ago all these things would be
 solved.

3 In fact it -it seems a direct reflection of "stop being gay."
 4 Or stop being anything that's different than the way it was.

5 I mean even my own child.
 6 Yesterday
 7 we had this terrible discussion.
 8 We -we ran into her principal from middle school
 9 or from when she was in Sumac ((Sydney's elementary school))
 10 at -out in front of Luigi's ((a restaurant))
 11 And Syd is -is you know in sixth grade and trying to be really cool so she
 pretends not to notice.
 12 Even -even if Ann Larson was her favorite person while she was there she
 pretends not to notice her. =And I said "Sydney that's Miss Larson."
 13 And Miss Larson is having a fit to get her to come over and
 14 /
 15 so
 16 anyway
 17 she went over to talk to her and I got out of the car and talked to her
 18 and she says "You just look so much more grown up now that you're not in
 grade school."
 19 Sydney says "I'm still in grade school."
 20 And -and Miss Larson says "No (Sydney) junior high school is not grade
 school anymore."
 21 And -and Sid says "Well
 22 we still get grades."

23 And I said "Yes you're going to get grades for a long time to come (hehe)
 even though you're not in grade school."

24 I said "unless we can figure out some way to do -to -to remove the
 grading system." =And Anne (Larson) says "And we're working on
 that. =Aren't we?"

25 And we got back in the car and Sydney says "Well what's wrong with
 grades mom?"

26 And I said "Well
 27 you know
 28 let's think about it."
 29 And then Dave says "Well yeah.
 30 What's wrong with grades? =I mean you've got to have something."
 31 And here's my non academic son arguing for grades.
 32 And -and -and Sid says "Yeah that's the way it's always been mom."
 33 And I said "Well just because it's always been that way doesn't make it
 right." =I said "Think about it."

34 I said "If -if everything you do is for a product that's going to get a grade
 on it." =I said "How many times have you really done what you wanted
 to do? =How many times has your effort been truly authentic or has it
 just been done because you knew the grade was the final outcome and
 that was what was more important than the learning experience in
 fact?"

35 Well the conversation just completely shut down.
36 Not another word after that.
37 Um
38 But
39 You know
40 The idea that -that was a long way around getting to the main thing that I
thought was so interesting
41 and the idea of being
42 that this has always been the way it was. =And even a sixth grader.

43 Zoe: Take her to Huck Finn.
You know?

44 C: Oh I know.

45 Z: You know.

46 C: Oh I know.

47 Z: Huck Finn. =They use the line they use that line two or three times.

48 C: [Yeah that exact same line.

49 Z: The exact same line.

50 C: But the idea that -that she would think
51 just already in sixth grade
52 that it's -this is the way it's always been
53 therefore it must be right
54 is the attitude I think
55 the majority of adults have.

Terrible Discussion is a multifaceted story that works with, between, ultimately against the primary frames of the group. On the surface it accommodates well to the primary frames of the personal and the critical. It is a story about a discussion with Clare's daughter and her son, which she describes as "terrible." This would seem to count categorically as the personal: tense conversation with her children. It is also a story about being critical. It deals with grading, a pertinent issue to teachers and to democratic educators about the purposes of evaluation, sorting, etc. Moreover, it is also a story about critical consciousness in the realm of being "wide awake" (Clare, personal communication) about the idea of grading, that it is a very human construction, not just a given. That it has always been around—*the way it's always been*—does not, for Clare, make it immune to a critical gaze.

In order to make this story happen as a narrative performance, Clare needs to connect the story to the context. In addition to the primary frames, she needs to somehow make this story connect to the topic of conversation (gays in the military). How does she get to a story about her daughter from a conversation about gays in the military? In lines 1-4 Clare is taking a turn at conversation. She makes a general comment about the *good old days* and the assumption that many social problems are simply a problem of the current times, that "all these things would be solved" if we could go back "fifty or a hundred years ago" (line 2). She connects this sentiment with current and continuing animosity toward gays as a "reflection" of this nostalgic sentimentality to the *good old days*, that gays could very well solve their own problems if they could "stop being gay" (3). More generally, Clare asserts that many of our (social) problems could be remedied if we could "stop being *anything* that's different than the way it was" (4). It is the use of the term *anything* that signals for the auditors that this is not simply about gays, but about the delusion of the "the way it was" (2). Moreover, it allows Clare to shift into story, a story that is not about gays, but about the larger category of the presumed rightness of the notion of the "way it's always been" (52). Thus, just about

any topic that addresses the good old days is acceptable in her next utterance and Clare has authorized herself to solicit taking the narrative floor not necessarily restricted to the topic of gays in the military.

Can stories in the Teacher Forum be about “anything,” or does the Teacher Forum circumscribe what stories can be about? It seems that they need to connect—in content if not theme—to education, schooling, learning, teaching, or something coming under the rubric “educational process.” More importantly and more specifically, the Teacher Forum constrains stories to the *critical*, to harbor critical commentary about education and related issues. And since the primary frame is of *critical democracy*, then stories can, in effect, connect to just about anything in social life since schools are embedded in society.

Since Clare has opened for herself the possibility to talk about “anything” about “the way it was,” she proceeds to breakthrough into story. In lines 5- 7 Clare provides a preface in the form of an abstract:

I mean even my own child.
Yesterday
we had this terrible discussion. (lines 5-7)

This abstract accomplishes two things. First, it connects Clare’s ensuing story to her previous utterances about the general category of “the way it was,” and “even my own child,” stretches the connection to Sydney, her daughter who is not immune to the “the way it was”. Second, the abstract is a preface and a petition to get the “floor” to tell a story. As noted in Chapter 3, an abstract is a “one or two clauses summarizing the whole story” (Labov, 1972, p. 364). Though not the part of the narrative’s events (of the narrative action), the preface is a necessary a part of conversational narrative utterances. Since there is an obligatory pause, and since no one took a turn after this pause, we can infer that a non-objection is, in effect, a form of permission. Clare then launches into her story and breaks through into the story’s *opening* in “we ran into her

principal" (8). This abstract succeeds not only in introducing the story but also in connecting to the larger topical issue of "the way it was."

Terrible Discussion is a story that is simultaneously humorous and subtly critical. At its core, this story is a joke. However, the story events do not end with the self-sufficient joke. Clare's abstract refers to the "terrible discussion," which does not emerge in the story as joke. This indicates that Clare has more to tell about than the joke. She extends the events beyond the joke to the realm of the discussion in the car between Clare, her daughter, and her son. Moreover, the story's events not only are extended to meet the demands of her abstract—what she said her story would be about—but Clare further includes evaluative commentary which explicitly reconnects the story to the immediately preceding conversation *and* more clearly to the primary frame of the critical.

Story As Joke

At its core, the story is basically a joke. Though the entire narrative utterance takes more than fifty rhythmic clauses, it is possible to isolate in the text a short, humorous story. I have indicated the story's core with a box (lines 5-22). It is a core in that the joke can stand on its own as a narrative. It need not have the "terrible discussion" preface, nor the ensuing action after Sydney's remarks to the principal. On its own, it is coherent and hermetic. It can be re-told as its own story. As a joke, it has properties of a joke: a set up, a comic hero, a comic straightman, and a zinger of a punch line. It has comic irony. It is a story about Clare's daughter, who is a sort of trickster. Sydney's verbal acumen is used to make the principal look like a fool. She is cast as the principal's foil. This story, in one sense, is about a comic hero, putting one over the ignorant principal. In so doing, a simple truth about schooling in our society is revealed.

Characters in the Joke

The characterization of Sydney and Miss Larson are important to the story core. They are fundamental opposites who are symbolically inverted to make the joke work.

Sydney. Sydney is Clare's twelve year old daughter. She is at that awkward age, not completely adolescent nor completely child. She is not elementary school age, which would identify her as a younger child. Neither is she a high school-age adolescent. She is in sixth grade—in *middle* school. Clare notes that Sydney is “trying really to be really cool” (10). This has the flavor of adolescent behavior, in which Sydney appears consumed with how people see and think of her. Thus, Sydney is characterized, almost stereotypically, as a young adolescent who tries to act “cool,” to avoid being embarrassed, trying “not to notice” (10). Her age in relation to this behavior makes her a child acting older than she is.

The combination of her age, as an early adolescent, and someone who seems to be shy or trying to be cool and not notice (and to not be noticed by) her former principal, makes her an unlikely comic hero. This makes her riposte to the principal all the more humorous. As Sydney speaks, “I’m still in grade school” (19), she still seems to be the young child: either she fails to understand that she is not in grade school, or she still thinks that middle school (or junior high) is merely an extension of elementary school. She either doesn’t know that she is no longer an elementary student, and therefore unaware and childish, or she still sees herself as a young student. Either way, taken by itself, line 19 shows Sydney as childish. It is not until her retort to her former principal that we see that Sydney is hardly childish. In the end, she is deft at word play. She takes the words of the principal to invert and refute the principal’s claim. She is insightful and witty, able to play on a double meaning of *grades* in *grade* school. In the process she reveals in the story a simple truth about schooling: having progressed to a higher grade level, students are still given grades, still evaluated by the same system of marks and reports.

Miss Larson. Miss Larson is characterized as well-meaning, but dim. She appears effusive as she wants to talk with a former student. She addresses Sydney in a patronizing tone. She expresses what many assume young adolescents want to hear: they are, or appear, more mature than children. Her main mode of communication to students is to talk down to them and correct their mistakes. Miss Larson is bumbling and patronizing to a child who is clearly insightful.

Symbolic Inversion

What makes this joke work as humor is the fundamental incongruity between the “normal” hierarchical relations between Sydney (as a child, student) and the Miss Larson (as adult, principal). In the story these characters, or their social types, are inverted: Sydney ends up smarter and demonstrates this through a sharp wit. In effect, the joke presents a form of anti-social behavior with a student smarting off to a principal and inverts the social hierarchy of student and principal (see Figure 4.1).

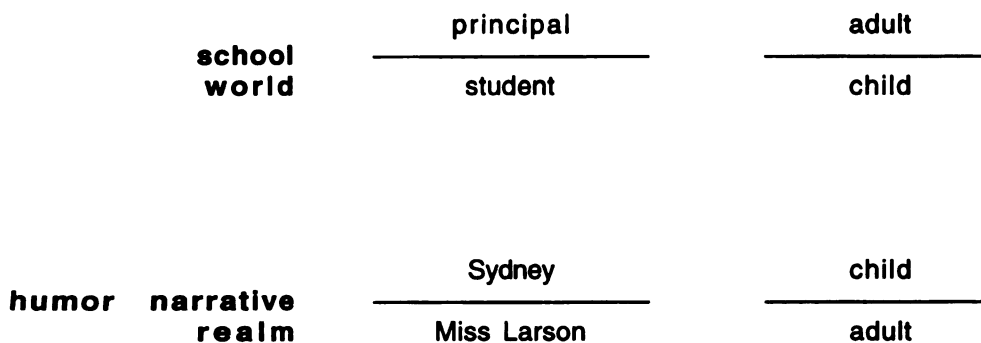


Figure 4.1

Humorous inversion of child-adult relations

This inversion is accomplished through Sydney's word play. Clare is able to do this through reporting what her daughter said (I have always thought this story is about Clare bragging about her daughter). When framed as a joke, she is able to construct a narrative that inverts the relationship between Sydney and her school-world superior, the principal. In the realm of the story, Sydney is shown as smarter. She is linguistically more competent and therefore symbolically more competent than the principal. The daughter uses the principal's words. The play of words is used to enlighten the principal that Sydney is still, ironically, being graded.

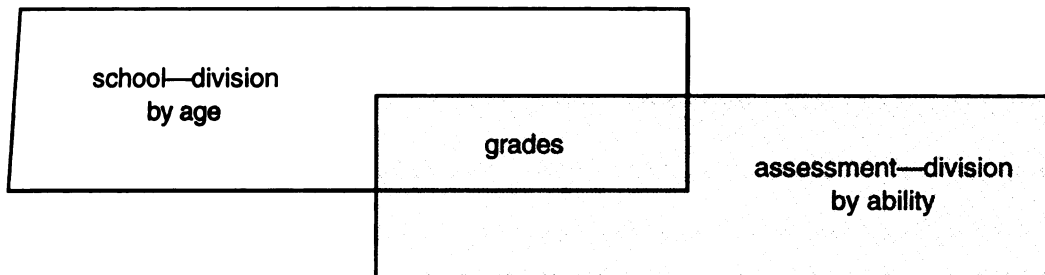


Figure 4.2

Sydney's pun and the double signification of *grades*

In effect, Sydney says that school is school regardless of grade level since it is still about grading. She achieves the symbolic inversion of herself and the principal through word play, punning on the double meaning she is able to invoke on the word "grade" (see figure 4.2). As a trickster figure, Sydney reveals to the principal, and to the world, the irony of continuation of grades: since all students get grades, they are infantilized by schools, even as they age.

The punch line of the joke is more than just a play on words. This play on words says something more than the fact that middle school students still get grades and are still treated as children. Recall, this is the Teacher Forum. Here, stories must be framed

in the *critical* as well as the *personal*. Clare's story of her daughter's punning carries a small truth embedded in a wise witticism. This embedded commentary on the idea of grading, evaluation, and ongoing assessment of students cuts to the heart of a serious educational issue, particularly pertinent for critical-democratic educators. It carries the implicit criticism that school is still about grades, no matter how old a student is, or how old she looks. The critique of grades, from a critical perspective, is that they are the tools of the functionalist school system. Grading and assessment are implicated in, if not driven by, the imposition of arbitrary standards of learning upon children for the sake of differentiating among them. This differentiation is implicated in the rational distribution of students for their places in the educational system and ultimately the socioeconomic structure at large. The critique, then, is about the ongoing use of grades that is not about just assessing for student learning; it begs the critical educator's question: assessment to what end? Unexamined questions of the purpose of grading and assessment, for the critical educator, ultimately mean a return to the unexamined functionalist perspective which occupies the space of "common sense" in common thought about education. While framed as a joke, in the Teacher Forum, this story this can be heard as a nuanced critical commentary on grades and assessment. Whether it was heard that way by the listeners is unknown. The text reveals the story's critical subtlety. It seems, as explored below, that Clare makes the judgment that her critical point was too subtle and perhaps lost on her audience. She thus extends and consequently transforms the story into a larger tale of critical consciousness.

Story as a Tale of Critical Consciousness

Clare's story does not end with the joke. It says more than *from the mouths' of babes arises Truth*. The joke takes up less than half of the entire narrative utterance. The story needs to continue. The most obvious reason for Clare to extend her story is that she never got to the "terrible discussion" put forward in her abstract. Moreover, the

story needs to connect to the larger issue or theme, already established in her pre-narrative utterances (lines 1-4), of “the way it was,” which Clare says involves “even my own child” (5). The joke does not satisfy the assertions set out in the abstract. Clare needs the narrative space to complete what she said her story is about and more importantly to drive home her point.

After the story joke ends with Sydney's punch line in line 22, “we still get grades,” Clare takes no more than the obligatory pause at the end of the sentence. That is, she does not pause to think what she might say next beyond the joke. She immediately continues the sequencing of narrative events by reporting her interchange with Miss Larson in line 24. As a character in her story, Clare comes into fuller interaction with the other characters. Clare (the character) is the first to respond to Sydney's words: “Yes you're going to get grades for a long time to come even though you're not in grade school” (23). Clare laughs as she says this, in a sense confirming Sydney's humorous insight that grades are not just a matter for grade schoolers. Miss Larson responds in the same patronizing tone she used moments earlier toward Sydney earlier. In this utterance, Miss Larson implies Clare is a colleague (as *we*), in dealing with grades, that “we're working on that. Aren't we?” (24). Clare is not known (to Teacher Forum members) as a ally to school administrators as a class as she is to teachers. Clare's report of the principal's words is dripping with sarcasm.

As the story shifts setting to the car, where the “terrible discussion” takes place, the story takes on a different theme. Sydney, the deliverer of the punchline about grades, now asks, “Well what's wrong with grades mom?” (25). Sydney sides with the necessity of grading. Even as Clare tries to foster a conversation, “let's think about that” (28), her son Dave, whom she describes as “non academic” (31), chimes in with “What's wrong with grades?...you've got to have something” (30). Clare is now facing a sibling alliance, two children who see no problem with, indeed argue for grades, since, in Sydney's words, “that's the way it's always been mom” (32).

This drastically changes the story and brings us to the terrible discussion. The attitude of *the way it's always been* raises the ire of Clare. She responds to Sydney's assertion and declares a moral stance. She admonishes Dave and Sydney to "think about it" since "just because it's always been that way doesn't make it right" (33). Clare directly reports her speech (see Chapter 5) of what she says next to her children:

I said "If -if everything you do is for a product that's going to get a grade on it." =I said "How many times have you really done what you wanted to do? =How many times has your effort been truly authentic or has it just been done because you knew the grade was the final outcome and that was what was more important than the learning experience in fact? (34)"

This is a long direct quote of her own words. Given the powers of human memory and the need to make a compelling drama from experience in personal narrative (Tannen, 1986), we can assume that this reconstituted utterance is not what Clare actually said. In fact, it sounds almost implausible that Clare would speak like this to a twelve year old (though she might to her high school age son). Clare is reporting her speech in a mode which implies this is what she actually said to Dave and Sydney in that she uses the first person pronoun and speaks in the present tense, as if she is replaying the actual conversation. This makes for good drama, a poetic fulfillment of creating the necessary dramatic narrative structure in a personal experience *narrative*. But did she really speak of "learning experience" effort versus the "final outcome" of a grade? Would she have used this language, as a mother, of "authentic" learning efforts?

Since we have no way to check on the accuracy of her words, we will never know. This is not to imply that Clare is lying. Quite the contrary: she needs to make a good story that makes her point, from the very real events in which she was a participant. We all take literary license when we tell a story. We allow it in our narrators and tolerate—even expect—it in our role as auditors. Clare sounds more like Clare-the-academic than Clare-the-mother. We can speculate that in making such an utterance Clare is propel the point of her story, which is after all, no longer a joke. This is about critical

consciousness. Though this does connect to the general issue of grading, which is always part of education, Clare is striving for a greater critical awareness of what grades are all about. She encases this argument in the story of the tense conversation with her son and daughter.

By extending the story beyond the joke Clare is making the larger point. She has made this story conform to the demands of the primary frame. Clare seems unsatisfied and is compelled to make sure the point is not lost on her audience. The story technically ends when she says "Not one more word after that" (36). But she includes two extended evaluative utterances (Labov and Waletzky, 1967) that help her make clear what her story has been about; she *explains* the point:

...that was a long way around getting to the main thing that I thought was so interesting and the idea of being that this has always been the way it was. =And even a sixth grader(40-42).

Clare reiterates her point and, by implication, comes back to (signals with coda) the original conversation topic of gays in the military and *the way it's always been* argument:

But the idea that -that she would think just already in sixth grade that it's -this is the way it's always been therefore it must be right is the attitude I think the majority of adults have (50).

In the end, Clare explicitly links the "attitude" of adults and those of a sixth grader. She has made her point in narrative form: grades are artificial impositions on *real learning*. Moreover, she makes the point that the conversation shuts down when you *challenge the way it's always been*, or the "idea" of it. This reconnects to the original conversation from which Clare broke through into her story. She draws a parallel *structural argument* about critical consciousness and the oppressive nature of "common

sense" beliefs about grading/assessment and homosexuality. The common sense, the way *it's always been* argument is insupportable for Clare: we cannot assume it for grades, nor can we for homosexuality. Clare's challenge to the unconsciousness about the reality of assessment is similar to unconsciousness about homosexuality (see Figure 4.3).

Unconsciousness of	
<u>Grades/assessment</u>	<u>Homosexuality</u>
<u>Necessary</u>	<u>Unnecessary</u>
<u>Unavoidable</u>	<u>Avoidable</u>
<u>Uncontrollable</u>	<u>Controllable</u>
<u>Natural</u>	<u>Unnatural</u>
<u>Good (+)</u>	<u>Bad (-)</u>
<u><i>What's wrong with grades?</i></u>	<u><i>Stop being gay</i></u>

Figure 4.3

Structural parallel of grades and homosexuality in *the way it's always been*.

