# Changing and Growing as Teachers and Learners:
## A Shared Journey

### By Judith F. Evans & Ellen Policella

This article is the story of a unique episode in the lives of one teacher and one student in a teacher preparation program at a small, urban, liberal arts college. It chronicles events and describes the convergence of two personal journeys that brought us from failure to the successes that I, as a teacher educator and Ellen, my student and a teacher-in-training, experienced in a year we shared. Presented through personal narratives, this is a celebration of personal and professional commitment between a student and a teacher.

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Our purposes in sharing our personal narratives are to recount events and experiences, to describe our evolving collaboration, to identify the features of the social context in which our learning was embedded, and to discuss the implications of our findings for others who discover themselves in similar situations. Our intentions are to discuss our experiences as they relate educational research to the real world of teacher preparation (O'Connor, 1988).

The account of our shared experiences turned into a research project with a single question of what had

caused our failures as student and teacher. Qualitative research methods were used to examine descriptive data collected from a variety of sources including the participants' journals, student field logs and assignments, teacher responses, and field notes documenting the conversations in our ongoing dialogue. Entries were dated and logged as they were recursively collected and analyzed for categories and themes. As is characteristic of qualitative research, emergent categories from the descriptive data and guided us to new questions that arose as our story unfolded. New lines of inquiry related to ways we and the course changed, and how those changes affected us as teacher and learners. Thus, the research study on which Ellen and I collaborated took shape as we documented, and now present, our two perspectives.

Our story is a study of reflective practice weaving the narrative threads that link our past, present, and future together. We have taken risks by using personal narrative, thus leaving ourselves unprotected by objectivity and distancing. In doing so we have often struggled as we confronted powerful emotions and put them on view to the world beyond ourselves (Beattie, 1995). Through our reflections, we discovered the strength of story in our lives, its power to move the reader, and its ability to help us as writers construct and reconstruct our own personal and practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994). Through our two voices, as well as the discussions I developed, we speak separately and together about our individual and mutual growth as teachers and learners during that year (Anzul & Ely, 1988).

## The Context

The Elementary Education Program at Manhattan College was developed to prepare graduates who are self-directed learners, effective teachers, informed professionals, and caring human beings. The Program was designed to be consistent with current educational theory and the College's Catholic LaSallian tradition which is based on excellence in teaching, respect for individual dignity, and commitment to social justice. Each student is guided through a process of change from student to teacher, from being recipient of information to facilitator of learning. Students are encouraged to assume increasing responsibility for their own professional growth in order to achieve this transition.

The goal of the faculty is to prepare professional educators who are reflective, scholarly, and committed to the education of all learners. A faculty priority is modeling effective teaching, scholarship, and research combined with service to the community. Students examine the theoretical foundations of learning and teaching in relation to psychological, philosophical, historical, and sociological issues (Excerpts from *Elementary Education Handbook*, Manhattan College, 1995).

I came to the College as one of only two full-time faculty members charged with the task of planning and implementing a new elementary teacher preparation program. As one of the architects of the Program, I worked closely with my program

chair to design learning experiences for our students based on current constructivist theories of teaching and learning. Students would be guided to examine their prior histories as learners in largely traditional, behaviorist settings using that knowledge to make shifts in their personal paradigms to more social, interactive learning processes underlying a constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1986; Trent, Artiles & Englert, 1998). We planned for students to assume active roles as learners while building new conceptual understandings of teaching and learning. Courses would be the vehicles through which their learning and development as educators would occur.

One such course, Integrated Learning, Pre-K-Grade 3, is a methods course required of all juniors in the Elementary Education Program. It is here that students examine a developmentally appropriate, integrated curriculum in the primary grades. The course introduces students to the content and skills in language arts, math, social studies, science, and the arts. It presents methods and materials, effective practices with young children, use of technology, and assessment across the disciplines. Students have opportunities to discover the relationships between theory and practice in their weekly field placements in primary grade classrooms. Because of the limited size of the faculty, I am the sole instructor of this course, and all students in the Program must take it with me. If students do not successfully complete the course, they must repeat it in order to progress in the Program and meet requirements for state certification. I first met Ellen when she enrolled in the course in her junior year.

