

Tina: A Portrait of Literate Awareness

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Tina is a seventeen-year-old African-American woman from one of the poorest neighborhoods in Pittsburgh. At first glance, she's the kind of teenager we read about in articles covering youth in the inner city—a kid who receives minimal support from home and school and who appears to have limited opportunities. But appearances and circumstances can mislead us, and can hide the promise that lies inside a young person's mind. Through working with Tina at Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center, where young people are encouraged to collaborate and solve problems when they write texts, I have come to understand that Tina has a strong sense of literate awareness, a sense of herself as a purposeful writer.

This portrait of a non-mainstream writer grows out of a series of discussions with Tina about high school writing and collaborative writing. Our discussions were modeled on a hybrid of a writer's reflection task [Flower (1990)] and a discourse-based interview [Odell, Goswami & Herrington (1983)]. I found that even when Tina writes for school, she devises plans and strategies and envisions a distinct audience for each writing task. However, in the writing she does at school, she seems unable to elaborate these complex ideas. In creating this portrait, I have struggled to do justice to the many layers and diverse strategies that are part of Tina's literate awareness.

School writing is the worst ever done by me. Writing use to be my favored subject in middle school, but now its completely the opposite. My turn around came right after the first day in the 9th grade because they asked me to write about my summer vacation. That was more of a kiddish thing I thought ! Who am I, I thought to think it was kiddish so I went on and did it. After a while it never changed, it was one childish assignment after another. It bored me to death I wanted a challenge a change that's when Mr. Shakespeare came into the picture. He wasn't the most easiest author to read or understand that was the big challenge. It wasn't enough he only lasted for one semester I need a year around challenge.

Community Literacy Program was that type of challenge I needed to spark the old writing feeling that I had a long time ago. It made me realize that school writing doesn't have to boring .

Tina, April 10, 1992

In this paper I trace an inquiry into literacy: what it is, what it can do, and what it can mean to those who are or are not “literate.” I explore and describe literacy through the experiences of Tina, a young woman from Pittsburgh’s Northside. When I worked with Tina, I was struck by the differences between the writing Tina does in two literate communities: that of her inner city high school English class and that of the literacy program in which she writes with support from peers and writing mentors. Through working with Tina as her writing mentor and listening to her reflect about her writing as a researcher, I discovered that even writers like Tina, who are often thought of as symbols of the failure of American schools, can have a unique sense of literate awareness, an awareness of purpose, of audience, and of rules that lies behind and beneath the texts they write.

What is Literacy?

Popular news magazines declare that America is suffering from the effects of a “crisis in literacy,” a crisis which shows its face as high school dropout rates rise and verbal SAT scores fall. Rates and scores are just numbers; we interpret them to be symptoms of a literacy crisis, but what exactly is it that is in trouble? How can we, once and for all, define literacy? Scholars, politicians, and researchers have struggled with that problem for years. However, each time they offer an answer to the question “What is literacy,” the extent of the “illiteracy” problem grows. What, then, is an *illiterate*? [Scribner (1984)]

The everyday American remains outside of this discussion. Scholars aren’t the heartbeat of America; it is the everyday American who reads the articles in TIME and Newsweek and creates the popular definition of literacy. In the U.S., we define literacy fairly generally. For example, when I ask my friends, who are mostly seniors about to graduate from a top university, to define literacy, they usually reply, “the ability to read and write.”

Research into historical definitions of literacy has started to shed a new light on the idea of literacy. Over the years and across cultures, the dominant definition of literacy, “the ability to read and write,” has had a number of different meanings—meanings that have continually evolved as the uses of language and communication have changed. The following are some pictures of that changing face of literacy.

Literacy as the ability to recite familiar texts

One of the earliest literacy campaigns took place in seventeenth century Sweden, as the Protestant Reformation spread the idea that individuals should have access to holy texts—that reading and interpreting the Bible should be the right of everyone rather than the privilege of priests alone. In 1686, King Charles XI decreed that all Swedish subjects should be able to read the Bible. Subjects in Sweden were tested annually on their ability to read parts of the Bible and to recite bits of catechism. Parishioners had to pass these tests of literacy in order to be able to take communion, be confirmed, and marry in the church. Writing was not encouraged, nor was the ability to read and interpret unfamiliar texts. Literacy, then, was defined as the ability to decode familiar religious texts. With this measure, literacy rates in one Swedish village increased 30% between 1660 and 1690. [Johansson (1981)].

Literacy as performance

In the mid nineteenth century, the first free public schools were established in North America. Literacy in these schools was based on Plato’s model of education, which in turn was based on the premise that a child is a “barbarian at the gates of civilization” [**The Republic**, qtd. in de Castell and Luke (1983)] who must be brought under the control of morality and reason. The educational model, then, stressed rote learning, repetition, drills, and copying from the “great books”, morally edifying works from Greece and Rome as well as the Bible and some English and American literature. The curricular material did not vary from grade to grade; rather, it was studied in more and more depth. Reading was a form of oral performance; the point of reading was to read aloud, and to develop effective oration skills. As de Castell and Luke (1983) observed, “in the nineteenth century classroom, reading was neither a private nor a reflective act, but a rule-bound public performance.” Students even learned the correct physical postures for reading, writing, and speaking. In this case, literacy again was projected outward; it was something one had, something that set one apart. [de Castell and Luke (1983)].

Literacy as function

After World War II, the idea of “functional literacy” became the new standard for literacy. The U.S. Army defined functional literacy as “the capability to understand instructions necessary for conducting basic military functions and tasks... fifth grade reading level” [Sharon (1973), qtd. in de Castell and Luke (1983)]. The association of literacy with reading has only recently been changing to include writing as part of the definition. The idea of functional literacy has since been extended to include many of the features of today’s “crisis in literacy”—the ability to read and understand forms, for example. [de Castell and Luke (1983)].

Literacy at the Community Literacy Center

Even today, literacy is continually being redefined. In Pittsburgh, a new, powerful picture of literacy is coming out of the Community Literacy Center, a collaborative effort between the Center for the Study of Writing at Carnegie Mellon and the Community House, a 75-year-old establishment in Pittsburgh's Northside. The definition of literacy advanced by the CLC is one of "community literacy." Literacy is more than simply reading or writing, and texts have implications greater than mere words on a page. Literacy at the CLC is taking action and reflecting upon that action. It's seen as a tool for social change. And, as a friend remarked when I described these pictures of literacy to him, it's a definition that emphasizes what an individual can do, as opposed to one which places an individual on a scale to see if he or she can "measure up."