Story Transformation

Clare's story does not simply have two parts in the joke and in the terrible conversation. Nor is it merely a joke embedded in a larger tale. The story makes a significant internal transformation—or, more accurately, a transformed extension—as it moves from joke to critical tale in which the dramatis personae are altered and the general theme tone is transmuted. This transformation is not so much a function of the original topic that precedes Clare's story, from which she needed to break from in order to break through into story. Immediate conversational topics do not necessarily dictate story topics in the Teacher Forum, though, they obviously exert an influence. This is

better explained by the primary framework of the Teacher Forum as it confronts the expressive form of this personal experience narrative.

The joke is itself a witty, incisive commentary on grading, through the arrangement of a fundamental incongruence between Sydney (student) and Miss Larson (principal), and a punch line that inverts social relations and embodies a insightful critique of assessment in schools. As it moves to its larger narrative purpose, Clare's story is no longer comic. Though the joke is serious humor about a serious matter, it deals with it in a funny way: Sydney's verbal play is a form of anti-social behavior aimed at the principal who is little more than a comic idiot, a representative of an educational system that doesn't think very deeply about what it is trying to do through things like grades and assessment. After the joke is through, the story takes a serious turn. Not only does the story deal with a terrible discussion, one that shuts down and makes the moment in the car unpleasant for Clare and her children. Its subject becomes the unreflective, half-conscious acceptance we give to things like grading. This is a serious issue of tragic dimensions. It is tragic in that the narrative theme is that of coming to terms with the active capitulation to, and willful support of, the idea of grading. It has tragic consequences in that those who give themselves over to it fail to focus a critique on it (like that started by the joke) as a function of the educational system to evaluate and rank order students. For critical educators this is a path of social efficiency in education that seeks to distribute students according to arbitrary measures (grades) in an educational system and, ultimately, the socio-economic structure. Such separation by grading is inherently unfair for the democratic educators. Moreover, as Clare indicates in her admonishment (line 34) to her son and daughter, grade "outcome" has come to drive out any sort of motivation for learning and usurped the authentic experience of learning. This sort of critical unconsciousness, and learning for the sake of grades, is as tragic as ignorance of homosexuality in society. This is at the heart of a critical perspective, which strives for critique of the way things are. It is only then that

social agents can affect change (i.e., teachers can orient their practice toward fairness).

Thus, the story moves from comedy to tragedy:

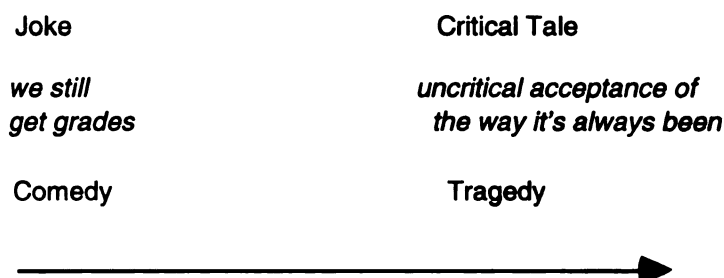


Figure 4.4

Story movement

Dramatis Personae Transformation

This move from the comic to the tragic is evidenced in the text in important ways. The “point” moves from *we still get grades no matter what school age we are* to *how even the young have internalized the ways it's always been*. More specifically, the story's action and characterization shifts. The drama is no longer centered on Sydney's punchline and play on language. It is focused on Sydney's, not to mention her brother's, unproblematic embrace of grades, since “that's the way it's always been mom.” The dramatis personae must therefore change and reorient themselves to the narrative action (see Figure 4.5).

Dramatis Persona	Joke (comedy)	Critical Tale (tragedy)
Sydney (daughter)	Hero	victim, dupe
Miss Larson, principal	straightman, fool	agent of the power structure
Clare	witness to an insightful joke	social commentator, consciousness raiser
Dave (son)	not present	victim, dupe, Sydney's ally

Figure 4.5

Transformation of dramatis personae

Most conspicuous is the transformation of Sydney. In the joke, she is the dramatic comic hero. She puts one over the principal, who is a comic fool. By the end of the story, and up until Clare's last utterance in the narrative, Sydney has become another victim of society; she has been socialized into the commonsense attitude of *the ways it's always been*. Clare's daughter is now no longer the child trickster of the joke who reveals the irony of perpetuation of grades. At the very close of the story Clare re-makes her point and Sydney, who "just already in sixth grade" (51), has been suckered by the ideology of grades. She is no longer an individual comic narrative hero, but a social type, a sixth grader.

At one level, Sydney's transformation is a natural outgrowth of her own witty insight in the joke. Even a bright, witty sixth grader can be duped. However, Clare fails to make that point in the last line of her story. Sydney, whose narrative strength makes, and is made by, the joke, is in the end a victim and dupe. And the transformation changes the other characters. Sydney's status is reinforced by her older brother. The principal who was comic fool is retroactively an agent of society and the school system who

perpetuates *the ways it's always been* for grades and assessment. And Clare becomes a protagonist in her story where she was at first merely witness to the action. She becomes social commentator and a consciousness raiser. One gets the impression that Clare is not so much speaking to her children (lines 33-34), as she is the audience of the Teacher Forum (just as she seemed to be bragging to them about her daughter in the joke). She speaks through herself as a character in her story, to speak to her audience, as if she might also be admonishing or lecturing them about critical consciousness.

Fitting Frames

This transformation in the story cannot be attributed merely to the constraint applied to Clare's narrative utterance through her abstract (5-7) in which she says she will tell about a "terrible discussion." More broadly and more pressing is the need to conform, like all utterances, to the primary frames of the Teacher Forum. The *personal experience narrative*, as a definable form, encounters the context in which it emerges. At one level, *Terrible Discussion* fits well the primary frame of getting personal. The story reveals a troubling conversation between Clare and her daughter and son. It is revealing in one important way that makes Clare look vulnerable. She presents herself in the story as someone who arrests a conversation with her son and daughter, clearly something she wished had not happened.

More importantly is this story's accommodation to the primary frame of the critical. The joke in the story itself does indeed fit this frame. It is a funny, critical story about grading. But its point may have been left too subtle for Clare's satisfaction. Whatever her motivation, Clare is compelled to continue the story. She includes not only the dramatic, stylized report of her admonishment to her children about authentic learning, she includes the two utterances that are explicit evaluative commentary on what the narrative's events mean—what the point of the story is.

Taken together, the primary frames of the Teacher Forum exert a powerful influence on *Terrible Discussion*. The story cannot rest as good joke, but is driven to become a tale of critical consciousness that is personal. The story's core is turned inside out and Sydney, the comic hero, becomes the tragic victim. In other words, the personal narrative form is at the same time independent of context and highly bound to it. *Terrible Discussion* as a joke gets subverted by the pressure of the primary frames, to be critical. Clare's choice to make it explicitly so demonstrates not so much a fundamental incompatibility of story and the primary frames, but that context can disallow and subvert a decent story-joke that stands on its own. The context of the Teacher Forum is not only a primary resource of and for story and storytelling, it is also a constraint.

CHAPTER 5
READ MY LIPS:
REPORTED SPEECH IN THE POETIC RELATIONSHIPS OF
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVE

For others say thou dost deserve, and I
Believe it better than reportingly.

Beatrice, Act III, Scene 1,
Much Ado About Nothing,
Wm. Shakespeare

Reported speech is an integral part of many forms of storytelling. As a variety of reflexive language, "Reported speech is speech within speech, message within message, at the same time speech about speech, message about message" (Volosinov, 1930, p. 149). In the personal experience narrative, of the conversational sort that is the focus of this study, a narrator frequently creates voices from experience and even hearsay (Tannen, 1986). Though based on actual characters and actual events, it is dubious that the words were actually spoken as reported by a narrator. This chapter is specifically concerned with the uses of quotation: the direct or indirect attribution of speech to another who is not the operative narrator. Though there are several forms of reported speech that are not quotation, their frequency and use in the personal experience narrative warrants a closer look at how it works in storytelling. Reported speech can be used to accomplish the personal experience narrative form as it becomes intimately implicated in the three generic features of implied truthfulness, dramatic movement, and the self-same of narrator and chief story character (see Chapter 3). As a form of realism, the personal experience narrative is necessarily consumed with not only telling a good story, but in asserting its truthfulness—that the events truly did occur.

The personal experience narrative seeks “maximum verisimilitude” (Jakobson, 1921).

Reported speech is a poetic trope that serves multiple functions in the genre of the personal experience narrative and the personal narrative as an expressive utterance in group life. Through an exploration of Zoe’s *No End of Year Trip*, I assert that reported speech—specifically direct *and* indirect quotation—works through the genre dimensions of the personal experience narrative. Moreover, it functions in the maintenance of the Teacher Forum as a group. As a device that builds on and creates interpersonal involvement with an audience, quoted speech draws the listeners, or addressees, into the drama of a “true” story and thus works with and toward “getting personal.”

Introducing Narrative Voices: A Question of Framing

To attribute speech to story characters poses certain challenges to the personal experience narrator. She¹ must bring the voices of her characters into the ongoing flow of narrated events. Since such speech is not that of the operating narrator, reported speech has a kind sovereignty. As Volosinov (1930) puts it:

Reported speech has a capacity of entering on its own into speech, into its own syntactic makeup, as an integral unit of the construction. It has a kind of autonomy—speech belonging to someone else—outside of the storytelling context but *still bound to the [narrative] event*. (p. 149, emphasis added)

Using reported speech requires that the speech represented have its own syntactic (and semantic) integrity. The narrator must make it work within, and distinct from, the storytelling event. The introduction of characters’ voices is, once again, a question of frames and framing. When in the course of telling a story an author or narrator wishes to create voices and use speech, she must signal to the audience that she

¹I use the feminine form since this chapter analyzes a story by Zoe and most of the storytellers (members) in the Teacher Forum are women.

is speaking *not* as herself as narrator. She frames her utterances as speech of others, and even herself as a character. Reported speech is "keyed" (Goffman, 1974) through use of *verbs of saying*, which then opens a syntactic structure that maintains the frame of reported speech. Reported speech is embedded within the narrative utterance, which itself is embedded in conversation. When a narrator breaks through into story performance, she shifts from the conversation frame to the story frame. Once she has taken the floor, initiating the dramatic narration of events, and desires to use dialogue and quotation, she does this by framing her narrative utterances as reported speech. She keys her audience to her efforts of attributing speech to others. The reported speech frame is layered within the narrative frame, that is enclosed within the conversation frame. Goffman (1974) calls this "lamination" of frames (see figure 5.1).

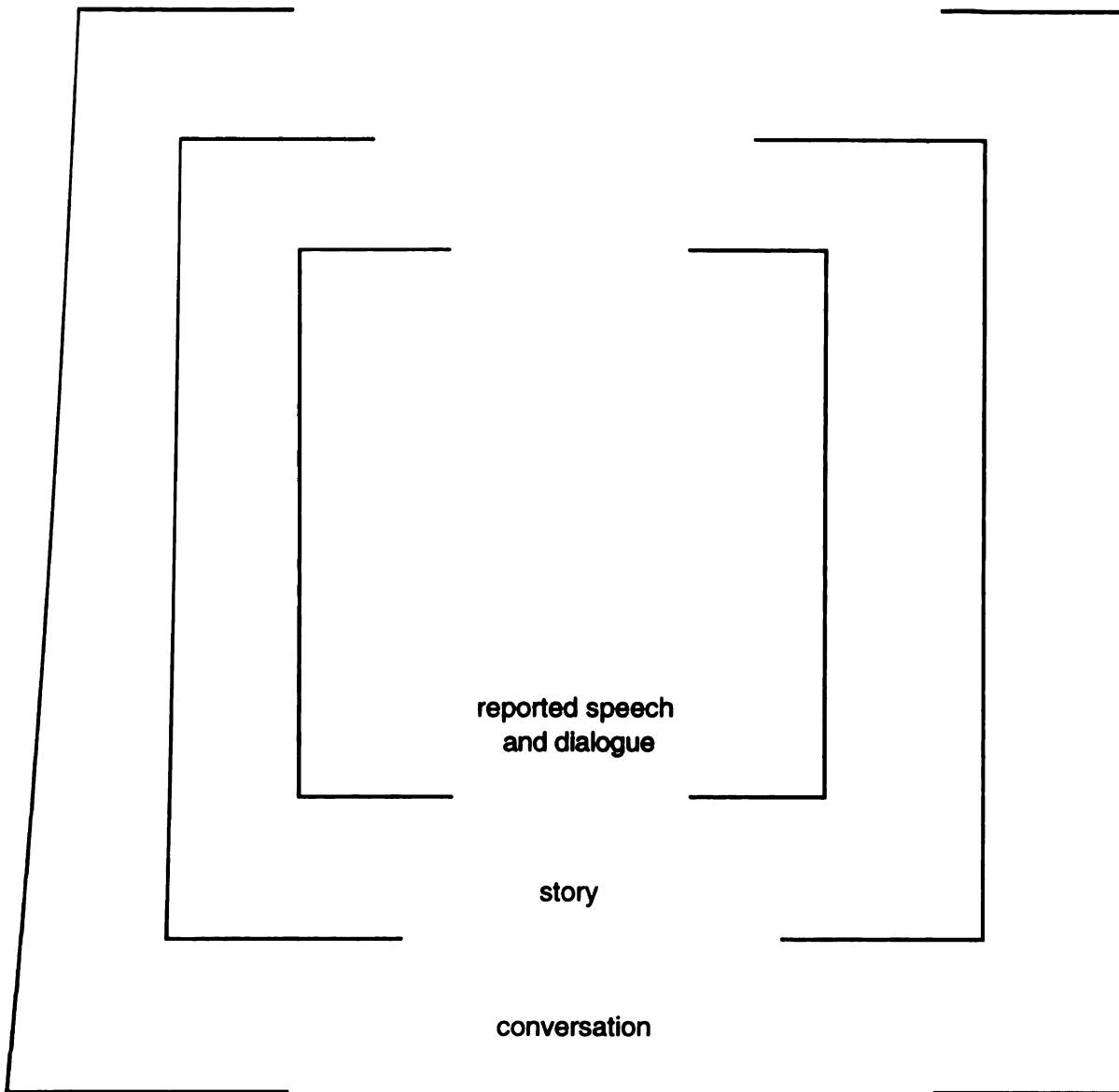


Figure 5.1

Framing laminations of reported speech in story

Figure 5.1 indicates that to shift frames is to set up a type of linguistic boundary where the frame of reported speech marks itself off from the rest of the surrounding narrative. As metacommunication, a frame of/for reported speech “explicitly or implicitly gives the receiver instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included within a frame” (Bateson, 1972, p. 185). In the transcribed Teacher Forum stories, I have set off direct quotation through the use of quotation marks and

indentation, as in fiction. Obviously, in spoken narrative the audience has no textual punctuation to see that what is being spoken is attributed to someone other than the narrator at the time of telling. To indicate the shift to quotation the narrator must use verbal literary devices to indicate such a shift has occurred. The common way to indicate this shift, or to introduce reported speech is, through the use of verbs of saying, *verbum dicendi*. Mostly common among these is *say* in its past tense *said*. For example, when a narrator says

Billy said “My mom is used to driving at night”

she is using *said* to shift her utterances to a frame of reported speech, where the utterance is that of Billy himself and the way he supposedly said it. The audience is keyed to the frame of reported speech through *said*: the frame sends the message “this is quoted speech.” Of course there are other ways of introducing reported speech to shift and maintain frames. The use of the verb of saying, or paralinguistic features such as a changed voice, or the shift of verb tense and pronouns are ways of keying the audience to the frames of quotation. In the story that follows, the narrator, Zoe, uses heavily the verb of saying to shift to the frame of reported speech.

Forms of Reported Speech

Before looking at how reported speech works in a Teacher Forum story, Zoe’s *No End of Year Trip*, it is important at the outset to define two distinct types of reported speech. Specifically I focus on *direct* and *indirect quotation*. Though there are other forms of reflexive language in Teacher Forum stories (that is, language or speech acts that refer to other language and speech acts), I want to focus specifically on the most widely distributed forms of reported speech in Teacher Forum stories, explicit quotation in direct and indirect forms.

Direct and Indirect Quotation

Direct quotation is a form of mimesis. Its orientation is the utterance itself as it supposedly happened in the story's events. The direct form seeks to reproduce the utterance itself. *Indirect* quotation takes on the perspective of the narrative (storytelling) event. That is, it works from the view of the storytelling event and it involves the more or less explicit narrator interpretation. Direct and indirect quotation differ in both their form and function. Consider the difference in the following utterances:

- A Joe said "You are the first person who has ever come to me directly about this."
- B Joe said (that) I was the first person who had ever come to him directly about this.

Both of these utterances ultimately have the same purpose in conveying the substance of Joe's communication. And both of these use a verb of saying (*said*) to introduce and frame the quoted speech. A is a direct quotation. As such, it seeks to imitate what Joe originally said. As such A is "footed" (Goffman, 1981) in the narrated events, or in the past when it occurred. As an indirect quotation, B is less a form of imitation as of analysis. That is, it analyzes the speech, and by extension its meaning, in the present storytelling occasion situation; it is footed in the perspective of the narrative event. It involves more directly the narrator's interest than Joe's.

Indirect and direct quotation have structural linguistic differences. With direct quotation, the narrator is concerned with foregrounding the purportedly original form of the utterance. Though the narrated events necessarily occurred in the past, their presentation with direct quotation is as if they are transpiring at the moment of telling. Therefore, the speaker pays attention to and presents the quotation with appropriate pronouns and verb tense. In A, the speaker uses *you* as if Joe were speaking to her in

the present. This first person direct quotation indicates a use of the present tense verb *be* in "you are". In contrast, the indirect quotation of B uses first personal pronoun *I* and the past (perfect) tense of *be*, "I was." Indirect quotation often involves the syntactic subordinator *that*, which is optional. When *that* isn't used, it can readily be inserted. In B I have done just that by adding it in parentheses. Narrator and audience are keyed to the quotation and the type of quotation it is through use of the verbs of saying, coordination of pronouns and verb tenses, and, sometimes, syntactic subordinators.

The delineation of direct and indirect quotation is a little muddier with the personal experience narrative, where the narrator is also a chief character in (or a first hand witness to) the narrated events. Therefore, the use of the pronoun *I* is used both as *I-the-current speaker* and *I-the-character*. In the personal narratives in the Teacher Forum, nearly all the direct and indirect quotations are in the first-person: the *I* is both a character and the narrator. In the indirect form, though, the *I* is the current speaker, the narrator. In direct forms, *I* is a character speaking in the narrated past. In those utterances where we can distinguish direct from indirect form, we have a clearer picture of who is supposedly speaking and from whose point of view the utterance is made (though the entire narrative utterance is still the narrator's). For example:

indirect: I said (that) I wasn't comfortable with a ball game that started at seven.

direct: I said "I am not comfortable with a ball game that starts at seven."

There is a subtle change in point of view that shifts with temporal difference in direct and indirect forms. In the direct form, *I* is speaking from the point of view as a narrator in the present, explaining her communication that she was uncomfortable. With the direct form, *I* is expressing the point of view of a story character.

This returns to the major difference between indirect and direct quotation, a difference that holds even for the personal experience narrative: authority and

interpretation. Direct quotation foregrounds the original utterance form. Direct quotation bears no necessary formal (syntactic) relationship to the storytelling (or reporting) event. In it we see the idiosyncrasies and provisional nature of everyday language, including incomplete sentences, subjectless imperatives (e.g., “Get planning!” in Zoe’s story below), use of dialects, etc. In that direct quotation claims to convey words as they were actually spoken, it is footed, or “indexically anchored” (Lucy, 1993), to the narrated events, and is therefore authoritative. The perspective of the current storytelling situation is less transparent with indirect quotation; it is anchored to the present storytelling event. Indirect quotation involves some more or less overt narrator interpretation or analysis of the reported speech. As such, the indirect quotation foregrounds the content of the quoted utterance, not its original form. Figure 5.2 indicates the basic structural and functional differences in direct and indirect quotation.

type of quoted speech	footed in	verb tense	point of view	foregrounds
direct	past	present	narrative character’s	mimesis of original form
indirect	present	past	narrator’s	narrator analysis/interpretation

Figure 5.2

Characteristics of quoted speech

Quasi-Direct Quotation

There is one other form of quotation that briefly warrants attention, since it occurs twice in Zoe’s story. What is called the *quasi-direct*, or *free-indirect*, quotation (Lucy, 1993) is used to report thought, or an internal state. It seems to blend the direct

and indirect forms. For example, consider the following:

direct: Sally said "Hell! I am angry."

indirect: Sally said (that) she was angry.

quasi-direct: Sally said: hell she was angry.