## The First Time Around: Resistance

It began like any other Fall on a college campus. Students returned anticipating their progress in their college careers. Professors had prepared their courses and awaited the arrival of new groups of students. It was a time of high expectations.

### Judith

Coming to a small college with a limited number of full-time faculty in our Elementary Education Program required me to move beyond my specialty of early language and literacy development to become a generalist and teach a variety of new courses. The students I encountered in my first two years at the College were part of a program in transition. Their earlier course work in teacher education had been taught from a traditional, behaviorist perspective consistent with their own previous histories as learners. They learned as individuals. They attended lectures, took notes on predetermined content, and memorized facts which they presented on tests as demonstration of their learning. Before redesign, students had minimal field work, usually limited to their senior student teaching.

Our new program, on the other hand, is grounded in constructivist theory. Students begin with themselves and examine their histories as learners and the theories behind their schooling. They also explore their beliefs about teaching and learning. They are expected to be active learners who seek and construct their own

meanings of new content by making connections with what they already know (Vygotsky, 1986).

I was unsure of my position with new students who were grade conscious, afraid to take risks, baffled by the open-ended, and resistive to taking responsibilities for their learning. I gave them assignments that required moving beyond given information by reflecting, responding, and making sense of new ideas. As a result, I received recall of key ideas from texts and class discussions, and reports of events that occurred in field placements, with no connections among elements of the course content and experiences, no connections between the known and the new. True to their traditional histories, students were concerned with how many pages they had to read or write. I was taking great amounts of time to respond to their work, but felt that they were only looking at their scores and ignoring the comments. They were concerned with their grades. I, on the other hand, was concerned and frustrated by what I felt to be the superficiality of their learning. The choice and open-endedness of my assignments were perceived by them as my being vague and unclear. I was requiring my new students to take a tremendous leap of faith to engage in a new way of learning without scaffolding their experiences with bridges over the chasms between their prior knowledge and current experiences.

When Ellen entered my course that Fall, she was part of a tight-knit clique of four individuals who rarely made a decision or move without the others. She was a follower who seemed very concerned with the status of her membership in the group. She rarely contributed to discussions in class, often sitting mutely with her friends. Her assignments seemed hastily done, rarely thoroughly developed to discover the richness that lay beneath the surface of ideas. All the while, I continued to ask Ellen to respond rather that report key points, make connections between old and new learning, and provide support for opinions and belief statements sprinkled throughout her papers. The examples or suggestions for further development I provided in feedback seemed ignored as this pattern continued throughout the term.

In the end, Ellen did not achieve the learning outcomes established for the course. She had not acquired sufficient knowledge of state requirements for effective teaching, of child development and its relationship to planning and teaching, of primary grade content and ways to integrate learning across the curriculum. Nor had she demonstrated the dispositions of effective teachers such as reflectiveness, perseverance, and open-mindedness to new ideas.

At the same time, course evaluations from that semester vividly articulated student criticisms of the inconsistencies they saw between my beliefs and teaching practices, and their frustrations with what appeared to them to be my inaccessibility for support of their efforts. Ellen's reactions were representative of the consensus of opinions of her classmates; however, because of her relative vulnerability at the time, the results of my performance had a more profound effect on her personal and educational development than on others.

When I first came to college I automatically declared my major as Elementary Education. I had always wanted to be a teacher when I was young... or an archeologist, psychiatrist, police officer and the list goes on. I have always been great with children, and it seemed like teaching was a logical choice because of all the creative freedom you have. And when I first started taking education courses, I seemed right on track. I enjoyed the program, possibly because the real world was still so far away.