The CLC offers two writing programs for teens. The HELP program focuses on neighborhood improvement programs. The INFORM program focuses on questions and issues that affect the lives of teens, including, in the past, teen pregnancy, college, careers, and places to go. According to Wayne Peck, executive director of the center, these programs are unique in the Northside for reasons that go beyond the literacy agenda. The HELP and INFORM programs are two of very few programs for teens in the Northside. Peck offers a number of reasons why programs for teens are rare in inner cities. The major one is that "it is perceived as risky and dangerous, often fraught with problems like drugs, guns, violence, pregnancy, adolescent rebellion—people are just plain scared of teenagers in the city, especially African American teenagers." [Peck, memo to CLC mentors, 1992]

As a result, those teen programs that are offered generally focus on social and recreation goals; if they are at all "academic" in nature, they focus on tutoring. The problem is getting kids involved. According to Peck, the fact that the CLC is reaching these kids is demonstrated in their behavior. Kids get involved at the CLC: they rarely miss a day, and they appear in program after program. As Peck wrote in a memo to writing mentors, "in an inner city environment [where the most pressing educational dilemma is 'getting kids to show up' at school] attendance and participation are seen as key indicators of success."

Over the course of the last year, I found myself in the middle of this inquiry about literacy, trying to position myself within it and formulate my own new definition of literacy. I came into the situation with my own ideas about literacy, ideas which had been constructed by my own schooling and culture. I brought with me my own literate experiences, my own theories of what it means to be literate. I found that my ideas and conceptions were repeatedly turned upside

down and inside out with every paper I read, with every conversation with the directors at the CLC, with every meeting with another kid. I explored the ways that literacies differ; how the professional and academic literacies that our society privileges and in which school has made me proficient diverge from the school and community literacies that kids in the INFORM program are learning to master. Through it all, my idea of literacy, originally the same as the rather narrow one described by my friends, has expanded and grown.

I'm writing about my experiences in a place that holds a very strong definition of literacy, and this definition is important in everything that happens there. At the Community Literacy Center, literacy is *action and reflection*; in the case of this paper, there are three main layers that emerge. One is Tina's action of interviewing a carpenter for the INFORM program and reflecting on that interview. She acted again when she wrote her school essay and her CLC essay, then reflected on that action of writing in our reflection sessions. And there is a third layer of action and reflection of which I am a key player—I worked with Tina and interviewed her, and now I am reflecting on that, too.

Introducing Tina

As a writing mentor for the INFORM program, I was matched with Tina, a seventeen year-old African-American woman, a senior at Oliver High School. To learn more about her, I talked to a youth program facilitator and a director of the CLC who used to teach at Oliver. This is what I learned about Tina's school and neighborhood.

Tina is a seventeen-year-old African-American teenager described by different people as “at risk”, “trouble”, a “poor student,” even “violent.” She comes from one of the poorest neighborhoods in Pittsburgh, a neighborhood that is built on one side of a steep hill, a place where there is very little green space and where the narrow roads are made of crumbling brick. The homes there are mostly three or four story brick townhouses. Many have balconies, cupolas, and towers and were probably magnificent fifty or sixty years ago. Most are in shambles now, with windows boarded, insides gutted by fire, porches decaying. The population in Tina's neighborhood is about seventy percent black.

Her neighborhood is poor in more than just monetary terms. It also lacks a solid foundation of educational opportunity and support. Census reports from 1980 showed that only 5.3% of adults over 25 in her neighborhood had any college education, and only 1.3% had completed 4-year college degrees. Only 49.6% had completed high school.

Most teenagers from Tina's neighborhood attend Oliver High School, a local public high school. Due to the poor achievement level and low retention rate of its students, Oliver is consistently rated as one of Pittsburgh's worst high schools. The numbers certainly are grim. According to Oliver High School principal Andrew King, less than 75% of the enrolled students are in school on an average day and more than a third of the students are placed on out-of-school suspension during the year. The meager attendance rate results in academic failure; twenty-two percent of the grades earned by students at the school were failing marks. Almost ten percent of the school's students don't complete the school year, and of the teens who were Tina's classmates in ninth grade, almost half have dropped out, failed to have been promoted to the next grade, or have transferred out of the school. Only about forty percent of the students who remain in school long enough to graduate make plans for any kind of post-secondary training (including two- and four-year colleges or vocational training.) [From an assessment of need, in preparation.]

These numbers really struck me. I went into the CLC thinking that, despite its status as an inner-city school, Oliver High School and its students couldn't be that different from the students in the high school I came from. They were poorer, true, and their test scores don't average as high as the scores from my school—but kids are kids, right? It turns out that I was wrong to think that. There are lots of factors that make Tina's high school experience different from mine and from those of the other CMU students who go into the CLC as mentors, including higher rates of teen pregnancy, the strong presence of drugs in the neighborhoods, the sheer poverty, and a striking difference in how much achievement is expected and supported. Most of the CMU mentors had parents who expected their kids to go to college and who did whatever possible to get their kids into college. We attended high schools in which most students stayed until graduation. We had high expectations of academic achievement. In a way, I can't help but feel guilty that I was brought up in an upper-middle-class family, in which both parents went to college and expected that I would go to college. When I look back on high school, I often feel that my entire high school experience was little more than preparation for college. I was bored, but I knew that by achieving in school, I could move on to college in four years. I took all the college prep and advanced placement classes, and participated in activities like the California Scholastic Federation, Latin Club, and Debate Team, since I knew that my participation in such groups would get me into the college of my choice.

Meanwhile, the average kid at Oliver just doesn't get that kind of support from home. Education isn't valued in their homes; about 18 percent of the fathers of Oliver students have themselves not completed high school. I can't imagine what it would be like to go through high school without the kind of encouragement my parents gave me, not having that carrot of the best college

education to motivate me, not “knowing” that I would, as a matter of fact, go to college, not participating in high school activities. Above all, I wonder where Tina would be if she had been able to grow up in a different situation, one in which she had the same sort of support that I did.

I was especially struck by the difference in expectations for academic performance during a conversation with my advisor, Linda Flower. After seeing for the first time a paper that Tina wrote in school, I told Dr. Flower that I was surprised and appalled that Tina’s school paper got a B, when the quality of the writing was so clearly below average. “How do you know what average is in a school like Tina’s?” she countered. That made me pause. I really don’t know where my idea of average came from. I’ve been cloistered in college prep and advanced placement classes in high school, and in classes with other writing majors here. I’ve actually never seen the writing of “mainstream” or “average” writers.

What does Tina think?

Based on these description of her neighborhood and school, it looks like Tina has lot going against her. She comes from a “bad” school, a poor part of town; she’s a young Black woman who wears a nose ring and a Buffalo Bills parka. She’s seen white women pull their purses closer to them when she gets on the bus. For the most part, the voices of others have dismissed her ability to be a scholar and a writer. But where is Tina’s voice? After all this, I wanted to know what Tina thought. How did she view *herself* as a student, as an individual in her world, and as a writer?