In the direct and indirect forms, Sally is reported as uttering that she is angry. The quasi-direct is more of an attempt to represent her thought. The direct form represents the point of view of Sally herself; the indirect that of the narrator. The point of view is not so clear in the quasi-direct form. On the one hand, it seems to represent Sally's report of her own point of view. On the other hand, there are other signs that this is indirect with the verb in past tense. This, according to Banfield (1978), is the form of the "free-indirect" quotation, or what I prefer to call the *quasi-direct*. It involves a blending of the direct and an indirect forms of quotation. Though it seems to sound like the direct form, with the presence of the interjection (*hell*) and the order of syntactic constituents (Lucy, p. 20), the pronoun and verb tense follow the indirect form. This gives the impression that we (reader/audience) have almost direct access to Sally's thoughts.

This definition of the quasi-direct form seems limited in a significant way. It is important to recall that Banfield is interested in literature and the development of tropes like quasi-direct speech in western fiction. The idea of quasi-direct speech seems applicable to oral literature in general, and to the personal experience narrative in particular, but with a slightly expanded definition. My re-definition may be a direct function of the genre properties of the personal experience narrative, but it is hard to account for it at this point². Banfield argues that it is the past verb tense that is used in the *quasi-direct*. But is it not possible to use the present tense? If the chief aim of

²This would require a thorough survey of various forms of the personal experience narrative which is beyond the scope of this study.

quasi-direct is the representation of thought in speech, and this is achieved by blending features of direct and indirect, is that blending limited to the use the past tense verb form and the deletion of the (optional) syntactic subordinator *that*? Consider the following example, taken from Zoe's' story:

- D I felt "Well, that's a real nice attitude"
- E I said (that) that was a real nice attitude.
- F I felt: well that that's a real nice attitude.

D and E are direct and indirect quotations respectively and clearly follow their respective patterns. F (the actual line from Zoe's story) retains the interjection (*well*) and it follows the pattern of direct quotation (as if she is talking to someone). Yet F retains the syntactic subordinator of the indirect form. Zoe is representing her thoughts, that ultimately have motivational consequences for her (as *dramatis persona*) subsequent action in the story. In this case, the syntactic subordinator is hardly optional but important to the representation of her thoughts. Even if we take into consideration that in F Zoe is restarting the word "that's (that -that's), we can still see that Zoe uses the past tense *felt* as the framing verb of saying, representing her *feelings*, or subjective experience. In other words, her thoughts. Her thoughts are painted as if she was speaking to herself. If she were only reporting the content of her thoughts, she would most like say something to the effect. "Then I thought/felt that was a poor attitude", rather than the sarcastic "nice attitude," as if she was trying to impress upon someone the inverted meaning of "nice". It therefore seems that the quasi-direct need not be determined by the use of the past verb tense in order to represent thought.³

Whatever the proper definition of quasi-direct speech, there is a larger

³In the Teacher Forum stories I have gathered, there are six other instances of my extended definition of quasi-direct speech, in which the aim of such utterances is to indicate thought without communication or expression to other characters in the story.

theoretical issue pertinent to the personal experience narrative as verbal art. Banfield (1978; 1993) holds that the consciousness or thought of the character has been directly represented, in a literary way, through the quasi-direct form. The important difference with the personal experience narrative is that the narrator is also a main character in her own story, that complicates the literary understanding of quasi-direct speech. If we consider Banfield's points more carefully we can see that the quasi-direct has a dramatic literary function, even for the personal experience narrative. Banfield argues that directly quoted language combines expression *and* communication, that it directly presents the utterances of expression of a literary character. Indirectly quoted speech, she also argues, represents communication *without* expression, referring only to the content of the communicative utterance without its direct expressive form. Thought reported in the quasi-direct form is neither communicative *nor* expressive: Expression has no form of its own. The expression of thought as speech provides the narrator a way of presenting thought without communication.

In D, the utterance is an expressive communication (e.g., Zoe saying something to another character). With E, Zoe reports communication (to whom is she expressing in her story?). The quasi-direct quotation of F allows for the narrator to present narratively her own thought as speech without reporting it as communication. The use of the quasi-direct in a story, as will become apparent in Zoe's story, works to accomplish the dramatic movement of the plot and ultimately the poetic efforts of the personal narrative. The quasi-direct form used to report thoughts helps explain the personal experience narrative narrator/character motivation that may otherwise be unclear from the description of action alone, tedious or boring if explained, or left intolerably ambiguous.

Alteration of Direct and Indirect Speech

As we shall see in the story analyzed below, the personal experience narrative

involves frequent alteration of the direct and indirect, and to a lesser extent, quasi-direct quotation. The alteration has practical and aesthetic functions. Specifically, the use and shift of direct and indirect forms help the narrator shift between points of view. She can represent herself in the storytelling occasion and in the story's events. This aids her to work effectively between interpretation/analysis and narrative authority. By using the expressive character of language, she can use direct reports that appear more vivid and authoritative. With indirect reports, she can more or less explicitly convey her understanding, as narrator, of the original utterances. Moreover, with insertion of the quasi-direct form she can further give credence to her motivations and intentions as a character in her own story. The manipulation of the direct, indirect and quasi-direct forms lets the narrator blend authority, interpretation, and explanation to create a tale of her experiences the way she'd like them to be received.

Story Background

Zoe's *No End of Year Trip* is about a conflict between Zoe and her principal. Zoe told this story in the eighth Teacher Forum meeting of that (school) year, in April. Present at this meeting were Olive, Fatimah, Clare, Hannah, Lana, and myself. Hannah did not arrive until almost the very end of the story. Zoe told this story at the very outset of the meeting. There was no preceding conversation, other than the more informal chatting between two or three individuals that typically occurs when members first gather. It was the first utterance that day to which Teacher Forum members paid *collective* attention. Zoe announced her story and then proceeded to breakthrough into story. Thus, Zoe's story preface did not act as a suspension of conversation that usually characterizes personal experience narrative in the Teacher Forum. It was more like she took the floor and made others pay attention to her.

"No End of Year Trip"

1 Zoe: (I had out with my principal.) *part 1*
 2 I kept my mouth shut
 3 for about for six years. =And that's what I told them.
 4 I said "I've been quiet for six years
 5 and she's so incompetent. =There's no other word to describe her."

6 Lana: Is she a Sister ((nun))?

7 Z: No.

8 Steve: What prompted you?
 9 I mean what was

episode 1—complication 1 10 Z: What prompted me was that *part 2*
 11 I planned the eighth grade trip last year.
 12 In the past we've done a shared time
 13 with the public school.
 14 And last year we kind of went to a split.
 15 Um
 16 We lost a lot of our kids but
 17 we are almost self contained. =We -They still take band over
 there.
 18 Um
 19 Last year it went
 20 rather from
 21 the three hours and lunch and the whole thing
 22 we went to two hours
 23 and our kids weren't included in a lot of their stuff
 24 and our kids were really treated badly in public.
 25 It -It's too bad because for years and years it's been a good system.
 26 And then all of a sudden
 27 they decided
 28 um

29 Clare: Hi. ((Clare enters))

30 multiple: Hi.

31 Z: -All of a sudden they decided that the -that the public school was
 running out of money.
 32 So if the Catholic school stays open
 33 the public school
 34 -that'll cause the public school to go under.
 35 Well
 36 you know
 37 if they you know if they're running out of money they're running
 out of money.
 38 That's all there is to it.
 39 So anyway
 40 um

41 last year I planned the trip because I had a little girl who was bald
 who wore a wig
 42 and they always go to an amusement park.
 43 And I heard this girl talking about an amusement park and she said
 her hair flies off.
 44 And um

45 ? : [Uh oh.

46 Z: [she said her doctor gave her special tape and her hair
 still flew off.

47 ? : Ooooh.

48 Z: And I thought "We can't go to an amusement park. =I'll take these
 kids to Chicago."

49 L: Oh.

50 Z: So
 51 you know
 52 they earned

53 L: [How many kids are you talking about?

54 Z: Twenty-four.

55 They earned three thousand ()
 56 twenty-seven dollars or whatever
 57 and we went to Chicago.
 58 And we did real cool things.
 59 And um
 60 I think we had twelve adults and twenty-four kids.

61 S: This was last year?

62 Z: Last year.

63 And
 64 but it -I undertook it.
 65 And when I asked the principal she said "NO NO NO."
 66 And I said "You know I'm really concerned about Sarah."
 67 She said "Sarah will have to learn that she can't do everything else
 everybody else does."
 68 Which I felt well that that's a real nice attitude.
 69 And then
 70 when she asked the priest about it
 71 -actually I asked him about it. =I saw him in the hall
 72 and he said "Great! =Are you going to Toronto?"
 73 And I said "Chicago."
 74 And he said "GREAT=I'd like to go."
 75 Well it turned out he couldn't go.

76 But once she -he gave the okay then she said to me "GET
PLANNING. =GET PLANNING."

77 Well at that point it was too late to go to a couple places I wanted
to

78 and um

79 but we still got it planned. =But this year *part 3*

80 I sort of like

81 got

82 I don't know

83 /

84 unspokenly chosen as the class advisor or whatever.

85 So I was gone the first term and I had a couple of mothers start a
bake sale every Tuesday.

86 And the kids started earning money right at the beginning.

87 And um

88 But this class

89 there's fourteen of them and they're awful.

90 And nobody breaks windows and nobody brings guns to school

91 but they're just always

92 -there's always a comment.

93 There's always smarting off.

94 They don't bring their books

95 they -there's always just a little bit of -enough of a

96 an attitude in the class

97 that we've talked about you know

98 -I've talked to them about three or four times that

99 "You know this isn't a right.

100 This is a privilege and you have to earn this privilege."

101 And they just assumed they were going.

102 /

103 As early as this week *part 4*

104 they said "What have you done on our trip?"

105 And I told them what I'd done.

106 And then I told them I really -they wanted to go to a ball game.

107 And I said I wasn't comfortable with a ball game that started at
seven.

108 And um

109 I said "By the time we get done it's it's midnight

110 we get home at four in the morning

111 if we leave at six in the morning. =It's too long."

112 And and rather than saying "Oh. Okay."

113 You know I had eight kids bombarding me

114 "That's not -they won't get out at midnight they'll get out at ten."
((in a childish, whining tone))

115 And I said "Well ten our time is -ten Chicago time is eleven our
time.

116 By the time you get to your car it's not like walking from Midville
High School school to your cars.

117 It's a big city."

118 And uh

119 and then I had "My mom's used to driving at night."

120 It was just -like it's just constant!

121 So on Tuesday I said to them "I'm not going to plan the trip.

episode 2—complication II

episode 3—climax/crisis

122 If somebody else wants to
 123 they can. =But I -I choose not to."

124 And I told my principal. *part 5*
 125 And she like wrote notes.
 126 And I said "All the teachers feel the same way that the kids don't
 deserve it."
 127 And um
 128 I said "You know it's your decision but I'm not going to ch -plan
 the trip."
 129 Well she came back to me the next day and said "The priest said we
 can't cancel the trip
 130 um because the kids are expecting to go on it."
 131 And I said "That's his decision."
 132 And I said "But I'm not going to plan it."
 133 And she said "Yes you are going to plan it."

134 ?: Ooch.
 135 ?: Oh no.

136 Z: And I said "I'm not planning it. =I'm telling you I'M NOT PLANNING
 IT"

137 L: Read
 138 my
 139 lips ((he he)).

140 Z: She went nuts on
 141 -or I said "I guess if it ultimately -if the the trip is
 142 an expectation
 143 then I assume that it's your responsibility to plan it."
 144 And I set her off.
 145 And she just like started saying "What you don't understand is this
 is a Catholic school and we do extra things at a Catholic
 school."
 146 Yeah I have seven preps. =Don't tell me about extra things. =I do
 the student council.
 147 Like I'm the one that stays there until five two nights a week with
 whatever's going on after school.
 148 I didn't say that to her. =I just listened and she said
 149 "I know you do some extra things and Joe ((teaching colleague))
 does some extra things but you don't understand I do so many
 extra things."

150 When I came back in October ((from maternity leave)) *part 6*
 151 um
 152 the welcome back to school bulletin board was still up
 153 and at Advent I took it down and put up Advent stuff.
 154 I just said to her "They've been back to school for eighteen weeks
 now."
 155 You know.

156 And um *part 7*
 157 / /
 158 but

159 / /
 160 she
 161 pretty
 162 -I -I sa
 163 -she said "You have to. =Father said we can't cancel it."
 164 And I said "Take them. =Let Father take them. =I'm not taking
 them.
 165 And I'm -and if somebody else plans it I'm not going."
 166 And um
 167 she like wrote it down and stormed out of my room. =So
 168 then
 169 she came in and said "Father's going to talk to the kids tomorrow."

 170 And so when ah *part 8*
 171 /
 172 he came in
 173 /
 174 he asked (me) not to be there. =So I left the room and I said to him
 "As a terribly disgruntled (employee)
 175 /
 176 I want to talk to you."
 177 And like
 178 I wrote up this huge page of
 179 complaints
 180 and uh
 181 all -I kept it all professional
 182 I kept it all
 183 things that she doesn't do that should be her job.
 184 And he said "You're the first person who's ever come to me
 directly about this."
 185 Everybody knows. =The parents all talk about her.
 186 The kids don't respect her.
 187 And um
 188 /
 189 but
 190 you know I said
 191 L: Is there a trip?
 192 Z: He said -I said "I'm not gon" -I told him what went on.
 193 And he said "I in no way insinuated that you would do it."
 194 And I said "Well that's what I assumed."
 195 And I said "I'm not going to do it."
 196 And um
 197 he said I told them that the trip was in jeopardy.
 198 And
 199 /
 200 my assumption was that
 201 that -that doesn't necessarily mean a trip to Chicago.
 202 And uh.
 203 So *part 9*

 204 anyway
 205 I didn't say anything further to her

206 and she didn't say anything further to me.
 207 But
 208 for an hour and twenty minutes I told him
 209 how incompetent this woman was
 210 how she doesn't speak to us. =She comes in and stands next to you
 and writes a note.
 211 And then hands it to you and while you read it. ((Lana laughing))
 212 If you just -if you just answer her she says write it down.
 213 She wants you to write your answers.
 214 And ah

215 Fatimah: I wonder where she got that notion from?

216 L: Interesting approach.

217 Z: She can't remember anything.

218 Olivia: Oh that's why she writes everything down?

219 Z: She writes down everything.

220 ?: Hi. ((Hannah enters))

221 Hannah: Sorry I'm late.

222 Z: If you say to her "I was just wondering if -if I could leave today at
 223 um
 224 right at homeroom?" =She'll get out a piece of paper and start
 writing a note.
 225 Like you can't even talk to the woman at all.

226 L: NO BABIES I KNOW. That's the first thing I said. ((in reference to
 none of the new mothers brought their babies today))

227 Z: We have teachers quit.

Reported Speech and the Genre of the Personal Narrative

Zoe's *No End of Year Trip* is a story in which reported speech and dialogue play an important role. These are important to the generic features of the personal experience narrative genre: dramatic narrative structure, implied truthfulness, and the self-same of narrator and key character or chief witness. This section will look at the role of reported speech as it relates to each of the genre dimensions and the accomplishment of story.

Reported Speech and Dramatic Narrative Structure

I first described Zoe's *No End of Year Trip* in my fieldnotes (4-24-93) as a "celebration of victory." I have come to believe that part of getting personal in the group is to share in one's triumphs, especially when these involve successfully dealing with troublesome administrators. Lana's story *Death Threat*, in chapter 6, has a similar theme of victory. The story was the first utterance that I recorded in that session. In fact, I only started the tape recorder at line 2 ("I kept my mouth shut"). I believe I recorded accurately in my notes Zoe's first words in line 1, but I keep these designated as doubtful hearings to be safe.

Zoe's story has 9 distinguishable *parts*, encompassing 4 distinct episodes. I have broken the story down into parts in order to show how in each part reported speech plays a role of moving the dramatic plot along.⁴ Episodes are empirically distinguished by utterances that indicate temporal shift between settings. I label the episodes *complication 1* (lines 1-79), *complication 2* (lines 79-102), *climax/crisis* (lines 103-169), and the *resolution/dénouement* (lines 170-227). The episodic shifts correspond with different story parts, as indicated in the text of the story's

⁴I make no pretense that these "parts" are necessarily natural or inherent within narrative generally or in Zoe's story specifically. I am only doing this for analytic reasons for focusing on the text and the role of reported speech.

transcription. I refer to “parts” rather than episodes as I believe they are better suited to talk about reported speech in the story and its dramatic movement.

Part 1 is Zoe’s introduction (lines 1 -5). This is a preface that comes in the form of an abstract (Labov, 1972). As I indicated in chapter 3, the preface is a petition to take the floor to tell a story. The abstract form of the preface is a summary of the story, but not part of the story proper. Nor is it offered in lieu of the story.⁵ The abstract/preface is a request for an extended turn at talk, where the regular rules of conversational turn-taking are suspended. The preface typically occasions a response (or at least a non-interruption) by the audience. In this case, Lana asks about the principal (if she is a nun), and I then ask her what had prompted her to “have it out” and to announce to “them” (3) her principal’s incompetence. My response is, in effect, permission for Zoe to tell the story (which she seems determined to do anyway) and she proceeds to open the story in *part 2*.

It is important to note that from the very outset of Zoe’s narrative utterance, even in her abstract, Zoe is compelled to use reported speech. After her first clause (1), the rest of the abstract/preface is a melding of indirect and direct quotation. Lines 2 -3 could have simply been general commentary, an expression of her anger and valorizing the duty of keeping her “mouth shut for about six years.” She indicates that this is not just her thoughts, but what she said to an undetermined “them.” This indirect quotation pattern is inverse to the usual form in conversational storytelling where the verb of saying usually precedes the quoted utterance. In other words, the typical patterns would have made Zoe’s statement “*I told them* (that) I kept my mouth shut for about six years”. Instead she put the verb of saying (*told*) after the quoted utterance. This, combined with the next utterances in *part 1*, that are direct quotations, foreshadow the intense use of reported speech in the remainder of the story. It is an ambiguous use of

⁵Like Susan Kalçik’s (1975) “kernel narrative”. See Chapter 6.

reported speech. When Zoe declares "I said 'I've been quiet..." it is not clear whom she is addressing (i.e., who "them" is). As the story unfolds, we find out that "them" is really a single person. In this sense, direct quotation of lines 4-5 is, perhaps, what she is transparently uttering as the narrator, not as a narrative character, to the audience. In effect, she says that her story will be one about a silent character who found herself morally bound to speak up and inform "them" of the incompetent principal in *their* midst.

Part 2 is also the beginning of episode 1 and forms the story's opening (Young, 1987). Since the abstract/preface is not part of the story's events, it is hard to characterize it as an episode, rather a general orientation to the main events in the story, that have happened sometime between this Teacher Forum meeting and the one before (one month prior). The first episode is marked by the shift in time to her planning the eighth grade trip "last year" (11). Episode 1/*part 2* amount to background complicating action. Zoe appears to feel it necessary to refer back to the year previous in order to render fully the meaning of the conflict with her principal. Here, Zoe is establishing her own role as the structural "hero" in her tale: she has already done heroic things in consideration of the one girl who was bald. Zoe implies that Sarah is bald because of illness since "she said *her doctor* gave her special tape and her hair still flew off" (46). This appeals to the members of the Teacher Forum, as Zoe's action is highly child-centered and shows emotional concern for her student.