As a junior in the Elementary Education Program, I entered Dr. Evans' course in Integrated Learning. I was not up for the work, the effort, the all-too-real atmosphere, or the time that she required. I had my friends with me who I thought were providing just enough help to get me through the course. I soon realized this field was beginning to demand a lot of me, perhaps much more than I had to give at the time. I am quite sure that I underestimated just how much work goes into becoming a teacher.

I found Dr. Evans confusing and unclear. The class always seemed unsure of what to expect because objectives for assignments seemed to change and grow more in-depth every time we asked a question. For example, in one big assignment we had to examine the elements of the learning environment in our field placements. We were all right describing the children, teachers, and physical settings, in reporting the daily schedule, listing the classroom rules, but we did not know what she wanted when she asked us to analyze the relationship between what we saw in the environment and the learning taking place.

Dr. Evans did not seem comfortable with us, nor did I feel comfortable with her or the class. There was a forced sense of community that I think I resented. It did not seem that the environment we were being told to want for our own classrooms was being modeled because it was so forced. Her ideas and methods seemed so different from the norm of other professors. They taught us about integration of learning in theory, but Dr. Evans expected to see evidence of our understanding of it when we planned and taught lessons to our peers. She also expected a lot more from our reflection papers, lesson plans, and units than did other professors in the program. Her criticisms seemed never-ending, as if they were based solely on what was done wrong, rather than what was done wrong and also done right.

I felt that nothing I ever did was good enough because this teacher already had a picture in her head of what kind of student she thought I was. There was a sense that this professor was forgetting that this was our first methods course, and that she was unapproachable to discuss such problems. What I didn't realize was that she was trying to change us as students, help us see new approaches to our old traditional habits. Suddenly the track I was on had changed, and I felt I had to rethink my career choice. It's hard to give your all to something if you're not sure why, and at that point I wasn't. Eventually I gave up trying and began to try to get by with as little work as possible. It was a recipe for disaster. The harder Dr. Evans pushed, the harder I

pushed in the opposite direction. I pushed from lack of motivation and from spite. I did not want to give this course or this professor an inch more than I felt either deserved. And I didn't.

### Discussion

That first semester resulted in unfulfilled expectations for both Ellen and me. Neither of us had achieved what we had anticipated for the semester. I seemed to have abandoned practices I considered effective in my role as facilitator of learning. I had not acquired knowledge of my students to use as a basis for my planning and teaching, nor had I guided them in the process of constructing new conceptual understanding of course content (Cooper, 1994; Myers & Myers, 1995; Burden & Byrd, 1994). As a result I had not brought about intended learning outcomes, especially for one student, Ellen (Cooper, 1994).

Contextual features that facilitate learning in a constructivist environment had been missing. Ellen, for one, had not received the kinds of praise and encouragement that would highlight her strengths and build her self-esteem (Ginott, 1972; Hitz & Driscoll, 1988.) And while we interacted with the content of the course through assignments, readings, and activities, Ellen and I did not interact with each other through experiences or direct dialogue that would have helped build a trusting relationship and facilitate shared understandings of course theory and content. The social, interactive process underlying a constructivist perspective of learning was missing (Vygotsky, 1986; O'Connor, 1998; Trent, Artiles & Englert, 1998). My students never felt part of a learning community nor safe to take risks necessary to build new knowledge of teaching and learning (Dodge, Jablon, and Bickert, 1994).

## Addressing Our Needs for Change: Reflection

The outcomes of the course had been devastating to both student and teacher. Disappointed in our achievements that term, Ellen and I began individual processes of reflection and sought counsel from mentors.

### Judith

As difficult as it was for me, I poured over student course evaluations at the end of the term. Painfully, I learned that my students thought I was inflexible, unresponsive to their needs, and inaccessible to them. I realized that in my eagerness to implement our new program, I had not allowed time for us to get to know each other and develop mutual trust before asking my students to make significant shifts in their beliefs and practices. I think that my practices had become inconsistent with my beliefs about teaching and learning because I was unsure of myself, my students, and the culture of my new college. I talked student-centered, but in actuality, was practicing teacher-centered. I was not able to translate new concepts into ideas the students could relate to. They would ask, "Why do we have to know this? Why can't

we do it the way we were taught?" I would respond, "Because we are trying to prepare you to be teachers for today and tomorrow, not teachers of yesterday." How glib and totally meaningless to my students!