Learning about Tina’s writing

To answer these questions, I used information I gathered from my experiences as Tina’s writing mentor in the INFORM program and from three reflection sessions during which Tina and I met and discussed her texts. I used a hybrid of a discourse interview [Odell, Goswami and Herrington (1983)] and a reflection task [Flower (1990)] to collect Tina’s reflections about her school and CLC writing. In a discourse interview, an interviewer points out segments of a text, proposes possible alternatives, and asks the writer to read them and discuss the purposes, alternatives, and problems he or she encountered when writing.

The reflection task has two parts: *Reflecting on Your Writing* and a *Written Reflection/Think Aloud* (see Appendix IV and Appendix V for texts.) In the *Reflecting on your Writing* stage, the writer is asked to read his or her text from two perspectives. The first is a “big picture” view which looks at the goals of the whole text and the ways it reflects purpose, audience, and text conventions. The second is an “in-depth reading” in which the writer marks sentences, titles,

headings, and key points and reflects on purpose, audience, and alternative strategies relative to these lower-level text features. In the *Written Reflection/Think Aloud* stage, the writer is asked to listen to tapes of the *Reflecting on your Writing* sessions and then write about the text, thinking again about purpose, audience, text conventions, and key points, but this time evaluating the text, and talking about he or she felt while writing.

I combined the two methods because I felt that neither method was sufficient on its own. The reflection task concentrates on what was important to the writer/reflector alone, and is designed to be a largely independent task. However, I wanted to learn more about features I saw in the text that interested *me*; having worked with Tina, I also knew that if I left her completely on her own on a task, I wouldn't learn as much as I would if I was there to prompt her. The discourse interview counters the reflection method by being far more interviewer-based, focusing on those parts of a text that strike the interviewer as most interesting. I felt that by combining the two, asking first for the points Tina identified and then asking her about the features that struck me most, I could balance the things that interested me and the things that interested Tina.

In interviewing Tina, I looked for features that have been identified by researchers as “signs” of literate awareness: a sense of purpose, an ability to identify and write for an audience [Flower], a sense of unwritten rules she developed through her experiences as a student [Hull and Rose (1989)]. I also looked for the information that she brought with her into her writing tasks [Hull and Rose (1989)].

During the first two sessions Tina and I discussed her writing using my hybrid. I didn't try to keep Tina on task on purely text-based questions. I felt that the information I learned about Tina's high school, her family, her concerns, her many opinions, and her prejudices was as important to my understanding of her as a writer as was the information I learned about her writing strategies

For the third session, I tried to use the *Written Reflection/Think Aloud* task as it was written. Tina listened to the tapes of our reflection sessions for about 15 minutes, using a map I had made of places on the tape where she talked about audience, purpose, key points, or affective issues. However, she refused to do a think-aloud. She simply sat there in front of the computer, silent and only intermittently typing, until I removed the tape recorder. Then, she wrote continuously for about 45 minutes. I answered a only a couple questions at the beginning of the session about the purpose of the paper, and then sat at another table and did some other work. I feel that the text she produced during this session was very much her own. (This text appears as

Appendix III.)

A critique of reflective methods

Our discussions about Tina's texts took place several weeks after she actually wrote them. There are weaknesses in using this kind of reflection data in research. A weakness of retrospective accounts is that they are "constructions based on a writer's selective evaluations and inferences of what occurred during composing." [Greene and Higgins, in press]

The information gathered from this kind of inquiry can be colored by a number of factors. These might include:

- The biases of the interviewer, who might, intentionally or not, ask leading questions and induce the writer to come to conclusions that he or she might not otherwise have come to.
- "Wishful thinking" on the part of the writer, who might say that she did things or thought in ways that she actually didn't. She might avoid talking about thoughts that embarrassed her and problems that she had, or she might embellish the "truth."
- Holes in memory that the writer feels pressured in some way to fill in.

It's not possible, therefore, to point to a transcript of a reflection session and definitively say, "This is truly what this writer thought while she was constructing her text." A writer's account of "what really happened" is very flexible and subject to suggestion.

Nevertheless, reflections are valuable because they give writers a chance to explain themselves. While they do not allow researchers to trace the actual decision processes that went on during composition, they do give the writer a voice. We can learn a little bit about where the writer is coming from. We can learn that there is far more that lies beneath a writer's text than just the words we see on the page. And the writer, prompted to think about her writing in ways she hasn't before, can explore the way she writes and become aware of the stumbling blocks she hits, rules she follows, and prejudices that color her writing.

I also learned about Tina as a writer from my experience as her writing mentor in the INFORM program. As her mentor, I was able to witness her writing at the CLC first-hand. I was able to see for myself where she got stuck, where she needed to be prompted to tell more, what kinds of things she felt were important to talk about and what was better left unsaid.

The writer I saw

I first saw an example of Tina's writing when I acted as her mentor in the Spring 1992 INFORM

program at the CLC. Tina was one of nine high school students who participated. In the INFORM program, each student worked with a writing mentor from Carnegie Mellon to interview an adult who worked in the trades: an electrician, contractors, a plumber, a vending machine repairman—Tina talked to a carpenter called Chuck. They then wrote about their interview experiences. During twice-weekly sessions the group, led by a facilitator from the staff of the CLC, discussed techniques for interviewing, ways to introduce a paper, or how to plan collaboratively. After the group discussions, we broke up into our mentoring pairs and wrote. The writing mentors worked closely with the students throughout the writing process, from planning the interview and paper to writing the text to editing. At the end of the six-week session, the articles the students wrote were published in the INFORM program newsletter and the students presented their texts both to other students at Oliver High School and to the community at a celebration at the Community House. Tina’s text appears in full as Appendix I.

Writing for an audience

In our reflection meeting, Tina spoke about purposes both for her text as a whole and for parts of the text. Tina was not interested in carpentry as a career. She struggled with finding a purpose for her text until she re-read the transcript from her interview and found that the lessons she and other teenagers could learn from Chuck were lessons about values, attitudes and goals. Her main point for the text, then, was to show readers that “the way that you think that a carpenter is is not the way that he is. Someone else values their job, if you don’t.” She wanted other teens to learn what she had learned. Other agenda included using Chuck as an example of an adult who’s willing to help kids, who’s not foreign to kids, who works hard and has a satisfying career in a job that’s not glamorous. She wanted to teach something, give the kids who read her text something to think about.

When I asked her who pictured her audience to be, she initially said teenagers around her age or younger, and some adults who happen upon the document. I asked her to further explain her audience, and things got more interesting. She described a dichotomy of possible teenagers: those who go to school and those who dropped out or who just don’t go to school.