In this part reported speech plays an important role in the establishment of the background for the ensuing drama in three ways. One, she indirectly reports the speech of the "bald girl" and why she cannot go to an amusement park (43, 46). Zoe gives the serious and humane reason for her heroic decision to go to Chicago. Second, using the quasi-direct form, Zoe reports her thinking and her decision to go to a city rather than an amusement park with a roller coaster. It is *her* idea that she represents as speech (48). This helps Zoe to express her thoughts as a key factor in her motivation to go to

Chicago, which, in turn, has repercussions in the next episode.

Third, Zoe introduces two main characters with direct quotation, her principal and the priest. Through directly reporting the principal's speech in a conversation with her, Zoe presents the woman as her antagonist. The principal refutes Zoe's initial efforts and clamors "No! No! No!" (65). When Zoe gives her reasons for this trip—the concern for a child who cannot go to an amusement park—the principal gives a stern reply about Sarah's need to learn the hard lessons of life (67). Not to be discouraged, Zoe again uses quasi-direct form to report her thoughts. This implicitly explains for the audience her motivation for going to the priest. Her disgust with the principal's "attitude" (68) warrants her approach of the priest.⁶ The priest is then introduced in her constructed dialogue (72-74). His directly quoted speech shows a resounding confirmation of her decision, so much so that he said he would like to join the trip.

The last direct quotation of *part 2* is of the principal. After the priest's approval, the principal quickly changes her tone and enthusiastically tells Zoe to "Get planning! Get planning!" (76). Zoe surrounds the priest's words with the principal's completely contrary commands in an action sequence:

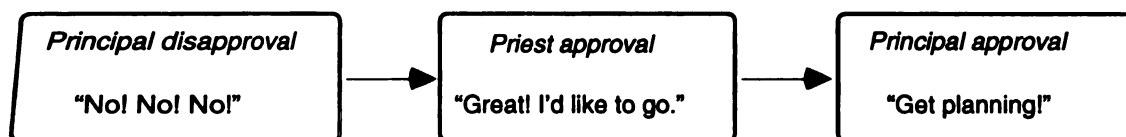


Figure 5.3

Action sequence through reported speech

The juxtaposition of these commands in this action sequence shows a principal who is

⁶As a side point, but not clear in her story, in Catholic schools, which are typically connected to a church, a parish priest is the administrative head and most major decisions (e.g., money) typically go through him.

irresolute, willing to surrender to the approval of her superior (the priest) and not to the merits of Zoe's heroic efforts to include students in communal activities. The principal cares more about covering her backside than about a student who may miss out on a class activity. This rubs the democratic, student-centered values of many teachers, and of the Teacher Forum members specifically, the wrong way. For them, responding to the needs of children is as important as reacting to the sentiments of a superior. This characterization and action sequence is accomplished with directly quoted speech.

Part 3 marks a episodic shift from the previous year to the current year in Zoe's story. Reported speech plays a minor role in this part and episode. In this part she establishes how she, by virtue of her heroic efforts the previous year in organizing a school trip, she was "unspokenly chosen as the class advisor" (84).⁷ She moves the drama along and develops her role as a selfless hero for a class of students who are "awful (89), "smarting off" (93), and who have "an attitude" (96). Her students, or "class" (88, 96), are an aggregate to whom she speaks. In describing how she deals with her class apropos the trip, she conveys this through direct quotation (99-100):

"You know this isn't a right.
This is a privilege and you have to earn this privilege." (99-100)

This speech is not introduced. Though Zoe says in lines 97-98 that she and the class have "talked," she makes a generalized direct quotation. While there is no verb of saying that linguistically frames her speech (e.g., *I said* "You know this isn't....."), Zoe does change her voice as if she were addressing her students, speaking in a didactic, measured manner one might use with unruly children. The change in voice is one aspect of direct quotation, a marker to key the audience that she has shifted frame. It is further

⁷I find this a fascinating use of language. Zoe uses an invented adverb to describe her ascribed status in the school, that she was unwittingly or coercively selected to organize the class trip. It is as if she cannot avoid using reflexive language—"unspokenly"—to describe herself and her involvement in the narrated events.

evidenced as a direct quotation by the coordination of verb tense (present) and pronouns (first person, "you"). With this utterance of directly reported speech Zoe indicates not so much a movement of action as a description of attitude, her general mindset at the time of the narrated events and her students, that further complicates the story.

Part 4 moves the story to the next episode in the near past ("As early as this week," 103). The drama of this entire part, and indeed the entire episode, is developed through use of reported speech and nearly every utterance is an instance of direct quotation. The students, on whose behalf Zoe has already heroically worked the previous year and on whose behalf she has *again* grudgingly decided to work, become antagonistic and fail to appreciate her efforts. She mimics her students' speech. She does not indicate any specific child in her class. Rather, any one reported speech act represents a composite of her students' voices. Zoe casts the conflict in linguistic terms, that she "had eight kids bombarding me" (113), a verbal barrage that is "just constant!" (120). This conflict, conveyed through reported speech, is but a warm up for the next round of conflict.

In *part 5*, Zoe's conflict with the principal, already introduced as insensitive and uncaring, comes to full crisis. As with the conflict with her students, Zoe's conflict with the principal is almost entirely narrated in reported speech, and all in direct quotation. She tells her principal in no uncertain terms that she has no desire to plan a school trip. In her speech she directly quotes herself and connects her reasons, described in *part 4*, "All the teachers feel the same way that the kids don't deserve it" (126). The climax of the crisis itself is reached through an utterance of direct quotation:

And I said "I'm not planning it. I'm telling you I'm not planning it!"(136)

At the zenith of this crisis the audience responds. Two indistinguishable (134-135) members utter some shock, and Lana joyously echoes Zoe's reported declaration of not planning a class trip and pedantically says: "Read my lips" (137-139).

Part 6 seems rather out of place at first glance. It is an aside where Zoe narrates an example of the “extra things” she does at the school. She also uses this part to remind members of the Teacher Forum that she was on maternity leave earlier in the year. Though not evident in the text itself, members of the Teacher Forum are cognizant that Zoe had a baby and was out for the beginning of the school year. Not only does she do “extra things” (146), she indicates she did these after her return from a pregnancy. Moreover, these counter the principal’s claim that she herself does “so many extra things” (149). What is notable about this aside is that Zoe cannot get through it without a use of direct quotation:

I just said to her “They’ve [students] been back to school for eighteen weeks now” (154).

Even this explication needs to be brought to life through reported speech.

Part 7 picks up where *part 5* was suspended for Zoe’s aside in *part 6*. Here the principal invokes the authority of the priest. Zoe represents this threat with a direct quotation (169). As Zoe shifts to the final episode with *part 8* and Zoe speaks to the priest (“As a terribly disgruntled employee...I want to talk to you,” 174-176), it is not entirely clear when she actually talks to him. Zoe simply moves directly to her conversation with the priest. Through a directly quoted utterance, Zoe is vindicated. This is the dramatic resolution where Zoe triumphs over the principal. We find out that the principal is a liar, that she had communicated to the priest that he wanted Zoe to do it: “And he said ‘I in no way insinuated that you would do it.’” (193). Again, the crux of the resolution comes through the explicit use of reported speech that forms a constructed dialogue between Zoe and the priest.

Lastly, the dénouement of *No End of Year Trip* involves Zoe commenting further on her frustration and disgust with the principal. This is done through indirect reporting of what she told him (208-213). She closes the story as she starts it, telling the priest how the principal is “incompetent” (5, 209). The narration gets a little

confusing when Zoe explains, through her indirect words to the priest, what the principal does that primarily annoys her, i.e., notetaking. Olive asks a question. Hannah enters the room, Zoe gives a further example of the notetaking. Lana then screams that no one has brought their babies (Zoe and Hannah both have young infants). Finally, Zoe ends her narration, and closes the story with the coda "We have teachers quit" (227) because of the principal.

Reported Speech and Implied Truthfulness

The forgoing brief analysis of the plot movement of Zoe's *No End of Year Trip* shows that she and her story respond to the demands of the personal experience narrative genre in order to develop a dramatic narrative structure. The poetic function, in Jakobson's terms (1960/87), of language and narration require that the narrator tell a "good" story, that the narrative utterance stand alone as a story for its own sake. Zoe's story has the basic narrative components of a beginning, middle and end (roughly following its episodes), complicating action, resolution, and it makes a point (the incompetence of her principal). This is accomplished through the explicit and substantive use of direct and, to a lesser extent, indirect quotation in constructed dialogue between Zoe's and her students, Zoe and her principal, and Zoe and the priest. The story is introduced (prefaced/abstracted) with direct and indirect quotation; the climax and ultimate crisis of the story is a verbal conflict between Zoe and the despotic principal; the drama's resolution is completed through a civil conversation between Zoe and the priest about the failings of the principal, in particular, and her oppression of the school's teachers in general. In this sense, the dramatic construction of the *No End of Year Trip* conforms to the essential demands of the primary frame of celebrating critical (critiquing a administrative superior's behavior and taking action to correct it) and getting personal, since it intimately involves Zoe as the story's hero.

As a genre, the personal experience narrative must respond to the demands of its

other generic features. Like the Zuni origin and stories and fictive tales Tedlock (1983) describes, the poetics of the personal experience narrative require that it work at implied truthfulness, that it seek verisimilitude. Reported speech, in the form of direct and indirect (as well as quasi-direct) quotation, is a trope to persuade an audience that the narrated events truly happened. Herein lies an inherent tension of the genre of the personal narrative. The creation of voices is essentially a poetic act that has more in common with fiction than with audio tape recording. The literary representation of speech and dialogue in conversational personal experience narratives, not to mention the limit of human powers of recollection, lead us to suspect that the lines were probably not actually spoken as reported. As Tannen (1986) asserts, "It cannot be the case that the dialogue presented in oral storytelling is being reported exactly as it was spoken, unless the report is based on the deliberate memorization of a transcript which was based on a tape recording of the talk" (p. 313). For instance, when Zoe reports the speech of her students who are haranguing her to take them to Chicago and to attend a Cubs game (103-123), she speaks of kids verbally "bombarding" her (113). She presents the students as aggregates and does not name any individual student. They all, or at least eight of them (113), were saying the same things to her. Unless they were a chorus, they could not have all said the same thing. And even if she were quoting one student as a representative example of being bombarded, can we say that this is precisely what Zoe heard? Or, even when she reconstructs the dialogue between her and the principal, the powers of memory indicate that even though Zoe was in a position to hear and participate in it, the conversation did not take place precisely in this way.

Strictly speaking, Zoe is not creating fiction. Her story is framed as a personal narrative that is supposedly true—expressly *not fiction*—and her direct and indirect quotations are said to have actually taken place. While she cannot, like most of us, remember verbatim, she does have a sense how speech sounds, how people talk to one another, and what a verbal conflict is like. Thus, in order to render the realism of

speech she cannot recall word for word, she needs to “model and trigger” the imagination of her audience (Tannen, 1986). She creates voices, depicting action and making drama that are based upon real people. She necessarily embellishes and adjusts these voices. This is the poesis of personal narrative, to create in the imagination of her auditors the voices of characters that make it seem as if the story were true. As verbal art, the realism of personal experience narrative cannot evade coloring. Referring to the great Russian realist Dostoevsky, Jakobson notes (1921/1978):

Exaggeration in art is unavoidable, wrote Dostoevskij; in order to show an object, it is necessary to deform the shape it used to have; it must be tinted, just as slides to be viewed under a microscope are tinted. You color your object in an original way and think that it has become more palpable, *clearer*, more real. In a Cubist's, picture, a single object is multiplied and shown from multiple points of view; thus is made more tangible. This is a device used in painting. But it is also possible to motivate and justify this device in the painting itself; an object is doubled when reflected in a mirror. The same is true of literature (p. 44, emphasis in the original).

Given the latitude we give (and take) in the personal narrative, we need to assume that a story is true, especially when we know the narrator and feel she is someone we can trust.

The literary device, or trope, of reported speech in Zoe's story works to help her achieve dramatic rendering of events. This rendering of events is necessarily exaggerated and deformed since a pure isomorphic mimicking of the original form is impossible. Besides, she needs to make the story sound real to achieve “maximum verisimilitude” (Jakobson, 1921/1978) of the realism of the personal experience narrative. This is where the art and the tension of the personal narrative genre reside. To make things seem real, they must be deformed. To make a speech seem like it truly did occur, it must be recreated from memory to sound like real speech and dialogue that, at the same time, has dramatic movement.

Reported Speech and Narrator Self-Same

This leads to the consideration of the third feature of the personal experience narrative genre and the use of reported speech, the *self-same* of the narrator and the narrative's protagonist and/or chief witness. This dimension is clearly implicated in the forgoing discussion of the other two genre features. Zoe is capable of telling the story as an accurate drama since she was not only there, she was in the action. Reported speech and her involvement in the constructed dialogues put her intimately in the dramatic action. The story cannot proceed without her and she develops it through reports of her own speech.

As for meeting the demands of implied truthfulness, what better way to demonstrate a story's truthfulness than by replaying speech and dialogue? Not only was Zoe in a position to hear the words spoken by others, she is an interlocutor in dialogue with them. She heard them *and* she speaks back to them. It is her involvement in the drama that makes her a credible storyteller, that in turn makes the verisimilitude acceptable. The genre of the personal experience narrative seems to hinge on this quality as it puts the narrator *dramatically and realistically in the action*. Listeners give themselves over to the narrator as the most credible one to make a story good and seem true.

Reported Speech and Audience Involvement: Implications for Teacher Forum as Group Entity

So far this analysis has been concerned with the use of reported speech in the form of direct and indirect quotation, apropos the realism of the personal experience narrative genre that is both artful in its dramatic rendering and at the same time real-sounding. Since members of the Teacher Forum have no way to really check on the accuracy of Zoe's story, all they have to rely on is Zoe and her text. As Zoe is artfully and intimately inserted into her own story, her credibility and the story's are nearly one in

the same; they vouch for each other and the auditors make the necessary leap of faith that the story is true and welcome the chance to be taken away by the drama.

Is there more that we can say about the use of reported speech other than the inevitable adjustment, embellishment, exaggeration, deformation, and transformation made by the author and tolerated by the audience to achieve a good story that has veracity? Can this not be said about any conversational personal narrative in any context? Does the "culturally defined scene" (Bauman, 1986) of the Teacher Forum exact anything special or unique on the use of reported speech in personal experience narrative? In my view, I find it is essential to connect the use of reported speech to the context of the Teacher Forum specifically, the group life of these teachers who have something in common and have coordinated their verbal utterances in alignment with the primary framework.

As defined and described in Chapter 2, the context of Teacher Forum is composed of two primary frames: the *critical* and the *personal*. I claim the personal experience narrative is a high form of the personal. If the personal narrative is implicated in "getting personal" in the Teacher Forum, then it would seem that reported speech plays a role in accomplishing this. As a trope and a poetic device used in storytelling, as we have seen, reported speech is a means to enact drama from experience. As an oral activity, storytelling is an event that works to involve the audience, not simply the presentation of text to be "read" or heard. In other words, it seeks the involvement of the auditors, as persons with whom the narrator is already in some form of coordinated relationship. Tannen holds that as spontaneous "poetic linguistic device[s]...used in ordinary conversation", represented speech and constructed dialogue are

...means by which experience surpasses story to become drama. Moreover that creation of drama *is made possible by and simultaneously creates interpersonal involvement among speaker or writer and audience* (emphasis added p. 312).

Though I believe Tannen fails to consider the need for verisimilitude in conversational

narratives (not to mention in realist fiction), her notion of interpersonal involvement would seem relevant to an examination of storytelling in a group that praises "getting personal."

Functions of Reported Speech

Of relevance is linguist/literary critic Roman Jakobson's (1960/1987) theory of language. He identifies six *constituents* of speech present in any act of verbal communication:

- 1) addresser (speaker, encoder, emitter, poet, author, narrator)
- 2) addressee (decoder, hearer, listener; reader, interpreter, audience)
- 3) code (system, *langue*)
- 4) message (*parole*, the given discourse, the text)
- 5) context (referent)
- 6) contact (a physical channel and psychological connection between addresser and addressee)

Each of these components is associated with a specific *function* of language:

- 1) emotive (expressive)
- 2) conative (appellative)
- 3) metalingual (glossing)
- 4) poetic (aesthetic)
- 5) referential (cognitive, ideational)
- 6) phatic (keeping channel open)

Though speech events, according to Jakobson, must involve all of these constituents and their functions, one may be emphasized in a given speech event. In the referential function, there is an emphasis on the context or idea of a verbal message. Jakobson was concerned with what makes not only poetry poetic, but ordinary language and prose.

Poetry is only the major example of the poetic, but all speech acts are, to some extent poetic. In a sense, this chapter has been an examination of the *poetic* function, that is a focus upon the *message*, as the “dominant” (Jakobson, 1935/1978) in personal experience narrative and the role of represented speech therein. As Jakobson (1935) sees it:

The poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituents (p. 69).

Apropos the aesthetic expression of storytelling, this is the narrative utterance for its own sake—telling good stories. The genre demands of verisimilitude *and* dramatic narrative structure in the personal experience narratives are subsumed under this poetic function; to tell a good personal experience narrative it must be both dramatic (in its own, conversational way) and true (inter-subjectively understood as actually having occurred). As part of the poetic function, reported speech is “a focus within the verbal message on the verbal message itself” (Waugh. p. 144). In relation to this dominant, the deep symbolic quality of the personal experience narrative reflects a subsidiary function of the *metalingual*, part of the group’s *code*.

Of specific concern to this analysis is Jakobson’s *conative* function. This is where an emphasis of utterance is on the relationship between the *addresser* and the *addressee*. In storytelling, this is between the *narrator* and the *audience*. It would seem that in the conversational personal narrative a preponderance of reported speech acts reveals an emphasis on the conative as well as the poetic. In a group that is dedicated to “getting personal,” the emphasis on the conative makes the use of reported speech an artful device to work with and toward the personal. It seeks to draw the audience into the story and engage them in the story’s telling.

There are at least two occasions where we can see that the audience is engaged in Zoe’s story. As noted, the preface/abstract *No End of Year Trip* (1-5) involves direct and indirect quotation. Zoe announces that she has a story and is seeking the floor. In the

preface-response sequence, Lana and I express curiosity and respond with questions.

These indicate, at least on the surface, a form of engagement. Lana and I are responding to Zoe's reported speech. Lana seems to want to know if the principal is a nun and I did want to know what compelled her to say these words to someone. I was personally drawn into Zoe's' preface: To whom was she talking? What led her to say these things about her principal's incompetence? What happened when she "had it out" with her principal?

Lana's and my response provide one set of clues as to how we were brought into the story through in/direct quotation. More significantly, there is evidence that the audience is engaged at the story's climax:

Zoe: I said "You know it's your decision but I'm not going to ch -plan the trip."
 Well she came back to me the next day and said "The priest said we can't cancel the trip
 um because the kids are expecting to go on it."
 And I said "That's his decision."
 And I said "But I'm not going to plan it."
 And she said "Yes you are going to plan it."

?: Oooh.

?: Oh no.

Z: And I said "I'm not planning it. =I'm telling you I'M NOT PLANNING IT"

Lana: Read
 my
 lips (hehe). (128-139)

As Zoe reports the heated dialogue between herself and principal, there are responses by at least two (unidentifiable) members of the group during this telling in lines 134 and 135. They seem to sense the conflict and are compelled to utter the reactions "Oooh" and "Oh no". More telling, however, is Lana's response (lines 137 -39). When Zoe raises her voice to directly quote her own speech to the principal, Lana seems unable to contain herself and recites the phrase made famous by former President George Bush when he wanted to be understood in his hollow promise to not raise taxes: "Read my lips." Lana is

moved to respond to Zoe's reported verbal action toward the antagonist; she displays that she is not only listening to the story, but has been drawn into it, and responds specifically to Zoe's use of direct quotation. Reading lips is a reflexive metaphor that refers to the imperative act of intently listening to one's words. From this it can be inferred that reported speech within the personal experience narrative not only serves the function of the poetic, of telling a good, true story, it also serves the conative function of maintaining personal relationships and helping folks "get personal." Reported speech is therefore also a device to maintain the group and its primary frame.