Additionally, field placements gave students no evidence that any of the concepts or strategies I explained and demonstrated actually worked in real classrooms. I recognized my struggle in class sessions, and felt the distance between my students and me. I realized that as I became unsure of myself, I had become increasingly inflexible, demanding, and authoritarian. I faced the scathing course evaluations that clearly reiterated what I already knew. Just as in my feedback to my students, compliments were lost among the voices of dissent. But I had a stake in this new program and its implementation.

In my year-end review, I reflected on the effectiveness of my teaching with my program chair. We examined what I would need to do to turn the situation around. We began by identifying the major categories of student complaints: unapproachable, gives too much work, too much reading, inflexible, expectations are vague, unclear. Using additional evaluations, we also identified what was successful in other courses I taught to see what might be applied to work in this course. I recognized my needs to improve my relationships with my students, and to be more responsive to them. This would require me to trust the teaching and learning process in a constructivist classroom and trust my students and myself in it. I also realized that it was imperative for me to identify field placements that would provide experiences to complement student learning in the course. Resolutely I challenged myself to become the teacher that my students expected, the teacher I aspired to be.

### Ellen

I know I didn't do as well in that class as I could have and this meant I would have to take the course over if I wanted to continue as an education major. At times I had felt that everyone "got it" in the class except for me. Other times, it seemed like no one "got it," but were afraid to say so. I could have said, "Oh, yeah, I'll show you," but it seemed like a waste of energy because this was just not for me. I believe this was an indication of my immaturity and showed the kind of person I was at the time. At that point, I hated the class and the whole idea of becoming a teacher.

A poor relationship was established from the start, yet if I possibly had understood what I was doing to myself, the situation could have turned out differently. I was scared and unsure that this was even right for me. The poor student-teacher relationship was all I needed to really give me doubts and shut me down. The teacher was not all to blame, and I was not all to blame for what happened either. I felt that if the teacher had taken a moment to ask about my personal life maybe I would have been more comfortable in the class. Some of my responses would have made sense to her. My friends said I should talk to her about my grade, but I didn't think she would be interested. I could have come forward myself, but I felt very uncomfortable speaking personally to her.

Getting a D was a wake-up call for me and caused me to take a major step in my education. I was upset and confused when I took my work and the feedback from the term to a family friend who is a teacher. I wanted some help and direction, and I think by this time I was ready to face myself realistically. My friend asked me for some frank talk and honest self-examination. We looked back on old field logs, reflection papers, and major assignments. I could see how insignificant my work was in comparison with what I should have been doing. For example, on reflection papers I would barely broach topics to be addressed. I just wrote enough to make a page and a half to hand in. This might be acceptable for a first or second year student, but never for a junior, and I knew it. This was also not the work of the student I had always known myself to be.

Once my friend, the teacher, had looked at my work in relation to assignment expectations and agreed to a great extent with Dr. Evans' comments, I, too, understood that I had not really fulfilled the requirements of the course. I realized that I had short-changed myself and the teacher I hoped to become. I believe that this was the first indication of my commitment to myself, to my decision to become a teacher, and to my future students.

### Discussion

The concept of teacher as reflective practitioner introduced by Donald A. Schon (1983) presents the notion of teachers who reflect on past actions and outcomes in order to improve decisions and performance in the future. Reflection requires teachers to be introspective, open-minded, and willing to be responsible for decisions and actions (Ross, 1990). Being reflective involves constant self-analysis.