She predicted that each of these groups would react distinctly to her text. Kids who go to school would react to it positively, both as a well-written text and as an informative piece. They would appreciate the parts of the article where she said more and related what she learned to the life of a teenager, and they would appreciate Chuck as an individual.

C.S.J.: OK... let’s see... How do you think that your reader would react to this text, to your paper that you wrote, thinking about that teenager from your high

school or from a high school like yours?

Tina: It depends on, you know, what kind of teenager it is.

C.S.J.: Ok... give me a few examples.

Tina: If it's a teenager who always goes to school, and does the work, then he might think it's a good text. But if it's a kid who doesn't hardly go to school and cuts classes and like that, then, they might think it's dumb.

C.S.J.: Ok, so a kid who's pretty conscientious about school, who goes to school, might think this is a good text. Why?

Tina: Cause they know what to look for.

C.S.J.: In terms of how it's written, or...

Tina: Yes. And what it's written about.

She was very aware of which parts these readers would find interesting, and backed up her opinions about this with vivid examples. One instance is the point that she thought was the most important, where she talked about Chuck's willingness to help young people out and encourage them to do what they want to do. She said that this is important because too many adults don't give kids a chance to make their own mistakes, or they generalize all kids, or they think that if a kid makes trouble one day, he/she is never good or sincere. She felt that it was important for young people "who go to school" to see that there are people who will give them a chance.

Kids who don't go to school, however, are "ignorant," they skip school to "smoke reefer" and they aren't the same people they were long ago when Tina was friends with them. According to Tina, these kids "think they know everything"; they would think Tina's insights and advice (that kids need to take breaks or that people shouldn't judge others) are stupid, and they wouldn't respect this carpenter who is making a modest if honest living. Tina thinks that her text could help this second group if only they'd really read it and "take it into consideration." Then they'd see that there are adults who want to "give a kid a chance." But she doesn't think they'd give it any more than a cursory, bad-attitude reading if they even picked it up at all. They're the same as the adults who don't give kids a chance and who say that all kids are bad—they just discriminate the other way.

This concern for real-world issues recurred whenever Tina and I talked about her writing at the

CLC; she was eager to discuss issues that concerned her, and these discussions seemed to be a very natural part of her explanations for her writing. For example, she talked a lot about why she is in school rather than dropped out, how she feels about drugs and teen pregnancy. The reasons she gave for writing the way she did to the audience she pictured seem framed in the larger scope of her life as a teenager.

As far as her plan for the paper goes, she says she just wrote her text in the order that she asked the questions, but from working with her as her mentor, I know that that's not really true. The carpenter she talked to was evasive in his answers and hard to understand. She had to ask most questions several times, at different points in the interview, to get a satisfactory answer. Even then, he answered only in vague, general terms. The information she eventually used in her paper was gathered from all over the interview.

Using conventions

To get her audience engaged in her topic, Tina used a lot of rhetorical questions. She seemed to think about her audience in choosing to use them—since she's writing to kids like herself, she felt she could anticipate what they would want to know, and beat them to the punch by asking their questions first.

Tina: Because... them was the questions that, you know, they're going to say, if I could interview a carpenter, those are some of the questions I would ask.

C.S.J.: How do you think a reader would react to them?

Tina They'd probably like it. They probably would want to ask someone questions, and they would want those questions answered.

The language she used in her text is generally informal to appeal to teens and be easy to read. However, she surprised me when she put in larger words like “disinterested” and “jeopardized.” She likes how big words sound and is proud that she knows them.

Correctness?

The first time we sat down to write, Tina wrote very slowly and changed words over and over, trying to get her exact meaning into each sentence before moving on. She seemed to want to get every paragraph to be perfect. Luckily I'd read an article that pointed out in passing that this kind of emphasis on correctness is a common problem with unskilled writers [Perl, 1979, qtd. in Hull and Rose, (1989)]. Being able to name this problem suggested a technique to get past that

stumbling block. The next time we met, I encouraged Tina to simply write to get ideas down on paper—to save writing “correct” sentences for later. We could fix the grammatical problems another time. She was doubtful at first, and I think she tried to test me by taking my advice a step too far: she stopped capitalizing and punctuating altogether! But we did get a lot more written once she stopped worrying about textual accuracy and concerned herself with generating ideas instead. It was a much freer session.

Collaborating

The CLC, unlike many school writing programs, places its emphasis not on textual correctness but on the development of ideas. Using collaboration to explore and express these ideas is an integral part of the literacy experience as described by the Community Literacy Center. Writers collaborate with their peers and with their writing mentors to produce their texts. When Tina and I worked together on her text for the INFORM newsletter, our collaboration consisted mostly of her developing ideas, trying them out, with me there to ask her to tell me more. I’d then reiterate what she said, summarize, and verify the plan for the paper as I understood. The following is an example of a collaborative session; it comes from the transcript of a session when we worked on developing her plan.

Tina: Well, I want to talk about the... um... how he once in a while wants to give up on carpentry but he said, he says... I asked him if anything happened to him that made him say, that made him say why he’s a carpenter and he said, yeah, yeah, it’s like any job, you get tired of it. It’s a job and that’s what you do and you get tired of it, and sometimes you want to...and working in the elements is part of it. Any kind of trade has its ups and downs.

C.S.J.: Where will you put that? Is that one of the first things you’ll say, or one of the last?

Tina: I don’t know. It will probably be in the middle.

C.S.J.: What kinds of things would be before that?

Tina: Like... um...

C.S.J.: Right now what we have is your introduction saying, so, well, you think this... well, that’s not the way it is.

Tina: First a typical day on the job, and then I will go to... um...

C.S.J.: So your typical day on the job will be sort of.. it will counterbalance your

introduction. You think this is what happens... but really, this is what a guy does.

Tina: Yeah...

I'm encouraged by the fact that, after our hours of working together on her text, Tina does consider that text to be completely her own. In one of our reflection meetings, I asked her where some of her ideas came from. Even if I felt that the idea was elaborated only after I prompted her to tell more, she says that she thought of it on her own. For example, the first time through most of her paragraphs, she simply stopped with a simple description of what happened. Take, for example, her paragraph about Chuck's willingness to encourage students to go into carpentry:

Also what surprised me was when I asked him would he advise someone to go into carpentry he said yes. "It's either in your blood or it's not." Well the way I took it was as if he were saying if you're interested go for it. Don't let anything or anyone stop you. I feel more adults should encourage teenagers in general instead of putting them down because most of them don't care anymore. They think if one kid is bad we all are and its not true. That's where the old saying comes in, "don't judge a book by its cover." That's exactly what they're doing. That's why Chuck gets the respect he deserves from me because he seems to be there to help and encourage.

This paragraph ultimately became one of the key points she identified for her document. In its original form it was much shorter:

Also what surprised me was when I asked him would he advise someone to go into carpentry he said yes. "It's either in your blood or it's not." If you're interested go for it. Don't let anything or anyone stop you.