This use of reported speech to bring an audience into a story, a function that focuses on the relation between addresser and addressee(s), points to an inherent tension in conversational storytelling. Unlike stories that are oft retold, the conversational personal experience narrative in the Teacher Forum has the flavor of "news." Stories typically are about events that have occurred since the last Teacher Forum meeting. In other words, the conversational personal narrative does not have the practiced or ritualized stylization of other story forms. There is a double edged risk: emphasis, or over-emphasis, on the poetic may seem too stylized for a personal experience narrative and may discourage active listening. Conversely, overemphasis on the conative function may bore one's audience who may want to hear a good story that is worth listening to for its dramatic realism, its poetry. This forces the narrator to walk a narrative competence tightrope that stretches between alienating one's audience and boring them.

CHAPTER 6

AMBIVALENT EMERGENCE OF A PROSPECTIVE PARADIGMATIC NARRATIVE:

A TEACHER'S DEATH THREAT

Teachers suffer in many ways what they experience as conditioning or manipulation by their superiors or by the "system" itself. To reflect upon the situation, even the bureaucratic situation, is to try to understand some of the forces that frustrate their quests for themselves and their efforts to create themselves as the teachers they want to be.

Maxine Greene,
Teaching: The Question of Personal Reality

Sometimes a personal narrative moves beyond the personal and starts to take on qualities of a shared or communal tale (Schely-Newman, 1994). Such stories can start to take on paradigmatic qualities for the group in which it is told; they become emblems of the group's common meaning. This is an exploration of such a narrative told in the teacher Forum. The story is about a death threat one of the teachers, Lana, received from a middle school student. Personal experience narratives told in the Teacher Forum are typically single episodes of the kind that arise in conversations. Stories have the flavor of "news" where members narrate events that are usually no more than one month old. The *Death Threat* is a striking anomaly to this pattern. It is about events three years old. Longer and multi-episodic, with a more developed dramatic plot, the *Death Threat* resembles a "social drama" (Turner, 1957). Members tell an abbreviated version outside the Teacher Forum and often index it as the "bullshit" or Lana's "ordeal." As such, the *Death Threat* is en route to becoming a more shared story: in many ways it displays qualities which reveal the core values of the group—critical democracy and an ethos of personal support for its members. Though all members sympathize with Lana's trauma, their attitude toward the narrated events and toward Lana herself vary widely

(from sympathetic to critical). There is a collective ambivalence about the meaning of the narrative's events: even though it expresses core values, it also reveals certain conflicts while it emerges as paradigmatic. This chapter looks at how this social drama is put together and what this narrative means for the Teacher Forum.

Background

Lana told the *Death Threat* narrative in the sixth Teacher Forum meeting of the year. That day followed a Michigan February blizzard. The frigid temperature and the poor road conditions kept several members away. Only five members were able to make the meeting, Lana, Zoe, Hannah, Robin and myself. Since few came that day, the meeting had an air of informality; there seemed to be a feeling that this was not really a meeting. The combination of the bitter cold outside and the small number of attendees lent a greater sense of intimacy to the gathering than usually characterize Teacher Forum meetings.

The *Death Threat* narrative emerged about thirty-five minutes into the conversation. The conversation leading up to the *Death Threat* centered around thinking about creating and teaching in democratic classrooms. It included commentary on the teacher's leadership role in such classrooms and whether there is contradiction between teacher control and the democratic ideal of equality in participation and decision making. Lana noted the difficulty in dealing with students who resist cooperative participation, and asked, "How democratic can you be when you have 'goof-offs'?" Further, she asked "How can we maintain a democratic classroom and at the same time deal with a student intent on totally disrupting the class?" This is, of course, a significant pedagogical question that resists any easy, formulaic answer. Mere classroom management techniques are too simple for democratic educators who are encouraged to query the purposes of their actions vis à vis democratic goals. Further, Lana asks how a particular student can be brought into a democratic classroom community without adversely

disrupting that community. This question goes to the heart of the classic democratic tension in the dialect of individual and community, between the rights of any one individual and those of the group.

Robin then commented, "Along with the rights and privileges come responsibilities. For anybody." I said that I thought the idea of accountability is often confused with a sense of responsibility. This led to Lana's commentary and my response:

Lana: Oh I know. This new CREEP¹ business from the state. You know that dichotomy between the administration and the teachers all that crap that I went through with the death threat a couple of years ago. You know. And I finally got into the um off the office. I said, "You have a luxury down here of being able to deal with a child on a one on one basis. And yes, I feel sorry for this child's background. I realize he is a troubled teenager blah blah blah and I hope he you know but he does not have the right to come into that classroom and threaten the teacher's life and disrupt the class and so on. When I am in that classroom my decisions are based on what's best for the majority. As much as I care about that individual, the majority takes precedence." Well we went round and round and round and round on that issue and the board of education finally decided that um you know that difference between...and again it's that power structure hierarchical deal.

Steve: So you got a death threat from a student? Can I ask about that?

Her comments piqued my interest. It was hard to tell if Lana was speaking directly of personal experience, of a specific child, or a type of child who is bent on making classrooms uncomfortable. Prior to data collection, I had heard from at least two members that Lana had a traumatic experience in her school district a few years preceding and that the Teacher Forum was a major source of professional and emotional support at that time. They advised me to be careful in asking Lana about this experience as she found it painful to discuss. I was uncertain if this was the precise experience to which she was referring in this utterance. I had been a member for almost seven months and I had yet to hear the *Death Threat* narrative. The words "death threat," combined with "all that crap I went through," led me to think there was a good chance that this

¹Acronym (pseudonym) for state mandated standardized testing.

was that experience. I couldn't resist. My request for Lana to say more opened the door for the *Death Threat* and allowed Lana to breakthrough (Hymes, 1970) into the story:

"Death Threat"

1 Lana: Oh this -this was (hehe) a topic of conversation several years ago.
 2 Um
 3 Yes there was a note
 4 ah left on my table
 5 and ah
 6 it was in a letter or some such thing
 7 and um
 8 this particular child was going to
 9 cut off my tits
 10 and shove one down my throat
 11 the other up my cunt
 12 and throw my body into the front yard of my house so that my husband and
 children could see what a bitch they lived with.
 13 And the office said "Well Lana I don't know what you're complaining about.
 You run a writing workshop. =You let kids choose their own topics so
 how can you say this isn't the appropriate topic?" =And I
 14 -and they said it's just a typical teenage expression of anger
 15 and they wouldn't do anything and wouldn't do anything.
 16 So I filed an assault complaint with the police department who the next day
 showed up and took the kid out of the building in handcuffs
 17 and he spent the weekend in detention.
 18 And my name was mud. =How dare I humiliate that child in front of his
 peers?
 19 And when he was brought back to school that following Monday he was made
 a teacher's aide
 20 to make up for the humiliation that he suffered at my hands
 21 and I
 22 you know
 23 the -the lousy teacher syndrome came down
 24 all this kind of stuff and I said you know "Screw you."
 25 I said "I have the RIGHT to walk into this building and feel safe and it is
 your responsibility to insure my sa" = "Oh we don't have any nobody is
 breaking the law here."
 26 I said "This kid is into HEAD BUT TING.
 27 To me that's physical assault.
 28 You can call it teenage fun
 29 but kids are hurt when he's butting heads with them."
 30 And I said "This is a foster child who has Fila tennis shoes and long sleeved
 Polo tee shirts on day after day that have never been worn before
 31 and you can't me that he's not financing those somewhere else."
 32 The kid will come in Monday and just be "uuuhhh" ((groggy))
 33 and by the end of Monday be extremely hostile.
 34 I said "He's on drugs."
 35 Well of course because he's this foster child and there's -there'd been a
 previous police record that all this is confidential. =They don't tell the
 teacher anything. =Like the schools now don't have to tell you if a child
 in your classroom has AIDS
 36 because that's a breech of confidentiality.
 37 And uh
 38 the police were absolutely horrified

39 they said because of the sexual content of that note in addition to the life
 threat it was jus ().
 40 And we went round and round and round.
 41 And finally I said
 42 "You know they want to put him right back in the class."
 43 And uh
 44 so I started the grievance.
 45 Spent a year fighting it and
 46 complaining about a lack of discipline code in my building.
 47 During that time no one I worked with would associate with me.
 48 And the whole staff is constantly complaining about no discipline no
 consistent patterns for
 49 -you know
 50 -but nobody would associate with me. =And I said "Look I'm going through
 with this.
 51 And you're welcome to ride along because you're all complaining about
 discipline. =Why don't you (join) me?"
 52 Because it's a class action grievance so something can ="Oh no we don't
 touch you because if you lose we don't want your shit on our shoes"
 53 kind of attitude.
 54 So finally I won it. =I won it at the board level.
 55 And -but I -I had like twenty three pages of single spaced documentation. =I
 was going home every night and writing up who said what. =And I mean
 it was just
 56 it was a horrible year in my life.
 57 And the upshot of the
 58 um
 59 /
 60 resolution was one that I would be evaluated for the first time in my career
 in North Hampton ((Lana's school district)). =I've been there sixteen
 years now.
 61 This was at the end of the twelfth or thirteenth year and I'd never been
 evaluated. =And I'd asked for them
 62 because I want it on my record my current work but nobody would evaluate
 me and
 63 yet they were making evaluative comments about my teaching. =Now how
 can you do that?
 64 So the principal and the assistant principal came out looking like hell at the
 grievances ().
 65 And ah
 66 but the upshot was that there would be a consistent discipline policy
 developed for both middle schools.
 67 A policy was developed in my building.
 68 I'm the only teacher that has the policy applied.
 69 Everybody else is still bitching about the lack of discipline.
 70 And I -and I you know at this point "Screw you all.
 71 You know I'm fighting my own issues
 72 but I was willing to do something for everyone of you."
 73 And uh
 74 with attitude
 75 -you know human personal attitudes like that
 76 /
 77 I don't want anything to do with you.
 78 So but

79 /
80 -and I'm the rabble rouser and
81 / / /
82 It's just unbelievable.
83 / /
84 Local politics.
85 /
86 And then nobody
87 you know
88 -MOST people
89 don't want that a hassle like that in their life.
90 They'll complain about the fact that there's no support for discipline.
91 They'll go home at the end of the day and be all ticked off because they didn't
get done what they wanted to do because of this obnoxious child who
disrupts their class day after day.
92 But
93 in the summers they don't have to think about it.
94 /
95 So anyway.
96 / / /
97 But I don't have discipline problems in my classroom now.
98 (hehe) And the word -and the word got around the next year when the kids
were screwing around and one kid leaned over to the other kid and said
99 "You better be good in here she calls the cops if you aren't."

Needless to say Lana's story opening was a shock; I listened wide-eyed. At the time of this telling, it was three years after the events, which took place over the period of almost an entire school year. As the narrator, Lana needs to attend to creating an accessible text that further explains what the *Death Threat* meant in her previous allusion. A mere chronological listing of the events may fail to bring the meaning these hold for Lana, as well as other group members. She needs to make the causal connections between the events that lend a coherence and brings out the significant events that may otherwise be discreet and disconnected. To do this she develops a plot and reconstitutes dramatic characters and employs tropes. These draw upon the common experience of educators and the general orientation of the Teacher Forum.

Dramatis Personae

Lana

One defining feature of the personal experience narrative genre is the *self-same* of the narrator and the main character in, or chief witness to, the events as they unfold (Stahl, 1989). In this case, Lana is the story's protagonist. Structurally speaking, she is the "hero" of the story. She creates, or reconstitutes, adverse conditions and trials worthy of a story's hero. These trials come in the form of victimization and stigmatization.

Lana is clearly symbolically victimized by the student through a threatening letter. The letter is graphic and specific, not a comment uttered under the boy's breath as he exits the room on his way to the next class. Lana is threatened by his ongoing presence in the school after he returns from a weekend in juvenile jail (line 17). Additionally, Lana is victimized by her school district, who places the cause of the threat on her own teaching (the writing workshop, line 13); they blame the victim.

Lana experiences stigmatization after filing a grievance with the school district. She casts herself as someone held up to scrutiny and ostracized by her fellow teachers.

After offering her colleagues the opportunity to transform her grievance into a venue for larger concerns of school discipline, Lana is practically shunned, "because it is a class-action grievance;" if she fails then all teachers pay the price, they get her "shit on their shoes" (52). And Lana is stigmatized by the school administration (the "office"), as someone who "humiliates" a child by calling the police. This, in turn, causes the "the lousy teacher syndrome" (23). Lana's victimization and the stigmatization makes her the story's hero who encounters challenges and trials. It casts her as the innocent who either has the choice to fight the injustices or roll over when "my name was mud" (18). Lana decides to fight; "Screw you all," she says (70).

The Student

The student is the instigator of the drama. His threat to mutilate and kill Lana makes him an unpredictable and menacing creature. He is hostile by nature, "into head-butting," which Lana calls "physical assault" (26-27). The disturbingly graphic letter is a calculated message of hostility, not the momentary anger of a frustrated middle-schooler. The letter specifically describes mutilation of physical features which define women. He is a male violently threatening a female whom he calls a "bitch" (12). This is not lost on the Teacher Forum as the majority of the members are women, and four of the five present during this particular telling are women. The student is presented as a predatory threat, reiterating a recurring image in our society of violent males who direct their anger at women. (Would this student have threatened to cut off the penis of a male teacher?) His concrete description of mutilation encourages auditors to believe that he is capable of carrying out some physical violence, if not the mutilation itself.

The student is also trouble because he is involved in the illicit world of drugs. She connects his actions to drug use, where he is "extremely hostile" (33). His expensive clothing and tennis shoes are marks of the modern adolescent drug dealer (30). Not only is he hostile by nature, a misogynist, and a drug user, the student is also

a drug dealer. This implies he is involved in the underworld of the drug trade, a place that can only reinforce his violent and pathological nature. Additionally, Lana tells that he has a sealed police record (35), further implying that he might be even more of danger than the school is aware. The student is an enigma to be feared, so potentially dangerous that even the "police were absolutely horrified" (38) and took him away in handcuffs (16).

To demonize a student like this, for the sake of literary coherence and plot initiation, is risky business for a democratic educator. On the one hand, Lana needs to convince the audience that this kid is a genuine threat, that he is indeed someone to be feared. On the other hand, is such demonization of a middle school student fair? One of the pillars of democratic education, most powerfully codified in nearly all of Dewey's writing on school, curriculum, and learning, is that it is child- or learner-centered. In the creation of democratic classrooms, and the socialization of children into democratic communities, the educator endeavors to work from a child's own interest and reality.² This translates into a ethos of acceptance of the student; student bashing is out. Thus, Lana takes a harsh line on a student which runs counter to the child-centered ethos of democratic education. The demands of the narrative drama require that the student be genuinely dangerous, a real threat; he needs to be bad. To merely cast him as a troubled kid would require Lana to tell a story of how she came to terms as a pedagogue with a harsh, but otherwise educable child. An educational hero is one who overcomes the pedagogical obstacles in a difficult child. A dramatic hero, overcomes genuine and immediate danger like a mortally threatening student.

²The most cogent statement of Dewey's on this matter is found in *The child and the curriculum* (1902).

Administrators

Like the threatening student, the administrators of the school are similarly demonized. While we do not meet any individual administrators, they are represented as an aggregate. The administration, presumably made up of more than one person, has a singular voice and is called the "office" (5) and operates as a coordinated and omnipotent "they." For example, when characterizing the "office's" response to the students' threat, Lana reports,

-and *they* said it's just a typical teenage expression of anger and *they* wouldn't do anything...(emphasis added, 14-15).

What makes the "office" truly contemptible in this story is not only its unresponsiveness to Lana's concern for her physical safety, but its implied assertion that Lana's use of the "writing workshop" caused the threat. This response is a thinly veiled and cynical attack upon Lana as a teacher. The writing workshop to which Lana refers (13) is a methodology for teaching writing that is integrated with an English or language arts curriculum. Well known to the members of the Teacher Forum, the writing workshop is viewed as a progressive pedagogy in that it treats students as actual writers. As Lensmire (1994) describes it:

Writing workshop approaches emphasize providing opportunities for students to engage in and practice the craft of writing. A central theme within such approaches is student ownership: Students have wide powers to determine the topics, audiences, purposes, and forms of their texts....children are supposed to gradually become more and more able to realize their intentions in text (p. 3).

The writing workshop approach grew in response to the commonplace, conservative teacher-centered instruction, in which the teacher "initiates writing tasks, determines audience, purpose, and format for the writing, and acts as the sole audience, an evaluator...[where] the purpose of such school writing is often the display of academic mastery in evaluative contexts" (Lensmire, p. 3). This traditional form of

writing pedagogy functions "to silence students, deny student experiences and meanings, and alienate students from the teaching and learning they encounter in school" (ibid.). Lana uses the writer's workshop as a central component to her English instruction (interview, 4-29-93). When Lana reports the "office's" response to what "they" call her "complaint," "they" are implicitly accusing Lana of bringing this death threat upon herself since Lana indicates "they" said, "You let kids choose their own topics" (13). Not only does the office dismisses her safety concerns as acceptable teenage anger, it criticizes Lana's teaching as the actual cause for the death threat. It is criticizing Lana on two levels: her personal response to the letter and her professional, pedagogical conduct.

In characterizing the office in this way, Lana is not only appealing to the common experience of teachers in dealing with the authority structures of schools, but to the democratic values present in the ideology of the Teacher Forum. Administrative hierarchical authority is one of the most pervasive, undemocratic dimensions of schooling. In the Teacher Forum there is a built in skepticism, even hostility, to administrative hierarchies. In her story, it is not what any one or more individuals of the administration really say to Lana. Rather, the "office" is the disembodied, yet ever present, specter that symbolizes the top of the authority structure that is inherently undemocratic. The office is managerial and has power to be unresponsive to a teacher's concerns and to criticize Lana's pedagogical aspirations. They, too, are bad.

Fellow Teachers

Like the administrators at her school, Lana's fellow teachers are also a collective and form a singular voice; they are the "whole staff" (35). Together they are one, large character who is yet another nemesis to Lana. When Lana tries to turn the incident and the grievance into a school-wide issue of discipline, she is shunned by the staff. Like the office, it is not so much what any particular individuals say to Lana, it is how they

represent as an “attitude” (53, 74) which embodies the entire staff’s reaction to her struggle.

The sense of isolation and abandonment that Lana conveys in her story should not be underestimated. Teachers’ work has historically been one of isolation, where they are removed from their colleagues and engaged in classroom work with students (see Cuban, 1984; Goodlad, 1984). In general, teachers rarely come together in any consistent manner outside of their classrooms to discuss issues, such as discipline. Though they work in the same building, hold similar goals, values, and dispositions, teachers remain in an ironic, lonely, “egg crate culture” (Lortie, 1975). Though independent, they paradoxically rely on other teachers for camaraderie. As Lortie (1975) describes it, “Relying on others to prevent loneliness intensifies the role of teaching in one’s life; cultural isolation follows personal isolation” (p. 98). Lana connects to the common experience of teachers being isolated and lonely which is only intensified by additional rejection by colleagues.

Narrative Devices

In addition to the characters and characterizations in the *Death Threat*, Lana employs literary devices in the story to further the drama.

The Letter

The letter, or note, from the harassing student sets this drama in motion. Lana breaks through into story performance by dramatically re-reading the frightening letter, revealing a poetic brutality (9-12). This sets the tone for the story and frames the ensuing events as deadly serious. Lana indicates that the letter is not merely a message of “I hate you” or an adolescent’s exaggerated verbal venting “I’m gonna kill you.” Rather, her rhythmic mimicking of the letter calls attention to its barbarous contents and alerts the audience that this is a serious matter indeed:

this particular child was going to
 cut off my tits
 and shove one down my throat
 the other up my cunt
 and throw my body into the front yard of my house so that my husband and
 children could see what a bitch they lived with (9-12).

In one sense, Lana is re-reading the letter as if she were dispassionately reading a grocery list. She is presenting it plain and factual, letting the note speak for itself. In another sense, it is not a re-reading of the note at all, but Lana's report of what the student said he would do to her. That is, she did not say "the letter said these words." Moreover, she refers to herself in the first person rather than the third person (using *my* vs. *her*). This juxtaposition of an objective mimicking of the letter (just the facts) and Lana's use of the first person (e.g., *my* body) calls attention to the letter's threatening contents and makes the point that this threat is directed toward her. It brings a morbid intimacy to the letter.