The first steps toward change for both Ellen and me began with feelings of failure and our realizations that nothing had turned out the way we had expected it to that term. We began by critically examining our own perceptions of the situation, and by analyzing our strengths and weaknesses as teacher and learner (McIntyre & O'Hair, 1996). Interestingly, at that point, we had begun to engage in parallel courses of action.

Ellen and I reviewed the past events of the semester. Each of us acknowledged our difficulties, sought counsel from outside parties, identified sources of our problems, established new personal and professional goals, and made commitments to them. The reflection process also required both of us to consider the perspectives of the other. As Margaret Anzul and Margot Ely (1988) note, once reflection is introduced the impetus to change is inevitable. "Facing up to one's imperfections, particularly as they impact on the people we teach, is often difficult. Doing something about it is not as easy as it sounds" (Anzul & Ely, 1988, p. 682). The paths we had taken were analogous to climbing two converging staircases leading to the same destination. The similarities were stunning.

## Second Chances: Collaboration

The course was not planned as a collaboration, nor was it intended to provide the context for a research project. But something special happened between Ellen and me when she repeated the course. Our awareness began with recognition of the changing nature of our relationship that emanated from a renewed commitment we both sensed in ourselves and each other from the start of the term. Thus, we began a process of ongoing reflections of our shared experiences that resulted in personal change and our growth as learners and educators.

*Judith*

I was apprehensive as I faced a course that I had been struggling with for the two years since I had come to the College. When the term began, I was especially cognizant of several students who would be with me for the second time, and the demands this would place on me as a teacher. Ellen was one of those students. We were two nervous, yet resolute people when we greeted each other on the first day of class.

The first class of the term began like many other first sessions. There was a myriad of administrative details to attend to such as introductions, attendance, collecting student data, and explaining course requirements and their scheduling. However, with the desire to set a positive tone for the term and to get students actively involved in their learning, I immediately led the class into an exercise creating a graphic organizer called a graffiti wall. First I asked the students to think of what the term in the title of the course, Integrated Learning, meant to them and to write any words, phrases, or ideas they had on a piece of scrap paper. They were then instructed to transfer their jottings to the blackboard. Unlike a cognitive map which is organized conceptually, notations on a graffiti wall can be a stream-of-conscious randomly-placed series of notations. Hesitantly, the first brave souls came to the board and eventually every student made some contribution to the wall. We examined the ideas as a class and the students became excited to discover both repetitions and unique ideas. We talked about the process of carrying out the assignment and my purposes for doing it. Through discussion, they realized that I was using this strategy as a way of assessing their current knowledge of the focus of the course. When I followed the graffiti wall with a request for students to write one or two questions about things they wanted to know or hoped to learn in this course, a number of them realized that they were participating in a KWL activity: what they *k*now, what they *w*ant to know, and what they have *l*earned. I had activated prior knowledge on several levels, helping students make their first connections to work covered in previous courses. The class ended in a hubbub of relaxed, enthusiastic chatter.

Still I was aware of those who were in the course for the second time. I made a point of talking to each one privately after that first class. Ellen and I chatted for

about fifteen minutes in the empty classroom after others had left. We began with pleasantries about the summer and then moved to the subject that each of us was preoccupied with, repeating the course. In that first conversation, we declared our commitments to be open-minded, to free ourselves of the negative legacy of our previous term together. When I told her I wanted this to be a fresh start for both of us I secretly prayed that my actions would reflect my intent. And so we started.

Our initial conversation turned into a dialogue that lasted throughout the term. It marked the genesis of our collaboration, our collegial partnership in the systematic examination of our experiences. We began chatting on a regular basis after class, in the halls, and in my office. Her response papers became a dialogue journal, and I began keeping my own journal documenting the content of our conversations and my experiences in the course. I also took advantage of opportunities to get feedback from her student perspective of various teaching strategies I demonstrated, the field placements, and the way I delivered the course content.

As a reflective practitioner I understood that the information I was gathering might hold answers to what had gone wrong the year before. As a qualitative researcher, I realized that what was occurring was indeed teacher research as we systematically collected, documented, and analyzed our data.