As I remember it, the rest of the paragraph came about because I asked her to tell me more, to tell me what Chuck's words meant to her and what they could mean to other kids. On her end, however, I found that the prompts from me seemed to become a more transparent part of her idea of her text. She describes a very clear picture of her intentions for this paragraph and for the statements within it, explaining how she intended for her audience to react to each assertion. When she reflects on her text, she remembers that those sentences were her idea (which I hope they were—I just brought them out more clearly for her.)

Tina identifies that I generally helped her to think of things she wouldn't have otherwise come

up with. Yet even when I tried to lead her with my questions into a discussion of collaboration, she couldn't identify specific places where my collaborative support led her to add more.

The only part of her text that she did identify as a place she changed because she collaborated was her second to last paragraph. After two or three days of writing, we had a peer collaboration/peer editing session with the other writers in the program. Writers read their papers aloud, and the other writers and mentors responded to the text, pointing out places where the writer could have explained more, or where the text was not very clear. Tina's first version of this paper was pretty convoluted and inconsistent, and it puzzled several of her peers:

chuck gave me the impression that he job is physically harder than any desk job can ever be. it seems to be that way because a desk is just more or less just really typing and answering phones. trades are mostly manual labor the kind of work where you get your hands dirty. not to say that the desk jobs aren't equally as hard but trades are mentally hard as well. so that puts to type of strains on you.

The flurry of comments that came after she read this paragraph (What's harder? What strains? Aren't desk jobs hard, too?) led her to trim it down to its final, clear, concise form.

Chuck gave me the impression that his job is harder than you know or think. Trades are mostly manual labor the kind of work where you get your hands dirty but they are mentally hard as well. So that puts two type of strains on you.

It seems that, to Tina, the most important feature of help is that it allows the text to be her own and that it encourages her to think in detail. From working with Tina, I found that she is a very insightful, opinionated young woman who has a lot of ideas. The key thing I had to do to help her was to focus her thinking, and learn to ask the right questions. What I hope she got out of our sessions together is more ability to ask the right questions of herself.

The school writer.

Tina's CLC text was a fairly strong piece of writing, full of purpose and intention, packed with details and urgency. After working with her on this first text, I felt that Tina was a good writer; she was bright, opinionated, and motivated when we worked in our collaborative sessions. But then I learned that she makes poor grades, that she has followed a vocational cosmetology curriculum in school, and that even her principal looks on her as an example of academic failure. When I saw an example of Tina's school writing, then, I was dismayed. Her school writing doesn't reflect the same level of ability and strength as her CLC writing.

Tina identifies herself as a student and a writer. She considers herself a good student, and is proud of the fact that she is still in school. Her identity as a student sets her apart from the kids who don't go to school. She's toughed it out; she's going to have a high school diploma as well as three years of cosmetology training. Maybe she'll go to college someday, maybe not, but she's learned and she's going to make something of herself. She even sees herself as a future civil rights leader.

However, her teachers don't necessarily see her in that same light. I learned that her high school principal was surprised to hear that she was doing good writing in the INFORM program. I also talked to a former teacher of hers, now a director at the CLC who told me that in class, Tina was basically like everyone else. Tina pointed out her English class with Phil Flynn as one of her favorite classes in high school. She even called it "fun", but the attitude Flynn describes her as having in class contradicts that. According to Flynn, Tina was cold in class, gave him dirty looks, was standoffish and aloof, only called him "Mister," never Mr. Flynn, until the class was well under way.

I had her in English class, and I know what she's like, she'd one of those kids who's real moody, it takes a long time to actually win her over in a class room. [But] It's not hostility, it's something else, she doesn't trust people I think. But it's misread by teachers as hostility. You can't take these things personal, it's not personal. It's just a way of negotiating the world.

Tina herself even admits to the behaviors Flynn described. I think that, to her and for her, all it really takes to be a "good student" is to just show up and get the work done. (Frederick Erickson (1984) calls the diploma kids like Tina receive a "docility certificate.")

According to Flynn, these kinds of negative first impressions seem to be a vicious circle in high school classrooms. Students like Tina go into a class challenging the teacher to teach them—they have a standoffish attitude that seems like hostility but which is actually, according to Phil, more of a challenge to earn their trust. But some teachers perceive that attitude to be hostility, and they respond in kind.

Even though she identifies herself as a student and other students identify her as a writer, Tina doesn't care much about school writing in general. School writing tends to make her angry. She's "sick of pretending to be someone else," and just wants "to be myself." She responds to assignments in school with silence, avoiding the assignment for the most part, angry because she

doesn't know how to start. But she used to enjoy writing, as she wrote in the excerpt from her written reflection quoted at the beginning of this paper. Tina is tired of childish assignments. She says that she liked writing up through junior high school. She wrote in almost all of her classes, and she says she felt that the simple assignments they were given then were to prepare them to do real writing in high school, about real-world issues "like drugs." When her first assignment in high school was another childish one, when writing became limited to English class only, and when these childish assignments continued even into her senior year, Tina started to hate writing. She's also angry that her teacher says that the writing they do now—a lot of "pretend you're X" essays—are preparing them to write in college, because she doesn't think that's true.

The school essay

Tina says that the "pretend you're X" writing assignment she complains about is a fairly common type of assignment in her twelfth grade, mainstream English class. For the paper Tina showed me and we discussed, her class was assigned to read an article about a man who saved another person from drowning but who is now missing and presumed dead. They were told to pretend that they were that man's child, and write a three paragraph essay saying why he deserves to be recognized for his sacrifice. The format was prescribed: in the first paragraph, describe what a hero is, in the second paragraph, tell why the father is a hero, and in the third, summarize and tell why the father deserves an award. The students worked on the assignment in class for several days, spending a couple of days generating a rough draft, then meeting for a brief conference with the teacher about the draft before spending a few more days completing a final draft.

The following is the text Tina produced:

A hero to me is someone who goes out on a limb + risks his life for others, that's my father. Hero's are special for what they do. They are normal people up to a point, when they go beyond the ordinary live to do something extraordinary. Hero's are who makes sacrifices that are necessary to become a hero. Hero's are people who value other's lives as well as theirs.

My father really deserves something that states or shows the world he's a hero, because he make one sacrifices that no one dares to make unless they are very special. His life did account for something more than death. He could have saved his life first and left the others for dead. My father is an obvious hero because no normal person saves lives. They will save their self first before helping anyone.

My father reached out beyond the normal range of a human being to save lives. Which really deserves something more than publicity. He needs something that leaves his name and heroism as a legacy.