The student is not the only one who wields the letter as a tool of hostility. The office uses the letter against Lana. The office cynically calls the letter an instance of student writing and sarcastically asks Lana if it is acceptable. As noted, this is an attack on her work as a teacher, not merely her frightful response to the letter. The letter, therefore, carries a double signification: not only is it used by the student to threaten Lana's physical well-being, the administration uses the letter to attack her teaching and her pedagogical autonomy. The letter becomes pivotal; it calls Lana to action not once (seeking her administration's help and then the police's), but a second time (the grievance process). The letter helps shift the story from the more individual issue of a teacher's fear to the larger issue of pedagogical autonomy and control. The office's use of the letter not only reveals basic administrative insensitivity but an underlying hostility toward teachers who attempt to be different and employ more "progressive" methodologies, like the writing workshop. The letter works to transform the story into a larger tale of teacher struggle for self-determination.

The Grievance Process

Lana refers to "the grievance" process (44). This is well known to public school teachers as a procedure for filing complaints within a school district. It is less a legal ordeal than one that involves labor-management like disputes over the conditions and problems of teachers' work. The teachers' union is typically involved in a form of mediation in order to resolve a particular problem a teacher has with a district or a school's administration. In this case, Lana frames it as a problem of discipline, or a lack of a disciplinary code, and the school's failure to act on behalf of her physical safety.

Members of the Teacher Forum, like many public school teachers, see the grievance process as a drawn out adjudicative procedure set up within the confines of the given educational system. The perception of the process is that it tends to favor the system over the aggrieved party. Even when a teacher is successful in bringing forth a grievance, the time and public nature of the forum tends to focus attention on the aggrieved teacher, who is often cast by colleagues, parents, and especially school administration as a trouble maker. In this way the grievance process follows the classic struggle of labor against management and the continual perception of teachers as overpaid, underworked (summers off), baby-sitters who should be at least skilled in the art of student discipline. When Lana alludes to "the grievance process" this draws upon a shared understanding among the teacher-members of the Teacher Forum as a sluggish, unpleasant aggression upon teachers. In the story, Lana felt the grievance was important, but the fact that none of her fellow teachers, who are also union members, joined her made the alienation of the procedure all the more bitter. Even though a disciplinary code was established at her school, Lana points out that "Everybody else is still bitching about the lack of discipline" (69). It is as if her efforts and the outcome of the grievance procedure did not matter, making it "a horrible year in my life" (56).

The Evaluation

The grievance procedure gives rise to the evaluation of Lana's work. She indicates that she asked for the evaluation and gives no detail as to what it entails. Though teachers are evaluated in many ways on regular and irregular bases, Lana is sure to point out that in her twelve or thirteen year career she had never been evaluated in her school district. This is, therefore, a special evaluation. The idea of evaluation is anxiety-provoking for teachers. Lana implies that the school administration can arbitrarily exercise evaluation to get a teacher to conform or get dismissed. For the members of the Teacher Forum "evaluation" is loaded, the capricious tool of an already hostile and structurally powerful administrative structure. It is one of the most powerful instruments of discipline a school has for controlling and, in Lana's story, intimidating their teachers.

To trump the administration, Lana asks for the evaluation herself (61). She indicates that there was already a hidden form of evaluation underway ("evaluative comments," 63). Lana outmaneuvers her would be nemeses as she employs their tool of control and intimidation. She keeps her own records of her work at that time (55). Teachers are often very aware of the records that building administrators (i.e., principals) keep of teachers and school activities. The image of the notetaking principal recurs in another story in the next Teacher Forum meeting (Zoe's *No End of Year Trip*, see Chapter 5). This is a constant reminder that the principal has a "file" that can be used as evidence.³ When I asked Teacher Forum members if principal notetaking was in any way a form of intimidation or potential intimidation, *all* responded affirmatively and *all* had seen or heard of a principal's "file."

³During my first year teaching fourth grade, my principal would send notes around that had carbon copies. He continually kept notes of teachers' activities. His records became a basis for the dismissal of a teacher, whose true offense was his homosexuality. This allusion to the evaluative file was a piercing reminder for me.

Reported Speech and Dialogue

Lana uses reported speech and reported dialogue extensively in her narrative. These are tropes that help lend verisimilitude to the story and a literary coherence to the action. Lana frames the character's words as speech that actually occurred through use of the *verb of saying* (Bauman, 1986). That is, in order to indicate to her audience that the office and her colleagues are speaking, she enters quotative frame with "said." For example, she has the office talk:

And the office *said* "Well Lana I don't know what you're complaining about. You run a writing workshop you let kids choose their own topics so how can you say this isn't the appropriate topic?" (13)

And Lana speaks back to them as "you":

I *said* "I have the RIGHT to walk into this building and feel safe and it is your responsibility to insure my sa" = "Oh we don't have any nobody is breaking the law here."
I *said* "This kid is into HEAD BUT TING.
To me that's physical assault.
You can call it teenage fun
but kids are hurt when he's butting heads with them." (25-29)

Similarly, Lana's fellow teacher speak as one. By the time her colleagues dialogue with Lana, the verb of saying is omitted, they just talk back (as "we"):

-but nobody would associate with me. =And I said "Look I'm going through with this.
And you're welcome to ride along because you're all complaining about discipline. =Why don't you (join) me?"
Because it's a class action grievance so something can = "Oh no *we* don't touch you because if you lose *we* don't want your shit on our shoes" kind of attitude. (50-53)

This use of reported speech and reported dialogue helps Lana establish three things. First, it helps maintain the implied truthfulness of the story, its verisimilitude,

especially for the story's initiates (in this case Robin and myself). Reported speech **helps her** maintain her narrative authority (see Chapter 5). Second, reported speech **helps economize** what might otherwise be an even more lengthy and convoluted narrative. **Instead of** replaying what every administrator said over the period of a year's time, she **has them** speak together in representative speech acts. It would be hard to say if any of **her administrators** spoke the words as Lana reports. And it is hard to say if the teachers **at her school** actually said, "Oh no. We don't touch you...." (40). By having the office **speak as a group** and her colleagues as group, she can expeditiously characterize the response of people at her school. Thirdly, by use of reported speech, Lana codifies the image that her colleagues and the administration are singular characters, feeling and acting as collectives. In this way the collectives are individual characters, who are large by number and formidable antagonists in her story.

The Joke

To bring poetic closure to the *Death Threat*, Lana tells a short story in the form of a joke (97-99). The *Death Threat* structurally comes to an end with her declaration of victory ("So I finally won it", 54). This victory is symbolized by her own use of the evaluation procedure and the disgrace of the principal and assistant principal who "came out looking like hell" (64). Lana's victory is further symbolized by the development of a "consistent discipline policy" (52) that she claims is hers since she "is the only teacher that has the policy applied" (68).

Following this drawn out ending are several statements that are evaluative utterances which return to the points of the story and Lana's point of view (Labov, 1972). These include Lana's emotional anguish in her alienation and abandonment by her colleagues, whom she chides again (70-74; 90-91). This seems a diffuse and somewhat ambiguous ending to her narrative, which clearly has a dramatic beginning and middle.

No one picks up the conversation after Lana calls herself the "rabble rouser" (80).

There are several pauses, and two very long ones (81, 96). Lana and the audience seem uncertain that she is done. Lana needs to close the story and to signal that she is done. To do this she tells a joke. It is almost as if she caught herself floundering at the end of her story and needed something to end it after "So anyway" (96). She recalls how she heard a student say, "You better be good in here, she calls the cops if you aren't" (99). This punch line not only ends the *Death Threat*, returning talk to conversation, but also reiterates Lana's heroic status in the tale. She comes out on top; not only does she have a discipline policy, she regains authority over, and the respect of, her students.

Death Threat as Social Drama

What makes the *Death Threat* such an important tale? Is it simply a longer more dramatic tale, with multiple episodes and a shocking introduction? Does its age have anything to do with its importance? The *Death Threat* is three years old at the time of its telling and undoubtedly the events, if not the story itself, have been recounted on more than one occasion. It is not the first time that the veteran members, Hannah and Zoe, have heard about the death threat. As I became more curious about the *Death Threat* I began to ask members and my (member-)informants more directly about what Lana's story holds for the Teacher Forum.

As I found out, the *Death Threat* occupies a precarious symbolic position in the Teacher Forum. It clearly is a critical tale. And it clearly involves Lana dramatically and emotionally, and, therefore, conforms to the primary framework of the Teacher Forum. The *Death Threat* can also be viewed in terms of what Victor Turner calls a "social drama" (1957). It is a story not simply about a personal struggle, but a story that intimately involves the institutional and social structures that govern Lana's work as a teacher. And, it involves dimensions of schooling that all teachers can recognize: a hostile administration, cold-shouldered colleagues, administrative adjudicative processes, and a potentially harmful student. These dimensions involve the moral and political economy of

the school and therefore makes the *Death Threat* a tale about life and conflict within a social structure with which teachers are familiar. It is more than a personal drama, it is a social drama.

Turner (1981) calls social drama a universal cultural process, “and a fact of everyone’s experience in every human society” (p. 149). Social dramas occur with groups of persons who share values and interests and who have a real or alleged common history” (ibid.). Social dramas arise in conflict situations and have four processual phases: 1) breach, 2) crisis, 3) redress and 4) *either* reintegration *or* recognition of schism. These are clearly discernible in Lana’s *Death Threat* story.

A breach is a violation of some regular, norm-governed social relations. In Lana’s view, a vivid and graphic death threat from a student is such a breach; it is beyond the acceptable limit for expression of student anger. It is, for her, a serious breach of teacher-student relations. But the breach does not end with the student’s death threat. This is more of a precipitating event initiating the larger and more significant breach between Lana and the school’s administration. Lana frames the administrative *inaction* as a breach, arising from their failure to act upon a legitimate threat. As such, it is “the deliberate non-fulfillment of some crucial norm regulating the intercourse of the parties” (Turner, 1974, p. 38). In this case, the office failed to fulfill its obligation to act upon her concern and see to her physical safety by doing something about the threatening student. Moreover, the office attacks her pedagogical work. Lana sees herself acting on behalf of all teachers, not alone, though this alliance is tenuous and crumbles during the redressive phase when she offers to work for all teachers in her building (“I was willing to do something for every one of you,” 57).

In the crisis phase, “[T]here is tendency for the breach to widen until it coincides with some dominate cleavage in the widest set of social relations” (Turner, 1981, p. 150). Lana calls the police who arrest the student. The result is Lana’s name becomes “mud” (18). The antagonisms become overt, the administration brings upon

Lana "the lousy teacher syndrome" (23), and she and the administration "went round and round and round and round" (40). Now the problem is in the crisis phrase where "it takes up a menacing stance...and dares the representatives to grapple with it. It cannot be ignored or wished away" (Turner, 1974, p. 39).

In the redressive action phase, according to Turner (1974), efforts are instituted to confine the expansion of crisis. These mechanisms "are swiftly brought into operation by leading or structurally representative members of the disturbed social system" (p. 39). In the *Death Threat*, the redressive mechanism is the grievance process that Lana herself initiated. This is a formal adjudicative process, short of legal action, for teachers (as union members) and the school district. In the story, it is not difficult to imagine why a school district would prefer to have a grievance procedure than to have further official police or legal action.

The final phase of a social drama, according to Turner (1974), is "either *reintegration* of the disturbed group or of the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between the contesting parties" (p. 41). In the *Death Threat*, Lana conquers and successfully re-integrates in her school. It is not necessarily a happy or emotionally satisfying return, but a return where she has won her grievance. She indicates that she was able to get a discipline policy established in her building. Her joke at the end indicates that she feels she has reestablished her authority and her students respect her. She says she feels strong enough to say "Screw you all" to her colleagues (70). As is possible in the outcome of breaches and crises in the social drama, the social relations are rearranged, "most importantly the nature and intensity of the relations between the parts, and the structure of the total field, will have changed....[where h]igh status can become low status and vice versa" (p. 42). In the *Death Threat*, Lana achieves a higher status in her reintegration. Lana told me later (interview, 4-29-93) that soon after the grievance she was appointed head of her English department.

Ambivalence and a Prospective Paradigmatic Narrative

There is a major difference in the way Turner conceives of the social drama and the way I am borrowing it here to talk about the *Death Threat*. The *Death Threat* is not a story about the Teacher Forum itself, its social relations, its members' status, and its moral economy. In fact, the Teacher Forum does not even emerge in the story. The *Death Threat* is a social drama in a social field that is familiar to teachers generally, and to members of the Teacher Forum specifically. The political and moral economy of the institution of school in the tale rings true. The *Death Threat* occupies a liminal space between the moral order of schools and that of the Teacher Forum, and between the purely personal narrative and a shared communal tale.

It became clear to me that the *Death Threat* is more than just another story to the Teacher Forum. As I began to ask members what they felt about the story I was not so surprised to find a continuity in their sentiments toward *the story* as I heard it that day. All agree that what happened to Lana was terrible and that what she went through was unnecessary. Members maintain that no one should have to feel a sense of physical threat and that a school's administration should be responsive to the concerns of a threatened teacher. Moreover, members see the story as stating something important about being a critical democrat. That is, the story signifies an important issue as it relates to democratic education and critical democracy. The story is framed—as it is told and as it is heard—in the Teacher Forum as one of dealing with undemocratic hierarchies in schools. It is about an unresponsive school system that is indifferent to a teacher's life in her classroom, a teacher who finds she cannot do her job with a menacing threat in her classroom. More importantly, members see it as an issue of confronting the powers that be in a school system.

It is in this sense that I began to see the *Death Threat* as holding potentially paradigmatic dimensions. When I further queried my informants and other members of the group, they indeed said that during the time of the events of the *Death Threat* the

Teacher Forum acted as a support group for Lana. Following the charter of the group to be personal as well as critical, Lana used the group to talk about and seek empathy for her experiences in the ongoing events. The group was a place to frame, and to help Lana frame, Lana's dramatic encounters in a critical way such that she did not see her troubles as merely psychological or individual, but a function of her position in a particular educational system. When I asked Lana about her membership in the group at the time the events were unfolding, she told me that the group was the only thing that kept her sane (interview, 4-29-93).

For the members of the Teacher Forum, the *Death Threat* is a prospective paradigmatic narrative of the enactment of critical democratic values as one faces challenges or threats in one's occupational space. Lana retains storytelling rights for the *Death Threat* in the Teacher Forum meetings, and members are clear that it is "Lana's story." Members do, though, refer to the story and tell an abbreviated version of it, containing all the main elements and Lana's victorious resolution. They often refer to it as "Lana's story," the "bullshit" she went through, or "her ordeal." Indexing the story like this has the flavor of what Susan Kalçik (1976) calls a "kernel narrative." Kernel narratives are utterances which contain the "kernel" of a story that is already known and shared among a group of individuals. It is in this sense that the *Death Threat* is en route to becoming a more shared or communal narrative (Schely-Newman, 1994), that is, more symbolic or metaphorical of the values of the Teacher Forum. As paradigmatic, it provides a tacit guide for understanding events in schools in a critical vein and a potential guide for action if one finds oneself in a similar position to Lana's. It says "I can win," but it also says "I may also pay a psychic price in the process." This, in turn, carries the implicit message among the Teacher Forum members that if one pursues redressive action in the face of a crisis, it is good to have a supportive, personal, or intimate group for support. The *Death Threat* carries symbolic meaning not merely as a

story with mythic qualities as social drama, but also the implied understanding that teacher groups are worthwhile especially when one is critical and in crisis.

The story of the story of the *Death Threat* does not end with its shared metaphorical meaning as a emergent paradigmatic narrative. When I further queried members of the Teacher Forum, especially those who were present at the Teacher Forum meetings the three years prior when the narrated events occurred, I found there to be far from uniform sentiment about *the events* and about *the narrator*. Peering below the artifice of solidarity in the metaphorical meaning of the *Death Threat*, I found wide variation in attitude toward the “actual” events and Lana as an actual person in the events as they happened. On one end of a sentiment continuum, there are several members who think that the wrath Lana incurred from her school administration was self-induced, that she brought it upon herself through overreaction to a hollow threat from a troubled student. They find it hard to believe that such a hardened menace could have made his way into a public middle school, especially in an overwhelmingly middle class district which makes provisions (has educational and social programs) for students who are threatening. They feel that if he had been a real, violent threat he would have been exposed and have been either in jail or in a special state facility. At the other end of this continuum there are members who find Lana completely justified in her complaint—her institution of a breach—in that no one, or no woman specifically, should have to endure such a threat.

In addition to the variation in attitude toward Lana’s reaction to the threat, some Teacher Forum members feel that the school may have responded within the bounds of reason. After I heard the story I recorded in my fieldnotes that my own initial reaction was probably similar to that of the “office”. After getting over the initial jolt of the graphic brutality of the letter, I asked “What is the big deal? Another kid talking tough. These are kids who need our help the most” (fieldnotes, 2-20-93). As a former social worker who worked with “delinquent” boys, I was impressed that the student actually

took time to write a letter to make a threat; I felt that he didn't have the nerve to be hostile to Lana's face. I found myself not listening to the gravity the story held for Lana and remembered what I heard the progressive educator, Vivian Paley, once say: troubled children like the hostile student in Lana's story define our responsibilities, not our contempt (fieldnotes, *ibid.*). It was not until I thought I understood that the larger point of the story is how schools systematically alienate and dehumanize teachers who have concerns (like physical safety), apropos the values inherent in the Teacher Forum, that I revised my own sentiments toward the story.

Similarly, some of the Teacher Forum members feel that administrators, in their basic insensitivity and disconnection to teachers and classrooms, would naturally react in a manner of the "office." They indicate that since its task is to keep children in school (by law), not necessarily to "empower" teachers, the school would logically react in this way. They feel that Lana would have had a stronger case had she made the student a focus for help, not for elimination. These members feel that the humiliating grievance and evaluation might have been entirely avoided. Conversely, other Teacher Forum members are convinced that Lana was completely justified in asking that the threat be removed and that the school administration work on her behalf. They feel that such a violent threat overrides any educative or legal concern the school might have for the student: such aggressively graphic threats against women made this student an unacceptable client. Moreover, some of these members think the district administration was out to crush Lana and they persuaded the Teacher Forum to send a letter to the school district in support of Lana. The group went on to contact a attorney for legal consultation.

Complicating this range of sentiments toward the events are the opinions group members have about Lana herself. Several are indifferent to her. Some like her. And a number out and out dislike her. Those who dislike her, or came to dislike her, feel she was self-centered in having the events become a crisis for her. They became resentful that group meetings were used continually for Lana to talk about her struggles and self-

esteem. For these members, the group was pulled too far in the direction of the personal, away from the group's purpose of sustaining critical conversation. At least one member left the group because of this. Others, on the contrary, feel that supporting Lana, emotionally, is one of the precise reasons for the group's existence. They feel that if they could not support Lana in this effort, what good is a group in the first place? They are drawing on the primary frame of the personal, which requires they use the time to support a fellow member. Some even feel that they *were required* to like her, to be her friend. It is this sense of duty that won out, despite the personal feelings of individual members. They used the time to talk about the ongoing events and to support Lana; for them, acting as a support group was not only perfectly acceptable, it was required (interviews, Fatimah, 3-23-93; 5-5-93).

This variation in attitude or sentiment to the narrated events, and to Lana (the person not the social drama narrator), leads to a collective ambivalence toward the *Death Threat* story. This happens at the same time the story emerges as a paradigmatic narrative where members embrace its symbolic qualities. To the members of the Teacher Forum, and to newer members who were not present during its events, like Robin and myself, the *Death Threat* embodies a democratic educational struggle: that teaching involves dealing in authoritative structures that are alienating. It is about framing the problem critically, about the power of administrative structures over teachers, who are forced to deal with what they feel is wrong. The narrative wins out, despite the lingering sentiments toward the events and the narrator.