By this fall a number of circumstances had changed. First of all, I had a shared history with about 90 percent of my students through two years of advisement and from other courses they had taken with me. I was cognizant of their prior experiences and where they were on the continuum of their development as teachers. They had experienced more theoretical consistency within the program than previous students, and had begun to see teaching and learning from new perspectives. I carefully scrutinized and selected placements for their weekly field experiences so that practices being observed were consistent with ideas students encountered in class.

I began to listen more insightfully to my students and ask for their input. I even conducted a midterm course evaluation to get feedback from them so that I could make further adjustments during the second half of the course. I encouraged conferences while projects were in progress instead of waiting until work was completed before offering suggestions. I was becoming more facilitative than didactic, and the students saw it. They began to seek my help. I began to notice changes in Ellen, such as her positive attitude, the thoroughness of her work, her use of feedback from me and her peers, her independence without her clique of friends, and the leadership role she was taking with classmates.

### Ellen

I was miserable the night before it was time to go back to Integrated Learning for the second time. I had taken an unpleasant and uncomfortable situation, and because of my own stubbornness, let it hurt me. And as a senior, I was embarrassed to have to take this class again. But one thing I had established for myself in the

semester away from Dr. Evans was that I knew I wanted to teach. I also knew from other successes that I could do the work, so I felt ready for what I knew would be a challenge.

On the first day of class I wasn't sure what kind of attitude I would have with Dr. Evans. One part of me knew I had to clean the slate and start fresh. Another part of me didn't know if I was ready to give her another chance. But I decided to use what I learned about myself to excel academically, personally, and professionally in Dr. Evans' course this time.

Honestly, from the second the teacher walked into the room for the first class, I could feel that she, the class, and the environment were different. We did a fun activity on the first day that helped us socialize and relax. At the end we discussed what we had done, our reactions to it, and the ways this activity could be used with young children, too. A year ago I used to get annoyed doing activities like this. Now I saw how she was modeling useful teaching strategies. We chatted at the end of the first class about a fresh start, and by the end of our talk, I felt good about what was to come.

I also remember when I wrote my first reaction paper, I was honest about a lot of my concerns related to taking the course again. At first I would get annoyed at all the stuff that was repetitive to me, but I knew it was unavoidable, and I began seeing it differently. Dr. Evans' comments were supportive and stated that she, too, wanted to start over. I was encouraged.

Dr. Evans seemed more approachable in a way I could not describe at first. Her comments were encouraging, notes on written assignments were helpful, and she seemed interested in our reactions to our field experiences. I wanted to show the professor what I had not allowed her to see in me as a student the last time. I was determined to get an A in this course because I knew I could.

I began participating more in class, and Dr. Evans started to point out my good points as well as suggest what my work lacked. This time, I appreciated it rather than resenting it. I began to form relationships with people I had never met before. I was on my own, and felt independent and good about myself. I had never realized what a difference having your friends with you makes... and it was not all positive. Even my journals were coming out better. I started stating "what" and "why" to support my ideas, something Dr. Evans was always trying to get out of me before. I felt confident enough to express my opinions on my observations. This helped me build my ideas about teaching. And Dr. Evans encouraged me, and seemed to care more. Even if she didn't agree with me, she would praise me for looking deeper into a situation. It felt good to please this professor who had seemed so hard to please before. I could see how useful the specifics in her comments could be to me.

My placement was a little too progressive for me. But I realized that I was getting to see examples of what we were learning about in our course. I began to be able to identify classroom practices and see all the connections that I never did the first time around. Now it seemed all right to laugh in class, and making mistakes was less fearsome. Finally, the risk-free environment we had always learned about!