I was surprised and disappointed by this text. I'd seen that Tina could do nice things with a text, that she had real issues to talk about, that she had an eye for transitions, that she could write several hundred words in one day. When I saw this text, and saw that it received a "B," I honestly didn't know what to think. From a textual correctness point of view, this text isn't grammatical; from a rhetorical standpoint, it's not elaborated and it's full of trite commonplaces and sentences that could have said a lot more ("Hero's are who makes sacrifices necessary to become a hero.") When I read it, before learning what her assignment was, I didn't know what it was about, and I couldn't tell what her agenda really was, although it did have a flavor of a proposal.

Is this "literate writing?" Is it the writing of a young woman who identifies herself as a student? I found out when I talked to Tina about this text that she really was aware of more when she wrote than might seem apparent.

Audience

One of the first questions I asked Tina about each of her texts was about her audience. Who did she think about when she wrote her paper? She says that when she wrote this essay, she thought about writing for a newspaper, and for the businessmen and working class people who read newspapers. Her purpose for this text, she said, was to "show people how the family feels, you know, toward certain things that happen to members of their family." Her secondary agenda was the one assigned to her: to get recognition for "her father." But surprisingly, even though she pictured her audience both before and while she wrote, she consistently predicted that her audience would react negatively to her essay:

C.S.J.: How did you think your audience, these working class people who are reading the newspaper and might see your statement about your "father", ... how do you think they'd react to this?

Tina: They might think that either I want a reward of some sort or just fame or, you know... publicity.

C.S.J.: For yourself?

Tina: Yeah.

C.S.J.: Why do you think that?

Tina: Cause most... most people, if their family did something like that, they would want some type of reward or, you know...

C.S.J.: Money for themselves?

Tina: Yeah... I don't know...

C.S.J.: So you think your audience would kind of be skeptical about this and just say, aww, she'd just trying to get money. Why do you say that?

Tina: I don't know...

C.S.J.: It's just kind of a gut feeling?

Tina: Mmmhmm. Some people might, you know, be sympathetic.

She repeated these same predictions about twenty minutes later in the interview. I asked why she didn't change her paper so it would have affect her audience more positively, and she said that she didn't because she never looked at it again after she wrote the draft, except to change it a little for the final copy. Here, she pictured an audience, but, unlike her CLC text, she didn't seem concerned with how the moves she made affected that audience. It might just be that just doesn't know her audience as well, but there's also the issue of pretense—it's not really *her* doing this writing, it's not really her voice. And she has never talked to me about her father; this underlines the ludicrousness of this assignment in a school where families with the father present are the exception, not the norm. She didn't seem to have as much awareness of the types of effects that what she said would have on her audience. She paused more when she answered my questions; maybe she made more things up, I can't tell for sure.

What I didn't expect is how Tina positions her teacher in relation to her audience. When I was in high school, I felt like I was writing for my teacher. I still do. However, Tina says that she doesn't think about her teacher when she writes. She's given up on trying to write for a grade, on trying to predict how this teacher will react to her writing.

C.S.J.: OK. Can you think of what kinds of things she was expecting from you in this paper? Like... knowing who that teacher is, is there anything in here that you did for that teacher? Knowing that she would grade it a certain way?

Tina: No, not really. I don't remember... She... she don't... she don't have no certain style to her, she don't have no "you should write it this way" or "you should write it that way." She just, I don't know... Some stuff be good and she grade it low... and some stuff be bad but she grade it high.

C.S.J.: So how'd you decide how you'd write something in that class?

Tina: Umm...

C.S.J.: Could you predict what kind of grade you'd get?

Tina: I never went into no... cause some stuff she think just dragged on, when it be more information, so... you really can't predict her. You don't know what she might be thinking today.

C.S.J.: Did you try for a while to predict what she was doing?

Tina: At first.

C.S.J.: How'd that work?

Tina: Got me nowhere cause I didn't know what to think (laugh) I do it on my own.

Similarly, Tina doesn't seem to use the feedback she gets in school. When she does use it, the impression I get is that she takes it blindly. For example, when we talked about her school text, she showed me a rough draft and a final draft. In the final paragraph of her rough draft, she was descriptive and sensitive:

My father inspired me + I know he inspired many others. with his heart-touching story of heroism + death makes you want to help the next person you saw. I hear people speaking of my father in such a sweet way. They will say if it was me I'll do it the same way. My father touched many and inspired us all. He showed us there's always a little hero in us all.

The sentence, "I hear people speaking of my father in such a sweet way," is a nice image, and shows her ability to put herself in the place of the person she's supposed to pretend to be. But in the final copy, that image is gone. Her prose is more concise and more correct, but doesn't show as much personality:

My father reached out beyond the normal range of a human being to save lives. Which really deserves something more than publicity. He needs something that leaves his name and heroism as a legacy.

Tina doesn't remember what her teacher told her that led her to change her final paragraph, but she does say that if it were left up to her alone, she would have kept the original version.

Tina: Yeah, she said something about... I KNOW she said something about the last paragraph but I don't remember what she said. Cause I don't think I woulda changed it on my own.

Using conventions

As a "good student," Tina wanted her opening sentence to be "different." She thought of two alternative beginnings: to use a dictionary definition of a hero, or to come up with one of her own. Some of her classmates used the "quote Webster's" strategy to open their papers, and Tina didn't want to do the same thing. Besides, she didn't like the dictionary definition or the definition they'd been given in class the week before. She made some interesting decisions when choosing her voice for the paper and the things she'd say, as well as when she defined "hero." She wanted to be able to relate to the topic somehow, so the first thing she did was try to imagine what it would be like to be in that position. She greatly admires Martin Luther King and is writing her senior thesis about him—so she put herself in the shoes of his kids.

Tina: ...At first I didn't know what to write about. You know, I didn't model... I didn't model myself after nobody. I just sit there for a while, I'm like... she wants us to write about someone who saved somebody's life but he not really my father so how can I write about him, you know? So I just sat there for a while, and I thought about people's kids whose father died for a cause or something.

C.S.J.: And you came up with Martin Luther King

She also thought about Martin Luther King when she developed the definition of hero that she ended up using for her first paragraph.

Can she write?

One of the problems students like Tina face is that they are in a Western society which so often equates writing with "thinking on paper" [Hull and Rose (1989)]. As a result, we assume that

those who can't write, can't think. But that's not true, as a lot of research has discovered. There are reasons why writers write the way they do [Shaughnessy (1977), qtd. in Hull and Rose (1989)]. Even an "illiterate" writer often has literate intentions, and can explain why he or she did what they did in the text.

Even though she is innately bright, Tina lacks the skills to do well in college—she does not, even at her best, write at a college level, with the level of textual correctness required in a college composition class. And even for admission to college, the ability to write is most often measured quantitatively, at a textual level (the verbal SAT, the Test of Standard Written English, the California Achievement Tests.) Tina has ideas, but, especially in her school writing, she lacks the tools—the grammar, spelling and vocabulary—to express them. She also needs help to explore her ideas and elaborate on them.