This tension between the accepted symbolic meaning of the story and its ambivalent emergence due to knowledge and sentiments about the events and the narrator shows a susceptibility to tropes (Workman, 1994). The experience of alienation among teachers who even marginally try to alter their practices, to be more progressive, more authentic to what they see as right pedagogy in the face of uncooperative and unsupportive administrations and colleagues is not uncommon. Some of the most

compelling published narratives of teaching and learning are by those who fought against a rigid structure.⁴ Teachers may pay a price for trying to be different. In this case Lana paid the price to be a more progressive English teacher who took on a critical democratic view of the enterprise of education. Stories like the *Death Threat* are a form of mimesis where Lana can replay and relive her trauma and listeners can vicariously experience it (Abrahams, 1968). In her story, Lana can symbolically deal with the events in a heroic manner and triumph. Members of the Teacher Forum can join in her triumph, whether it ever really was a triumph or if it ever really meant anything to the school and the district. In the Teacher Forum, it means much. The *Death Threat* is about the real threat that some educators feel from an educational system that sees their work as subversive. In this way, the weak overcome the powerful time and time again. The *Death Threat* serves well the Teacher Forum as it reminds the members what they are about, despite their differences and personal feelings toward each other. It helps keep them together while naming and exercising magic over the hostile educational world, and helps them feel “we belong.” Stories like this help teachers live.

⁴See for example Kohl (1991) and Herndon (1968).

CONCLUDING REMARKS:
ON THE ARTFUL AND ARTIFICIAL NATURE OF STORYTELLING

One does not make poetry with ideas but with words.
Mallarmé

I introduced this dissertation with the rather esoteric claim that we can never experience another person's experience. We do not have access to the events that someone narrates for us. If for some reason we do have access to these events, through having participated in them, or access to detailed records, we can never have the *experience* of the events that another person has had. All we have is what people tell us their experiences are like. These are inevitably distortions—presentations that are not themselves the experiences. These presentations are texts. As texts, they necessarily follow the cultural conventions we share for presenting our experiences. We agree that these conventions, or forms, are acceptable; we permit and employ them readily in our social lives. This dissertation has been about an instance of the use of one of those acceptable forms, the conversational personal experience narrative. By way of conclusion, I would like to revisit this rather grand assertion about experience in relation to the enactment of the three stories I analyzed. I make a final plea for educators and educational researchers to not limit their understandings of story to referential content alone, but to the poetic, rhetorical, symbolic, and contextualized practices of narrative.

Story as Verbal Art

The model of narrative I have employed in this study is that of performance, narrative as *verbal art* (Bauman, 1977). In the three stories I have analyzed, I have

tried to show their artistic or poetic dimensions. Following Abrahams (1972), I see verbal art of the personal narrative as an alternative model

...to those which see art as conveying knowledge (and therefore in need of interpretation by an initiate) or as expressing only beauty, or mirroring reality, or as an excrescence of an individual's beautiful mind or soul (p. 81).

To view personal experience narrative as verbal art is consequently to argue against viewing, or assuming, narrative (specifically teacher narrative) as a window to the soul or mind. Such a view builds from a positivist paradigm where narrative is a "reflection" of the mind or cognition. Similarly, in this view, narrative is sometimes conceived as a process (i.e., sense making), which is a variation on the narrative as cognition theme. In either case, the narrative text is taken to be cognition or an unproblematic signification of an individual's thought processes. This view, incidentally, is also taken from the realm of art, a Romantic view of narrative as the "excrescence of an individual's beautiful mind or soul." It valorizes the individual's artistic struggle, and indeed pain, to present and represent herself authentically from the depths of her soul. And since the soul is a beautiful creation, the struggle and pain is heroic. The Romantic view of teacher narrative is not inherently wrong; when a teacher tells a story, she is exposing her soul and making herself open to examination and criticism. There are a lot worse ways to think of the people who live with children in the classroom.

Related to the view of narrative as window to the mind and soul is the view that narrative is a mirror to reality. This view is also taken from art. The mirror to reality view sees an artistic rendering of an item to be fundamentally truer or more real. That is, taken through the artist's eye or ear, interpreted, and then put on canvass, in musical score, or into dance, the artist has gotten to the heart of the matter. She struggles to get to the essence of an object's reality, and reveals a deeper, cryptic Truth. In this view, a teacher's story, or a story of a teacher's experience, can get to the

essence or truth of such phenomena as relationships with children, personal curriculum development, learning to teach, and so on.

In yet another similar vein is a view that art is knowledge, or a codification thereof. Knowledge is artistically encoded information about some item or some event. Apropos narrative, this view would assert that since narrative is a truer representation of that which it recounts, it is in fact a container of knowledge. In terms of teacher narrative, this notion has been particularly appealing to educational researchers who have become disillusioned with research methodologies that have failed to deliver the educational knowledge promised by research on teaching (e.g., Carter, 1993). Stories of teaching experience, whether by teachers or by others writing about them, builds upon the view of narrative as window to mind in that it reveals the knowledge and experience of teachers, in ways that have eluded researchers in the past. The multi-dimensional, and indeed artistic, dimensions of narrative make stories rich texts that are receptacles for untapped and unused teacher knowledge.

Notwithstanding the obvious problems of interpretation and translation of stories to codified text, the aforementioned views of narrative as art are problematic in that they take for granted, for example, that people tell the truth, that there is little or inconsequential distortion that takes place in storytelling, that the text is just a mirror of the mind, that certain narrative forms and cultural conventions are of little import, that context, other than the larger cultural surround, is ultimately irrelevant to the stories themselves since valid Knowledge and Truth are transcendent. These views, to varying degrees, rely on the reliability of the text, what Renato Rosaldo (1980) calls a form of "text positivism."

This is not to say that the aforementioned views are invalid. Rather, I see it necessary to bracket them and put them aside when we consider teacher narratives as performances. A performance perspective asks that we reconsider such views in light of cultural expressive forms and context. It begs consideration of storytelling as a

performative act that is culturally bound and locally realized. Enactment of teachers' stories (or teachers' enactment of story) is an artistic act, where the narrative is the creation of artifice.

At the heart of a performance view is the notion that performances are acts of persuasion. That is, they are rhetoric. Personal experience narrative in this view is not simply borne out of the rhetorical intent of the author. Rather, it runs deeper in the culturally and social matrix in which the expressive form is employed. This requires a notion of context and an identifiable and knowable form of expression that can be used appropriately.

What the performance perspective points to, and what I have tried to show in my story analyses, is that story is both artful and artificial. The telling of personal experience stories is the enactment of a widely known and shared cultural form of expression. It is nearly universal and we cannot seem to get through the day without telling some story to someone about something that seems relevant at the time of its telling. I have tried to show that even in everyday conversational stories, there are poetic elements in them, like reported speech and characterization of *dramatis personae*. Though not the highly refined stories of the more ritualized or stylized sort (e.g., the urban legend), they contain the same poetic elements that make them artful, a sort of art of everyday life. The Teacher Forum is not everyday life, but a place to employ the everyday form of the personal experience narrative. Context provides purpose for stories and storytelling.

By focusing on the poetic dimensions, and the poetic function (art for art's sake) we can see that stories are indeed very human constructions. They must conform to not only the demands of the context in which they are told, but to the expressive form. This form is by its very nature a cultural convention, a genre that must be followed lest we get a bad story. As form-play within a culturally defined scene, we see that personal narrative is poetic and necessarily a distortion of experience. A narrator must make

drama from experience for story to work. And this drama is not the experience itself, nor is it the original events themselves. As constructions, stories are not really reality, they are artificial.

The Mimetic Fallacy

This view of the artful and the artificial leads to what I think is the underlying argument in this study: to undermine the “mimetic fallacy.”¹ This is a play on Wimsatt and Beardsley’s (in)famous essays in literary criticism called “The Intentional Fallacy” and “The Affective Fallacy” (both 1954). Briefly put, the intentional fallacy asserts that it is wrong for the reader and the critic to engage in speculation about what an author originally intended in his or her work. We have no access to the author’s intention or experiences (though this is always possible through supplementary texts about the author’s life, time, and culture). All we have is a text and it is to that we should divert our critical attention. Otherwise, such wild speculation about what an author *really meant* is a waste of time and takes us away from the text as a work of art. The flip side of this literary deceit is the affective fallacy. It eschews criticism that is focused on the reaction of the reader as the marker by which to gauge the effectiveness or goodness of a text (a precursive criticism of reader-response theory). What I call mimetic fallacy harbors a similar argument: since we do not have access to the original events in a story, nor to the narrator’s experience of the events, all we have is a text to read or hear. The idea that a text merely mimics events, experience, and cognition is, in a performance perspective, a false one. For the personal experience narrative, we should not be off checking to see if a story is true. We never really know this. However, we do have access to text and context. And we can query these with persistence.

¹The *mimetic fallacy* was suggested to me by Eliot Singer (personal communication). For any dereliction in my use of the notion I alone am responsible.

This is what I have tried to do in this study. In the stories analyzed, I have tried to look at how these stories get put together, what makes them narrative. That is, What makes them seem true? How do they have dramatic structure? How is the narrator also a character in her own story? In *No End of Year Trip*, Zoe poetically creates voices; Clare reports and transforms a joke in *A Terrible Discussion*; Lana's *Death Threat* engages a drama of almost paradigmatic proportions. These narrator's have to make their utterances work as narrative in the group: all need to perform drama the primary framework. These stories are presentations, they are artifice, entextualization (Briggs, 1994) of experience for others to secure a purchase. As artifice, they are artful and artificial.

Does this make story and storytelling any less meaningful when we recognize their artificiality? On the contrary, they point to the meaning saturated textual worlds created by the narrative artifice. With teachers' personal narratives, the world of tales provides a window on the world of teaching. They give the readers or auditors, teachers and non-teachers alike, an entry into teaching worlds and a view of the deeper vicissitudes of teachers' lives. In this way, the world of teacher stories connects to the traditions of teacher narrative. The more refined narratives of Vivian Paley, Herbert Kohl, George Dennison, and Sylvia Ashton-Warner are textual worlds of teaching and teacher experience. They are as much artifice as the conversational, personal narratives I have studied here. This does not point up their superficiality, but that in their common artful creation of artifice there are continuities in narrative worlds.

Cultural Embodiment

Moreover, in the performed personal experience narratives of the Teacher Forum, forces us to find the meaningfulness of artifice embedded in context. This interaction of text and context creates "real" worlds in the sense that good literature is artfully real. Meaning is not found in the content of stories alone, but in the way they are

put together in relation to the context. As an ethnographic study as well as a textual one, I have tried to look at the local meanings of the story and the personal narrative form and asked *Why does story make sense here?* To view narrative expressions as verbal artistic performances is to consider their aesthetic purpose of moving an audience. This is a matter of inducing the sympathy of one's audience, one's group. As Abrahams (1972) reminds:

This is done by resorting to shared orders and experiences and to techniques by which the insight and continuity of these experiences and orders are withheld by limitations on sight and by giving the appearance of discontinuity. The idea of art is to move the performer and his audience, the group, from a point of repose one in which larger and greater continuities may be demonstrated, recognized, recaptured. (p. 81)

In the stories that I have analyzed, I theorize that personal experience narration is such an effort at moving its members. Personal experience narrative is device, or *strategy* in Burke's words, by which experience is revealed to other members of the Teacher Forum. These experiences seek to persuade, not only through the content they present, but to the general "order" of a group, its primary framework: to be personal and critical. Moreover, the personal experience narrative form itself holds metaphorical qualities. In the Teacher Forum, the personal experience narrative is a high form of the personal. It is a vehicle for the critical and a device for getting personal. In viewing personal experience narrative as art, then, I am compelled to put such an expressive utterance at the center of this group as it "both embodies the primary motives of the group and it epitomizes them through stylization and performance" (Abrahams, *ibid.*, p. 78). Personal experience narrative is not *the* center, but it is *at* the center, along with conversation in which it is embedded.

If it is at the center, what end does the personal experience narrative serve? Obviously, it helps maintain the group and keep it adaptive. As a rhetorical expression—the epitome and the embodiment of the group—it seeks to persuade members that critical tales that are personal are worth telling. And, they are worth telling in a group of like-

minded others who, by their very membership, are oppositional to mainstream educational practices. Members converse and tell stories. The personal narratives are then persuasions to convince each other that what they are about is worthwhile and that it is worth their while to stay together. The educational world is hostile and there is an inherent need to convince each other that one should seek out others like themselves and to stay together.

Arguing From and For a Performance Perspective

In this study I am arguing *from* the perspective of verbal art as performance. It is also, by definition, an argument *for* this perspective. Following this argument for, I feel that there are at least two domains of relevance to *educational* studies of teacher narrative.

Oral Literature. First, this study begs that we look at how teachers' stories are put together as oral literature. As the Russian formalist literary critics might ask (Erlich, 1955): What makes these stories literature? Or, What is the source of their *literary-ness*? This urges an examination of story as a coherent and discrete object of art and its constituent parts. For example, my look at reported speech in Zoe's *No End of Year Trip*, or the inevitable characterization of *dramatis personae* in all the stories. Moreover, I have a hunch that there are features of teacher's stories that make them *teacher narrative*. In other words, there are themes, common experiences, arising out of teachers' positioned status in schools, that might naturally give rise to the use and distribution of certain tropes in teacher narratives (e.g., malevolent or dimwitted administrators). In short, I think there may be a genre of teacher personal experience narrative. This can only be determined when we start to examine more broadly the tropic dimensions of these stories in numerous narrative settings, in the more formal published narratives, in those that are lurking in the data of educational researchers, and in the infinite number of stories yet to be narrated and collected.

Contextuality. Second, this study urges examination of how stories are contextual.

As Malinowski (1926/1948) warned almost seventy years ago, “The stories live in native life and not on paper, and when the scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality” (p. 104). Though he was speaking of the Melanesians, the same warning can apply to personal experience narratives out of most native contexts. At one level, it seems self-evident that personal narrative, like any cultural expression, is rooted in some context. But context needs to be conceptualized, not just asserted. I have attempted to conceive of context as primary frames and how these, as context, are resources for and constraints upon oral utterances generally and storytelling specifically in the Teacher Forum,. The context of the Teacher Forum is not only primary frames. I return to the maxim of Katherine Young (1987) in making the distinction between the context and surround. Context is that which is not necessarily environmentally contiguous, in the surround, it is that which is relevant to the object under examination. The list of relevant features of story and storytelling events is presumably large and a researcher needs to have a tool for winnowing out and bringing forward the relevant contexts of story and storytelling. I do not argue for primary frames as *the* way to think of context. Rather, I argue for a contextualized view that has a *concept of* context. If personal narratives “live in native life,” then we must ask what this “life” is.

If stories are artificial and artful, then they must be treated as such. That is, they should not be considered truth since they are not Truth in and of themselves. They are not Reality, only a presented artifice of reality. This claim I make does not mean to denigrate narrative. If anything, I hope my study venerates narrative because of its artifice, because it is humanly artful. Mind, soul, knowledge, wisdom, and truth are indeed parts of storytelling. A narrator must obviously have a mind and some knowledge to tell stories. And that narrator and her/his audience must also believe that there is truth in story, especially for the personal experience narrative, and that it says

something wise or else it wouldn't get told in the first place. As artifice, we are thus concerned with how our lives are textual. That we tell stories in organized spaces is a way to give our fragmented lives meaning. Teachers are no different.

EPILOGUE:
THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF A TEACHER GROUP

Don't mourn—Organize!
Joe Hill*

The Teacher Forum has died a quiet death. Though officially the regional office of the CED still exists, the latest manifestation and membership of the Teacher Forum no longer does. I find it sad that I need to report this as I think a great resource for identity affiliation and formation has been lost. I believe Teacher Forum's dissolution can be explained by the fundamental inability, or, better, the will of its members to work through and sufficiently reconcile the inherent contradictions of its primary framework. Let me briefly explain the last moments of the Teacher Forum and why I think its downward spiral was, if not expected, sensible and how I may have inadvertently played a role in the group's downfall.

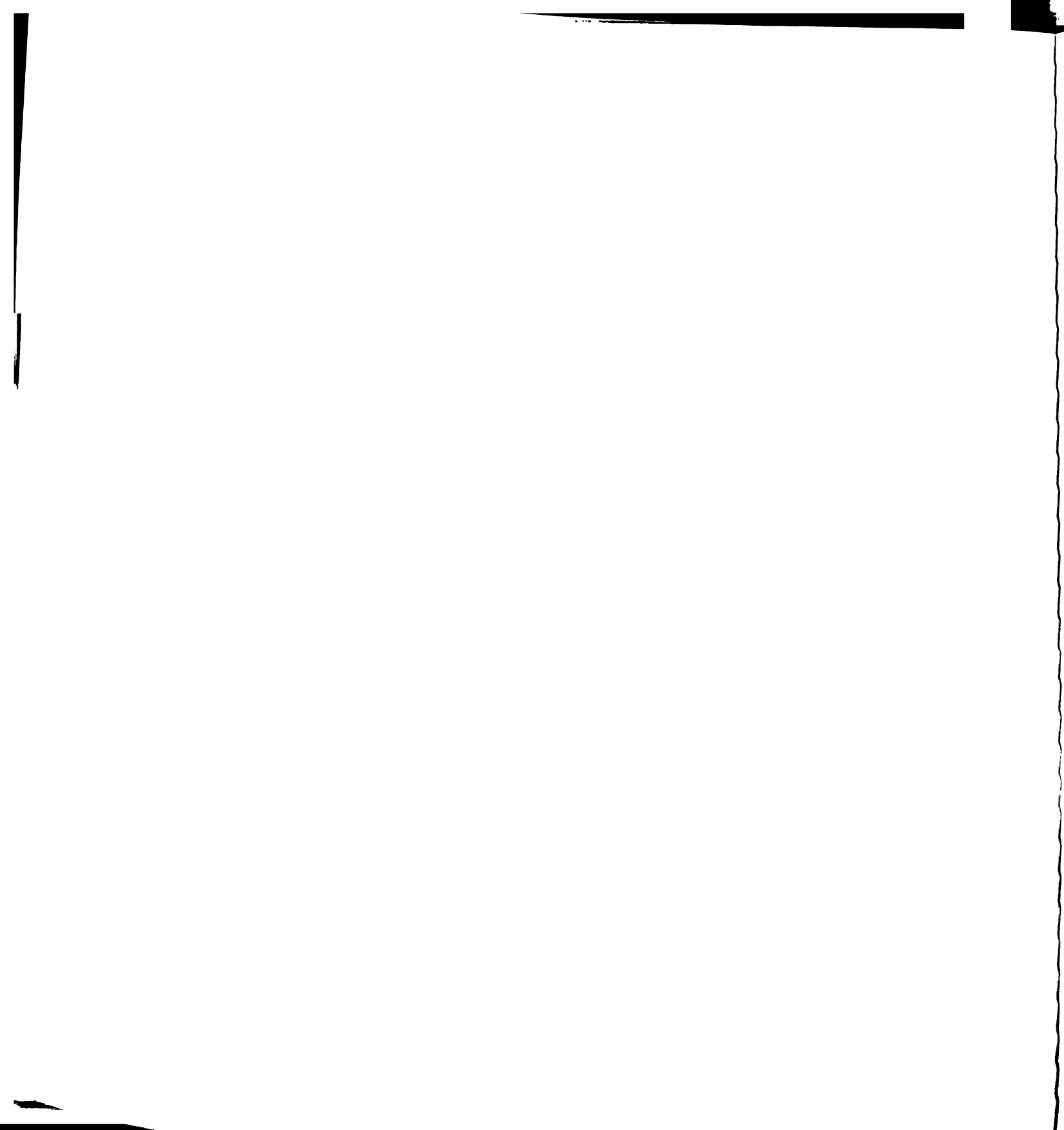
By the summer of 1993 I found myself an invested member of the Teacher Forum. I was asked to attend the CED yearly conference and make a report to the CED office coordinators' meeting on our groups activities and possible future direction. Neither Clare nor Fatimah could attend and other members did not plan to go. Since I knew more about that year's activities than anyone else (taking notes, talking with members, etc.), they proposed that I should go. Since I found this a rather uncomfortable position in that I still saw myself as an outsider studying the group (though I had paid my dues, participated in conversations, told my own stories, and generally considered myself a member), I agreed, grudgingly.

*As reported by Big Bill Haywood at Joe Hill's funeral.