*Discussion*

The collaboration between Ellen and me in our second year together in Integrated Learning evolved spontaneously, but became systematic. Often, collaborators are self-selective as they are simultaneously challenged by the same real-life problems and mutual concerns (DiPardo, 1996). In this case, Ellen and I were drawn together by our prior experiences, disappointments, and concerns for our effectiveness as teachers. We began to search together for solutions grounded in the realities of the difficulties we had experienced. Two key factors in the success of that collaboration were our ongoing communications, and the dispositions of open-mindedness and commitment that each of us brought to the situation.

Our ongoing communications and interactions throughout the term became central to our growth and learning (Vygotsky, 1986; Tarule, 1996). Indeed, our use of language helped shape our new understandings of ourselves, each other, and our practices (Barnes, 1992; Tarule, 1996). As Jill M. Tarule (1996) notes, "Dialogue is making knowledge in conversation" (Tarule, 1996, p. 277). And so it was with us that the meaningful dialogue we carried on through oral and written conversations changed the nature of our relationship and brought special meaning to our shared experiences. Our learning was guided and extended by our communications as we explored our responses and ideas.

Finally, as Ellen noted, conditions were being created where risk-taking was both invited, and now, possible. However, a facilitative learning environment would not have been possible were it not for changes in my teaching practices and the dispositions we brought to the classroom. The display of positive attitudes that foster learning and genuine human relationships (Cooper, 1994) were revealed in our open-mindedness and commitment to ourselves, each other, and the course we were involved in. Second chances had provided many challenges for us, but second chances also brought opportunities for our growth and change as teachers and learners.

## Outcomes and Implications: Change and Meaning

When the term ended, Ellen and I felt successful, and we felt a confidence born of that success. We realized that we had experienced something special as student and teacher, and that the collaboration we had forged at the beginning of our second term together had helped each of us change. We met several times to examine our shared journey for the unique features and common threads that contributed to our growth. We analyzed the written accounts of our experiences for their outcomes and implications.

## Outcomes

### *Judith*

I was a different teacher from the one who had taught the course last year. I felt more comfortable and confident in my knowledge of my students, in my responsiveness to them as individuals and as a class, with the field placements I had provided, in my knowledge of my content, and in my ability to help students construct their understanding of it. Most important for me were the relationships with Ellen and so many of my students that I had developed by that time.

In getting to know Ellen, I discovered the seriousness of her intentions to become a teacher. The substance of her reflection papers and field logs revealed the connections she was making between theory introduced in class and practices she observed in her weekly field placement. For instance, her enthusiasm for her field placement was evident, yet she was able to question and critically examine practices she observed in relation to her own beliefs and new knowledge. By the way, Ellen earned her A.

We laughed a lot more this year. We faced our struggles supportively as a community, and we reveled in our discoveries and accomplishments together. After the term ended, one of the comments I received most frequently in my students' course evaluations was, "Through my learning in class and field experiences, I have begun to feel like a *real* teacher in this course." And so did I. Through learning and growing on a shared journey with my students, and particularly Ellen, the joy came back to my teaching this year.

### *Ellen*

I realized that I had undertaken my work with a positive attitude and new levels of effort and determination to do well in the course. I had participated more actively throughout the course. I tested my ideas and became a leader in class and in my placement. I was able to use my earlier experience in the course to clarify expectations to others in a way that contributed positively to shaping our community of learners, which this time included the professor. I saw the growth in my independence. This year I really learned the course content. More importantly, this experience taught me so much about being a teacher, an adult, and gave me assurance in my abilities that I do not think I had before.

I cannot place my finger on one specific incident that brought about my growth, yet in the course of the year, my confidence in myself and my role as a future teacher became clear to me. Surely, Dr. Evans' personal interest, her modeling, encouragement, and belief in second chances were all part of it. I feel that my experiences as a learner will help me adequately express to my future students that learning is a process and can be a struggle. It certainly will help me be more encouraging and understanding to those students who don't find learning easy, because it wasn't for

me. I am sure my struggle has made me a stronger person as well as potentially a stronger teacher.