But then again, there are tools that she doesn't lack. Her sense of transition in the reflection paper, for example, is very good, and when she writes for a purpose, her grammar gets better. I don't think she's aware of the transitions, but she is aware of the grammar. But she can't write only those things she wants to write and get through school.

So, granted that Tina has some textual ability, even if she only shows it when she wants to, an even more controversial question is, is Tina a *good* writer? I could give samples of Tina's writing to a dozen people, and each could answer very differently. Those who hold to strict textual literacy, that it takes a mastery of grammatical conventions and standard written English to be truly literate, would probably call all three of Tina's texts "illiterate." She tends to run-on sentences, echo the dialect of her neighborhood, punctuate oddly, and miss verb agreements.

Those who favor rhetorical literacy, in which a literate writer is one who has a strong sense of purpose and knows how to speak to an audience, would rate her school text a near-zero, since it doesn't really say anything. The CLC and Reflection texts, however, would be evaluated much more highly, since they both make strong, persuasive points, and display a real sense of audience.

What do I say? I say, and am not original in doing so, that neither of these evaluations is sufficient. I honestly think that Tina's CLC and Reflection texts are beautiful; each has its moments of real beauty (the first paragraph of the CLC, the sense of transition in the Reflection) but neither would get her into a four-year college. Neither would rate her an A, or even a B, in a college composition class, or even in the composition classes I had in high school. They aren't

“correct.” But it’s possible for a paper that is textually correct to have no rhetorical value whatsoever; it can express only stale ideas, if any, in a very dry, non-persuasive manner.

Another reason why this is a hard question is because her writing ability appears to be context-based. She seems to write so much better in texts that she has a vested interest in. Maybe my collaboration with her helped make her carpenter text the way it is, but she wrote her Reflection on her own, and it’s a vibrant, expressive text. This isn’t a phenomenon specific to Tina alone, of course. I know that I am a much better writer when I write texts that I want to write as opposed to texts that I don’t have much interest in. Other college students have told me the same thing. But I don’t think the difference in my writing is as obvious as it is in Tina’s writing. I know how to fake it. I know the rules. I know what questions I have to ask of my text and how I should answer these questions.

But Tina doesn’t. As a result, I think, her texts fall apart. It’s like her experiences in English class that she’d told us about. When she isn’t interested in an assignment, or when she doesn’t know what’s going on or how to get started, she sits there angrily. I think the important point here is that she doesn’t know how to start. She doesn’t know how to start asking the right questions. She grasps at straws; in the case of the essay for school, she grasps for commonplaces, trite expressions of admiration, and mourning.

But when Tina is in a situation where she knows what she’s doing, when she has a purpose, she can’t wait to get started, to start putting things on paper. She is a very purpose-driven writer. For example, when we worked on her CLC text, she wanted to move to the computer right away so she wouldn’t forget the ideas that were multiplying in her head. When I asked her to do a written reflection, she was reluctant until I explained to her that her text might one day be used to help new mentors from CMU do a better job. As soon as she had a real-world purpose, again, she was eager to start typing in her text. For her senior thesis, she could choose her own topic, and she chose to write about her idol, Martin Luther King, Jr. But she plans to write more than a mere biography; instead, she’s using her paper to teach his lessons again, to discuss her feeling that the young Black men and women of today are forgetting his struggle. While she avoided writing the school essay about “her” drowned father until the very last minute, she started researching her thesis three weeks before the due date.

What is literacy?

Again, I ask the question, “What is literacy?” During my experience over the past year, I found that it can be called many things, that the definition can be colored to fit almost any agenda, that

it changes with time, with place, and with culture. I now see literacy as more than an ideal or a standard, as more than reading or writing, as more than performance. I see it as a tool, as a practice, as an awareness. In that sense, a writer like Tina is “literate;” with collaborative support and especially with a meaningful agenda, a writer like Tina can use writing to state purposes, to transfer information, and to teach lessons. Further inquiry into literacy may help families, communities, mentors, and teachers foster this sort of empowering literacy.

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- Tina for her personality, insights, and willingness to talk to me about her writing.

Appendices:

I	Tina’s Community Literacy Text	IV	<i>Reflecting on Your Writing</i> task
II	Tina’s School Text	V	<i>Written Reflection</i> task
III	Tina’s Written Reflection	VI	Bibliography

Appendix I—Tina’s CLC text

A Cut Above the Rest

By Tina

So do you think that carpentry is a push-over job? A guy in dirty jeans who doesn't know a lot. Well it isn't!!! I felt the same way but I was proven wrong. Chuck made me realize that there's more to it than just a hammer and a nail.

First what he wore shocked me, it wasn't what I expected. Chuck wore nicely pressed jeans and jacket to match. The shock came when I looked at his shirt. It wasn't the kind of shirt that most maintenance men wear. This shirt was dressy the kind of shirt you would wear to the office. Second he looked the way I pictured him. The tall blond type with the strong deep voice. Sure of what he wanted to do and what he wanted to be.

What is a typical day for Chuck ? Well it depends on what day of the job it is. If it's at the beginning it very laid back smooth, but if it's the end it's "push push push". Also there are people to look for in a typical day—the disinterested kind, just out for a job . These are the type that don't love this job they are just in it for the money. What I'm trying to say is that they might jeopardize quality for a "quick buck". On the other hand there's also a good side to all this, there are times in a day where they will win awards for the beauty of one the homes that they have built.

Like any other job you get stressed out or what you call burnt out. Yes it once happened to Chuck . "You get tired of it, you feel caught in a rut. Everyone does in this industry. The way it is, people want it done fast and you might have to work sixty to seventy hours a week. It's not the physical part that gets you it's the mental part , it gets to the point where you just need a break." I know exactly how Chuck feels, I also get burnt out. To me, I think more kids should be able to take a lot more breaks because its hard going to school five days a week plus your parents breaking your back to either get a job or to stay out of trouble.

I wanted to something know very important from Chuck but when he gave me the answer I was very surprised. I asked him what made him want to be a carpenter? He said not in so many words that it came when he was very young he would just pick up things and cut and build. He thought if he could make money off of it he would. The reason this surprised me is because you wouldn't expect a little kid to run around the house saying, "I want to be a carpenter when I grow up." It doesn't seem like a job that most children would want to be or any child for that matter. It seems that most people fall into that job, like they really don't want to be there. Maybe if people weren't just trying to make money, instead just doing what comes naturally they will feel they same way Chuck feels about his job.