I had assumed an unexpected leadership position the group. Not that I would have minded, since many of my social and educational values are in harmony with those of the Teacher Forum, CED, and the general ideology of critical democracy. But I was still the researcher and carried an ethnographic belief (or delusion) in a form of required detachment. By the middle of the next school year in 1994 I was beyond detachment. I developed an active interest in the group's survival and in the group's following its purpose and commitment to democratic education and pedagogical action.

In trying to be true to the group's purpose and ideology, I shared Clare and Fatimah's sentiment that the group should be more than about conversation. Though we all agreed that the intimate conversation and sharing of stories is vital to the group, we all thought critical democracy was about action, taking our avowed beliefs into a public or communal forum. We talked often of trying to increase membership, generating brainstorming sessions to think what we might do, such as creating an advocacy resource for parents and teachers, or holding workshops where our members could share their efforts at democratic pedagogy. Each time Clare, Fatimah and I mentioned this in the Teacher Forum meetings, and to individual members privately, we were met with resistance. "Too much time" and "too much energy" were the typical responses we got. Clare summed up well our frustrations: "I'm done validating people's reality. It's time for action!"

We knew the difficulties ran deeper than that. As critical educators we assumed that resistance is rarely what it appears and is rarely driven by what the resisters say it is. Our operating assumption had become that people enjoyed the conversation too much. Conversation took little commitment. To ask for more was to ask for risk. Teachers know well the risks they run by trying to be publicly different, to work from and toward different pedagogical values. Lana's *Death Threat* is an entextualized case in point. We also knew that some were invested in the group and that we could access and argue from the values of the group to call for action, not just thought.



Since our suggestions were met with resistance we thought it would be helpful to call a sort of quorum, where we could openly discuss the future of the group. We planned a winter retreat for February. We found rustic cabins at a nearby, bucolic state park. We sent out letters to our members and to the CED head office inviting any of our democratic comrades for a weekend of camping, cross-country skiing, and conversation about what sort of action an office like ours can take to fulfill our ostensible public commitment to democratic education.

Our retreat was a bust. Clare, her daughter, Fatimah, her son, Laura, and myself were the only ones who showed from our office. It was a conspicuous contradiction that we were all teacher educators and or graduate students and none of us were full-time practicing teachers. Bruce, a full time educational activist and writer from Ontario Canada came. Though we had interesting conversation about democracy and education, for me it felt more like a wake than a planning session. We were all disappointed that none of our teachers showed, even for half a day. After that, we called a suspension of Teacher Forum Saturday meetings until a time that we could decide what we were going to become.

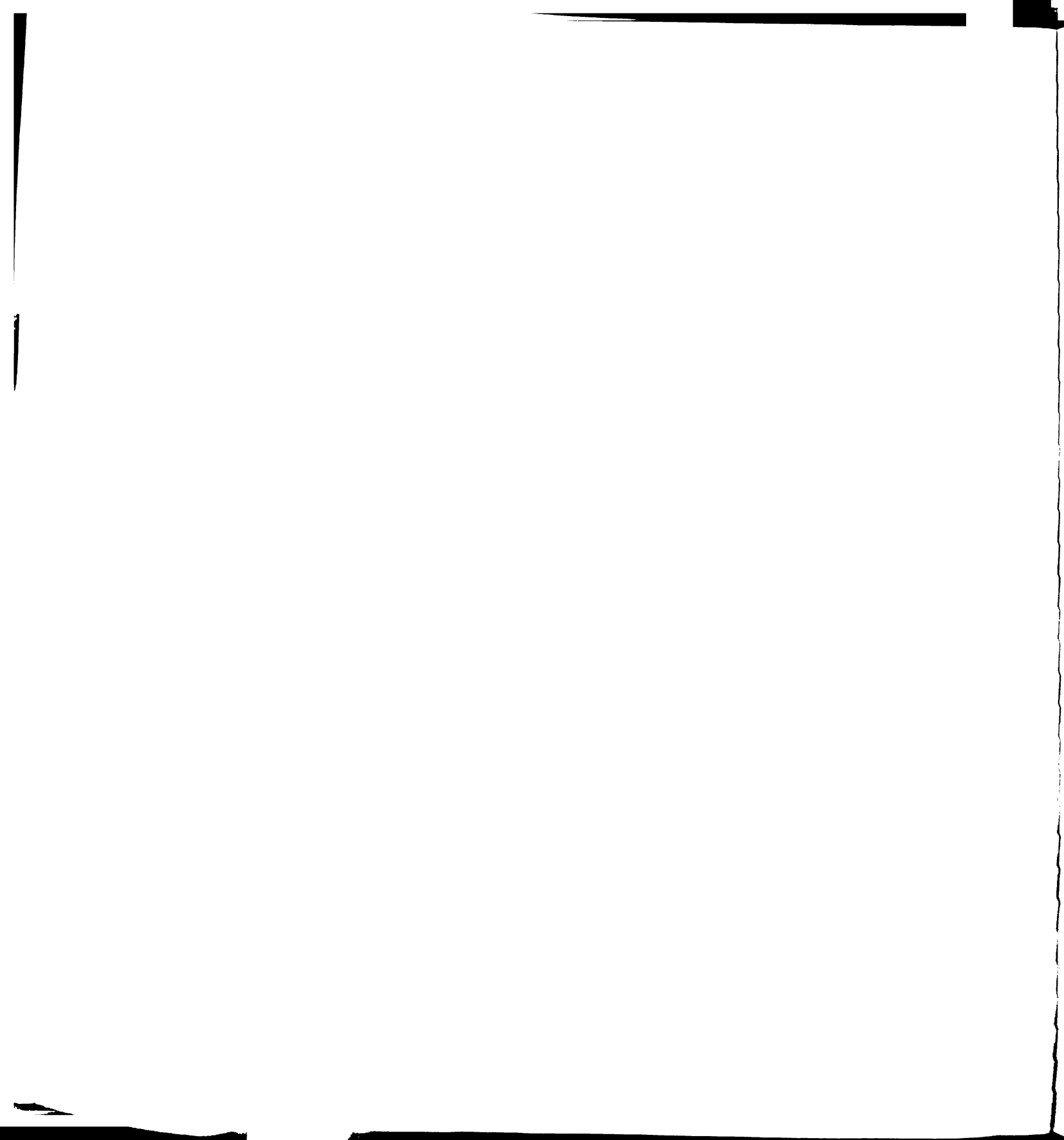
Why did the group dissolve? Why couldn't it stay together? Why couldn't we convince ourselves, and the teacher members specifically, that it is worthwhile staying together as a group dedicated to critical democratic education? The answer, I believe, lies in the fundamental tension between the two primary frames of the Teacher Forum primary contextual framework. As I noted in Chapter 2, there is an inherent, irreducible contradiction between the ideological primary frame of *critical democracy* and the interpersonal primary frame of *getting personal*. This contradiction lies between the empathic, intimate acceptance of the Teacher Forum members and their need to be critical.

The personal frame extends to verbal utterances, where conversation—not argument—is the primary communicative mode. Moreover, this frame demands of the auditors to accept the storyteller and treat her stories as intimate expressions worthy of

their embrace. The critical frame requires that member engage in critique of education, and indeed, social practices that rub against the democratic ideal of equality. Critique is indispensable in becoming aware of educational and social inequalities. This does not require accepting everything anyone says they do or believe, as some practices are oppressive. For example, suppose a Teacher Forum member who tells a personal, revealing story of pedagogical struggles with African American children. But this story happens to be about the failure to get these children to speak “standard English” 95% of the time? For critical educators, especially for someone like the African-American Muslim Fatimah, to respond to such a story is difficult. Would not such a story call for a critical gaze and an effort to persuade that storyteller that teaching standard English may in fact be oppressive? Might it also set that teacher up for judging and failing her students for a fundamental cultural linguistic difference that is irreducible and highly meaningful and functional for African-American children in their communities and homes?

This contradiction between the two primary frames works at another layer in the emergent culture of the Teacher Forum group. The personal frame values and supports intimate conversation, where members can discuss their troubles and foibles in their lives (in and out of school) as educators. Conversation, with give and take and acceptance, not argumentative battle for the Truth, is valued in this frame. Of specific relevance to me is the use of the *personal* experience narrative as a ready made, accessible cultural expressive convention that members can access. A personal experience narrative is “personal” by definition since it in all likelihood involves the narrator intimately.

The critical frame, as it works in the Teacher Forum means a subscription to the stated purposes of the group about critical democracy. Not only is the group about critical conversation, seeking a sort of consciousness about educational and social practices, it seeks action. As a pedagogical stance, it is about not just thought, but about



taking action to correct and work toward a more just and democratic society. This means engaging in conversation about what can be done to raise consciousness in teachers (and in turn their students) about the fundamental inequalities in a historically unfair society. For teachers, these involve the local things that they can do in their schools and classrooms to make this contribution to changing society. In short, it is about advocacy.

It is this taking action that Clare, Fatimah, Laura and myself were concerned about. We somehow felt it was our duty to move beyond conversation, telling stories, and validating ourselves and our experiences in the world. We wanted to *do* something. The other members resisted. This was terribly frustrating and arresting for us: Who are we to dictate to those who do the hard work in schools and classrooms? It seemed that members came to the group not for critical conversation, but for plain conversation. That is, they came for the intimacy and validation that a group of individuals can bestow upon each other. It was more like "I'm OK, you're OK." The culture of the group had become entrenched in the personal. The personal frame seemed to provide something very basic, almost primal, for those that came: an intimate, accepting conversation about being teachers. They did not come primarily for the critical democracy, though several of the members do share the ideology and do engage in progressive practices that can be called democratic. To ask that members pay attention to and follow through—act upon—the values of critical democracy *as a group* somehow was (at best) time and energy consuming, or (at worst) threatening. Moreover, to do this would take away from the very reason many of them still attended, *getting personal*.

As we started to speak of taking action and doing projects many members just stopped coming to the meetings. Many said that had families to tend to. Some were taking classes. Others just never showed and we never heard from them. The Saturday mornings became depressing without these teachers. We decided to have our retreat. No teachers came to that. The group went into a downward spiral from which it never recovered. We

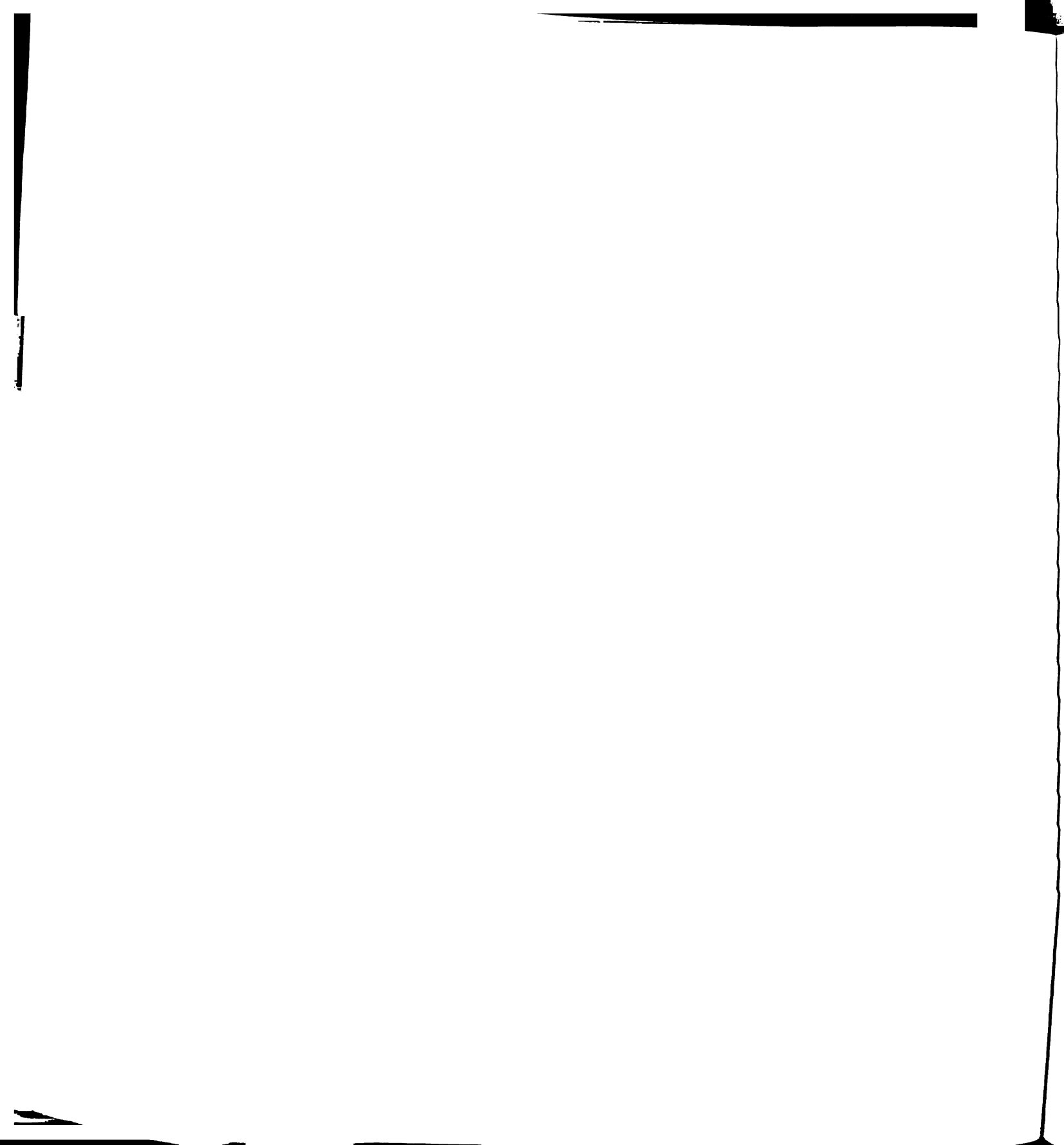
were unable to bring our two frames into harmony, to rise above the inherent contradiction to be personal and to take critical action.

What were we to do? We thought one solution was to just convene a conversation group, to have intimate conversation and tell each stories. But this would have removed the purpose for meeting the first place. Should we meet for the sake of conversation alone? What kind of group is this then? What would hold us together? Just conversation and story? As we know, conversation and story without purpose is hollow.

Clare told me she thought that I may have precipitated this downward spiral, though she graciously fails to indict me. I am inclined to agree; my study probably contributed. By recording the meetings, displaying a keen interest in the culture of the group, and asking the members "What is this group about?" and "What is going on in there?" I may have inadvertently sparked a reflection in the members that they may not have wanted. My queries, and very presence, may have forced them to ask themselves "What *are* we about?" "Why *are* we here?" and "What *is* going on in there?" They may have been forced to confront the fact that they may not have been living up to the publicly stated purpose of the group, which did have a six year history. An inability to reconcile the contradictions a group sets up for itself is hardly a uncommon feature of human cultures, large, small, or part-time. As Clifford Geertz says (1973), the irreducible feature of culture is that we are forever caught in imperfect webs of meaning in which we are forced to concoct sense upon non-sense. Coordinated groups of people try to reconcile fundamental incoherence. One way to get out of a semiotic system that seems to not have an inherent coherence, or an intolerable coherence, is resignation. That is what many of the Teacher Forum members did. The formerly convincing expressions in critical democracy and getting personal of *what is* and *what must be*, and its symbols of *what was* and *what might be*, no longer worked in harmony. When I asked my questions and demonstrated a curiosity, and when we pulled together our retreat, we were asking our members to peer below the surface of the symbolic

structure and look at the forms that held the primary framework of the group together. As a part time culture that only partially defined their identities as educators, the members found it easier to withdraw than to stay. The truth of the group was no longer self-evident. Nothing is lost when nothing is ventured.

I have come to believe that groups like this run their course. They exhaust, or can no longer fulfill, their stated purpose with the emergent cultural practices that once served them well. It is a shame since I believe that teachers are continually under attack in many subtle and crass ways. Withdrawal into personal isolation has not only professional effects, but personal ones. Perhaps the lesson of a group such as the Teacher Forum is that we need to know why we are together and we need to continually persuade ourselves that belonging with each other is worthwhile for survival. We may need to do more than just tell our stories. We need to tell our stories with a purpose.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INDEX OF PERSONAL NARRATIVES COLLECTED IN TEACHER FORUM MEETINGS

Session 1

<i>Story</i>	<i>Narrator</i>	<i>Title</i>
1:1	Harry	Not Multi-Cultural
1:2	Lana	Changed Forever
1:3	Darlene	Angry About "Queenie"
1:4	Olivia	Kid with Deep Anger
1:5	Lana	Black Kids Pick Hatred
1:6	Louise	Ten Words
1:7	Harry	English T.V.
1:8	Valerie	Backwoods of Kentucky
1:9	Fatimah	Missing Gitchie
1:10	Iris	Mike's Teaching
1:11	Valerie	Spanish Illiteracy
1:12	Iris	Slam a Black Kid Just as Fast
1:13	Harry	Consulting Firm
1:14	Lana	Black Girls
1:16	Fatimah	Kwame Touré
1:17	Fatimah	Student's Cheating Story

Session 2

2:1	Steve	Larry Cuban
2:2	Steve	Deaf Student
2:3	Lana	Mumbling Student
2:4	Steve	Iris' Project
2:5	Lana	Death Threat
2:6	Lana	Publishing Decline
2:7	Lana	Are You Reading With Them?
2:8	Steve	Sustained Silent Reading

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2:9	Hannah	D.E.A.R. Time
2:10	Zoe	All They Do Is Read
2:11	Zoe	Listening Center
2:12	Zoe	Hamlet with Mel Gibson
2:13	Hannah	Special Ed. Reader
2:14	Steve	White Pine Reading
2:15	Lana	English Curriculum Dilemma

Session 3

3:1	Zoe	No End of Year Trip
3:2	Clare	Minorities and Medical Technology
3:3	Fatimah	Gays in the Military
3:4	Fatimah	African American Female Scholar
3:5	Steve	Friend in Air Force
3:6	Fatimah	One Guy Wrote in the Paper
3:7	Lana	No Role Models
3:8	Clare	Terrible Discussion
3:9	Lana	Scary Meeting
3:10	Clare	Fundamentalist Baptist Church
3:11	Fatimah	Vivian Paley and Glue
3:12	Zoe	Fowler Linguistics Study
3:13	Zoe	"Derrick Seen Huck Finn"
3:14	Lana	Carolina Library Aide
3:15	Clare	Joel Taxel Pitching a Fit

Session 4

4:1	Iris	She's Very Strong
4:2	Iris	Olivia's Daughter
4:3	Zoe	My Principal is Gone
4:4	Fatimah	Minorities
4:5	Iris	Looking for Empathy Tests
4:6	Iris	Writing About the Muskie
4:7	Laura	Kelly's Homework
4:8	Clare	Sixth Grade Writing Instance

4:9	Valerie	Daughter's Science Paper
4:10	Fatimah	Feminist Lecture and Watching Grass Grow
4:11	Fatimah	"Will this answer the question?"
4:12	Donna	He Argued Against Multiculturalism
4:13	Fatimah	"What would you have done differently?"
4:14	Fatimah/Clare	Perfect Dad
4:15	Clare	New Meaning to Dysfunction
4:16	Fatimah	Daughter's Paper on Rap

APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTIONS DEVICES

Note the following transcription conventions are used to format the personal narrative as text, in order to make an effort at representing the feel or sense of the personal narrative as spoken.

Prosodic clauses which contain obligatory pauses are represented by line breaks or end lines.

/	one turn pause not obligatory at end of clause or sentence.
.	indicates end of sentence, with down intonation
-	restart or correction (e.g., but -but)
=	no pause for a new clause, where an obligatory pause would be warranted
()	inaudible or doubtful hearings
[indicates overlapping talk
(hehe)	laughing
(())	editorial comments
ALL CAPS	represents words said in an elevated volume
?	notes up intonation at the end of a clause typically representing a question
“ ”	quotation marks denote quoted speech

These devices above are adapted from Dennis Tedlock (1978) *Finding the center: Narrative poetry of the Zuni Indian*. and Katherine Young (1987) *Taleworld and storyrealms: The phenomenology of narrative*.

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