Moving beyond our individual accomplishments, we identified our positive attitudes and commitment to ourselves, each other, and the course as keys to our successes. Each of us had been willing and determined to change. We had become comfortable with the collaborative, social, interactive nature of teaching and learning in a constructivist classroom, and we had learned to trust ourselves and each other in that process. Our relationship had shifted from one of locked horns to joined hands, and the result was our growth as teachers and learners. In the end, we realized, too, that we had to take our collaboration one step further and tell the story of our shared journey to others in an accessible and understandable way.

## Implications for the Real World of Classrooms

Researchers investigate discourses and actions within educational settings to gain deeper understandings of the teaching and learning process (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998). Practice and research inform each other as we use the ideas, tools, concepts, and language of the profession to construct meanings from the events in classrooms. At times we are required to assume multiple roles as teachers, learners, and researchers, a complex, multidimensional and overlapping process (Peterson, 1998). But when we traverse the boundaries of those multiple roles we can promote our learning and our professional development. Guided by the belief that research such as this study has potential to result in refinement of our teaching practices and improvement of our students' achievements (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998), we present the implications of our findings for others, like us, who spend their lives in classrooms.

First, narrative can serve as a powerful method of inquiry as well as a way of knowing. Story allows researchers to understand their findings and readers to enter into a vicarious experience of what was researched (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). For instance, "... if a teacher understands (can tell) the story of her own education, she will better understand (tell the stories of) her students' education... Teacher education is a process of learning to tell and retell educational stories of teachers and students" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994. p. 150). Through our ongoing reflective process Ellen and I discovered the power of narrative as a way of examining our experiences, of making discoveries, and of reporting our findings. The unfolding story of our shared journey guided us to consider what we knew, how we knew it, and what we cared about (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). That story, recorded and analyzed systematically, led us to our discoveries.

Next, the ongoing communication consciously developed in the second year resulted in a shared trust, respect, and mutually supportive relationship between

student and teacher. Candid, positive communications between teacher and student helped create a facilitative, risk-free learning environment in the classroom (Ginott, 1972; Dodge, Jablon & Bickart, 1994). We also realized that the power of negative remarks can often obscure the positive messages included within comments. Successful communication between Ellen and me had a ripple effect that spread to the rest of the class, for ours became the communication model for the classroom community (Barnes, 1992).

We also discovered the power of modeling that took place on a variety of levels during the course of the year described in this study: modeling skills of effective teaching through modeling of strategies that help students construct knowledge; modeling critical thinking processes including decision making and problem solving; modeling collaboration between students and teachers as a way of promoting growth in both; and modeling an educator's disposition as lifelong learner in order to improve the effectiveness of her teaching, regardless of numbers of years of experience. Ellen became aware of the roles and responsibilities of teachers by the knowledge, skills, and dispositions I modeled. The efficacy of modeling crosses the limits of age of students, setting, and discipline to gain its significance in education (Burden & Byrd, 1994; Myers & Myers, 1995; Cooper, 1994; Morrison, 1997).

Another implication for practitioners is that change takes time. It is vital for us to recognize that substantive changes in knowledge, skills, and dispositions, be they personal or programmatic, regardless of discipline or educational level, occur slowly (Routman, 1991). Shifts in belief systems and practices require us to ask important questions, test our ideas, and reflect on outcomes. We need time to pursue those answers. We must remember that when going through change we all have our own zones of proximal development through which our learning must be scaffolded (Vygotsky, 1986). We need to allow time to travel through those zones along the paths to change.

Finally, the honest, critical reflection that we engaged in became an agent of change in the classroom (Schon, 1983; Anzul & Ely, 1988; McIntyre & O'Hair, 1996; Ross, 1990). In a learning community, when we assume the role of reflective practitioner, we become both teacher and learner. Through our reflections, those introspective, critical analyses of our behavior, Ellen and I learned about ourselves, each other, and the demands of the teaching profession. We assumed the multiple roles of teacher and learner, and in the end, our collaboration produced insights that helped us grow individually and together as professional educators.

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