Also what surprised me was when I asked him would he advise someone to go into

carpentry he said yes. "It's either in your blood or it's not." Well the way I took it was as if he were saying if you're interested go for it. Don't let anything or anyone stop you. I feel more adults should encourage teenagers in general instead of putting them down because most of them don't care anymore. They think if one kid is bad we all are and its not true. That's where the old saying comes in, "don't judge a book by its cover." That's exactly what they're doing. That's why Chuck gets the respect he deserves from me because he seems to be there to help and encourage.

Chuck gave me the impression that his job is harder than you know or think. Trades are mostly manual labor the kind of work where you get your hands dirty but they are mentally hard as well. So that puts two type of strains on you.

To tell the truth we take for granted some of the beautiful things that are a carpenters joy, like a door , a window or our house for that matter .It's different when someone shows you their work with pride. You don't notice these things when they're around but when they are pointed out to you your outlook changes. Chuck showed me his finished piece which is the sanctuary in the community house by the way. Those doors and walls in your house really have meaning as to say someone did this with their hard labor not just there's the door. Those things take on new meaning. I know why Chuck choose to be a carpenter to display his artistry around to other people. So do you still think carpentry is a easy job? I don't. Chuck changed my way of thinking.

Appendix II—Tina's School Text

A hero to me is someone who goes out on a limb + risks his life for others, that's my father. Hero's are special for what they do. They are normal people up to a point, when they go beyond the ordinary live to do something extraordinary. Hero's are who makes sacrifices that are necessary to become a hero. Hero's are people who value other's lives as well as theirs.

My father really deserves something that states or shows the world he's a hero, because he make one sacrifices that no one dares to make unless they are very special. His life did account for something more than death. He could have saved his life first and left the others for dead. My father is an obvious hero because no normal person saves lives. They will save their self first before helping anyone.

My father reached out beyond the normal range of a human being to save lives. Which really deserves something more than publicity. He needs something that leaves his name and heroism as a legacy.

Appendix III—Tina’s Written Reflection

Comparison from school against Community Literacy Program

School writing is the worst ever done by me. Writing use to be my favored subject in middle school, but now its completely the opposite. My turn around came right after the first day in the 9th grade because they asked me to write about my summer vacation. That was more of a kiddish thing I thought ! Who am I, I thought to think it was kiddish so I went on and did it. After a while it never changed, it was one childish assignment after another. It bored me to death I wanted a challenge a change that's when Mr. Shakespeare came into the picture. He wasn't the most easiest author to read or understand that was the big challenge. It wasn't enough he only lasted for one semester I need a year around challenge.

Community Literacy Program was that type of challenge I needed to spark the old writing feeling that I had a long time ago. It made me realize that school writing doesn't have to boring . Only if I new the techniques they taught me awhile ago such as: collaborative planning, a writing mentor and group discussions. The group brought things out that my mentor and I over looked and my mentor helped me to express myself more clearly. Things like that cant help but to make you a better writer.

After I look back on my paper that was written in school I think I could have done a lot better. It's not up to my standards. Maybe because I didn't have the time I needed it. The paper I wrote at clc I feel theres no need to change that it's perfect as perfect can get.

When the school paper was written I didn't care if I got a good grade or not because writing at that time didn't appeal to me. I thought I'll turn this in and what ever I get I get. C.L.C. really made me want to make the document special and not just to do it for a grade it was for someone on the street to read. That was the exciting part someone besides the teacher was going to see this.

I feel that maybe the teacher of my high school and many others should go to a workshop at the Community Literacy Program. They can learn a thing or to maybe more teenagers will be more interested in writing.

Appendix IV—Reflecting on Your Writing

Everyone writes for a reason or a purpose, whether it is to say something interesting, to inform or persuade someone else, or to simply think about a question or experience by writing about it. This means that different parts of what you write—key words and phrases, paragraphs, or patterns of organization—are written that way for a reason. They are supposed to *work* for you the way you, the writer, intended.

Reflecting on the plan behind your writing—by looking closely at what you wrote—is one way to think about how well your intentions were met in your writing. Here is a two step procedure you can use. You will need a copy of your piece of writing, a marking pen, and a tape recorder and a tape.

Step 1. Review the Big Picture

Look over what you wrote, and then talk for a few minutes about your plans and goals for this piece of writing.

- What did you want to accomplish?
- What did you need to do to succeed?

Talk out loud into the tape recorder about your plan. As you do, be sure to think and talk about:

- your purpose and key point
- the audience for your writing
- any writing conventions or formats you used such as examples, quotes, comparisons, problem statements, etc.

Step 2. Do an In-Depth Reading

Now look closely at specific parts of what you wrote. Talk about the plan you can see behind your writing.

First, put an **X** by your title and each of the headings, paragraphs, and key sentences on your first page. Then put an **X** by three other important places where you might want to look closely at the plan behind what you wrote. In choosing the places to reflect on, be sure to think about:

- your purpose and key point
- your audience
- any writing conventions or formats you used, such as examples, quotes, comparisons, problem statements, etc.

Now go through each of the points you marked with an **X** and talk about:

1. Your **reasons** for including this or putting it this way were ...
2. Your **predictions** about how this is going to affect your readers (how you hoped the reader would respond) are ...
3. Your **alternatives** (other things you could have done, other plans or ideas you could have used, other techniques that might have worked) were ...

Appendix V—Written Reflection/Think Aloud

The point of this reflection is to get a student’s perspective on writing you have done in two settings—school and community. We want to find out what you think about your writing in these two settings, not what your teacher thinks or expects you to think. This is not a test; you are not going to be graded on this information. In order to hear what you are thinking as you do this, we would like you to *talk out your ideas as you write this reflection*.

First, you should turn on and test your tape recorder to see if it is recording properly. Be sure the tape is at the beginning and turn your recorder on to “record”. Follow the instructions on the separate sheet titled “Thinking Aloud While You Write”. If you have any questions, the researcher can help you.

1. After listening to your spoken reflection on the two pieces of writing—the writing you did for school and the writing you did at the Community Literacy Center—*compare* the two pieces of writing. In your comparison, pay attention to these main categories we talked about:

- purpose (goals) and key point
- audience
- format strategies (quotations, problem statements, narrative techniques, etc.)

2. Evaluate the end result of both pieces of writing (community and school). Describe the extent to which you are satisfied with your writing in both pieces. Try to identify particular parts that you liked and disliked about each piece of writing.

3. As you think about the situations in which each piece of writing was written, think about how you felt when:

- a) you were talking about the assignment in class (or in the group at the CLC); that is, when you first understood the writing task.
- b) it was time to actually begin writing.
- c) when you say the finished product.

As you write, let yourself “think out loud” so that we can listen together when you’re finished.

Appendix VI—Bibliography

The following bibliography includes, in addition to works cited, a number of papers, articles, and books which were instrumental in helping me shape my own definition of literacy.

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