

CHAPTER 2.

BECOMING A WRITER TEACHING WRITING, 1963–1971

There are some people, writers included, who do not think that the testimony of writers should be taken seriously. They believe that the artist works dumbly, not knowing what he is doing. I believe that the artist is first of all a craftsperson and knows a great deal of what is being done during the act of writing. I think that a careful study of how writers write reveals significant information.

– Donald Murray, *A Writer Teaches Writing*, 2nd ed.

[The] process by which successful writers have brought their work to its final form has not been the interest of the pedagogue. Rather has he dissected the finished product—and from such analysis he has delivered to inarticulate students counsels of literary perfection.

– Raymond Weaver, qtd. in Berlin *Rhetoric and Reality*

I was hired at the age of 39 as a teacher and I didn't know how to teach. I looked at the textbooks—one of them was the Fowler approach and things like this. I read a good many of the books on the train between Durham and Boston at the time in the summer. I came here in July and I was going to teach in September and they made no sense at all, any more than my high school and college texts had. They were written by people who didn't write, and if you followed their instructions, you'd write badly.

– Donald Murray, “A Conversation About the Writing Craft with Don Murray”

I like to imagine a young(ish) Donald Murray in the summer of 1963, riding the train back and forth between Durham, New Hampshire and Boston, contemplating his mid-life career change as what we have come to think of as “the Sixties” was getting underway. Murray, 39, had a wife and three kids to think about as he rode the rails to a new life in a place that was not new, at least to him. In signing on at UNH, he had agreed to uproot his family from the comfortable upper-middle class suburbs of northern New Jersey where they had settled, surrender the large Victorian home that stood as a symbol of all his professional success, and, by his account, forfeit roughly half of his annual salary. Most significantly, though, he had chosen to embark on a new career for which he had no formal training, background, or experience, and to take on

a new professional identity, *teacher*, which must have stirred up at least some demons from his past.

As we learned in the last chapter, Murray's decision to become a college English professor was motivated by both practical and professional considerations. A profile published in the UNH campus newspaper at the start of his second year on campus confirms his initial plan to pursue his dream of becoming a fiction writer: "I [first] came to the University as an out-of-state student because of the artistic climate created by Carroll [Towle]," Murray explains in the article. "I came back to enjoy the same climate" ("I Have to Write" 10). The photo that accompanies the piece conveys a sense of Murray's writerly persona at the time. Seated in his home office, feet up on a desk, a tower of five-inch-thick binders containing the manuscript of his first novel, *The Man Who Had Everything*, on a table nearby, Murray is the very image of the mid-twentieth century American novelist.

As he points out in the epigraph at the start of this chapter, however, Murray's most immediate task that summer of 1963 was to learn how to teach, and to teach journalism, specifically. Since there were so few such courses on the books for him to teach at this time, however, he was forced to become a teacher of other kinds of writing, as well, and, just as important, of other kinds of students. It was because of Murray's experiences teaching writing and students beyond journalism that he was drawn into a new and unanticipated role during the early to mid 1960s, *reformer*, an identity he would try, at times, in the years that followed, to shake but which, eventually, would come to define him for the entirety of the second half of his career (and into his retirement).

In this chapter, I explore the early years of Murray's transition from writer-for-hire to writer-teaching-writing. Having examined, in the last chapter, the *why* of his journey, I begin, in this chapter, to investigate the *how*. How did Murray become a reformer? And how did he go about his reform work (and with whom)? In what follows I focus, first, on Murray's work on campus, at UNH, teaching Freshman English and Expository Writing, the latter a class for pre-service English teachers. I then turn to examine his work away from campus and, in particular, his collaborations with an important early sponsor, the New England School Development Council (NESDEC), which gave him access to a broader audience of practicing teachers with whom to experiment and test his emergent ideas about composition pedagogy. Murray's earliest reform work can, as we will see, be situated within James Zebroski's claim that "The origin of most of the key ideas in composition and rhetoric from 1968 to 1980 came from those associated with schools of education or with teacher education" (29). While the origin of many of Murray's earliest ideas about composition and rhetoric stemmed from his experience as a practicing, professional writer or from his reading in the

testimonial literature of writers and journalists, his work in teacher education at UNH and beyond provided the opportunity to begin to think critically about composition pedagogy during his early years in the field and develop his own unique approach.

EARLY INTERVENTIONS WITH “THE PEDAGOGUE”

In keeping with the typical teaching load of English faculty members at UNH during the early 1960s, Murray taught four courses per semester in his first years back on campus. His primary responsibility was a news writing course, but he also taught two service classes—Freshman English and Expository Writing, the latter a newly-created advanced composition course for pre-service teachers which, according to Murray, had gone unstaffed prior to his arrival “because of English department snobbery about methods courses” (*My Twice-Lived Life* 137). Given how little else there was for Murray to teach at this time, he signed on for Expository Writing despite the fact that he had no advanced graduate training in English or education, no experience working with pre-service teachers, and was, himself, a high school dropout.

As he explains in two summative reports written to department chair Bingham during his first year, Murray found the work in Expository Writing gratifying beyond expectation. The class, he declares with enthusiasm in his report on the fall semester (1963), was his “most successful,” its success being measurable in the “evolution of the papers” his students wrote and their ability to operationalize his primary objective: “to make the student experience the craft of writing” (Murray, Report on First Semester). In his spring semester report (1964), and despite the fact that he hadn’t taught the course again that term, Murray returns to ruminate on his experience in expository writing, explaining that it was, of all the classes he taught his first year, “the course in which, I believe, I teach the most about my craft” (Murray, Report on Second Semester).

As we also learn from Murray’s spring semester report, it wasn’t just the experience of teaching Expository Writing that was revelatory, however. It was the experience of teaching Expository Writing and Freshman English *simultaneously* that was so impactful for him. Filled as it was with students who were only marginally interested in learning to write, Freshman English was the ideal “laboratory,” as Murray put it, in which he could “test out the techniques” about “the craft of writing” he was teaching his future teachers in Expository Writing. In sum, Murray’s unanticipated work with first-year students in Freshman English and pre-service English teachers in Expository Writing provided an important early opportunity to begin to theorize about composition pedagogy—and to realize that he found such work meaningful, even fun.

Of what did Murray's early theorizing consist? His reports to Dr. Bingham offer some clues. In his fall report, he shares his concern about the quantity of writing students were asked to produce in Freshman English. Murray apparently felt that an important aspect of composition pedagogy was sheer practice, of which, it seems, he believed students were not getting enough. Of his experience teaching Freshman English, a class with a heavily proscribed curriculum, standardized syllabus, and limited set of assignments, Murray writes, "I feel it is important that students be given the opportunity to write." Again, later, he writes, "The student can only learn to write if he writes." His Freshman English students, he reports, wrote seventeen short pieces during the semester (the standardized syllabus specified that they only need write ten). His Expository Writing students wrote fourteen. "I do not feel that the number of papers required from an individual student can be cut," Murray writes in the conclusion of his fall report. "In fact, I intend to increase it wherever possible. . . . The quality of their work depends directly on its quantity." Thus, frequent opportunities for practice seems to have been an important early element of Murray's approach to composition pedagogy (Murray, Report on First Semester). He would later operationalize this belief by implementing a weekly five-page writing requirement in many of the writing courses he taught.

In Murray's reports to Bingham circa 1963 and 1964, we also see the kernel of what would later become a central tenet of his method: his belief that to improve at writing students must learn and experience what the practicing, publishing writer knows and not just write assignments to satisfy the teacher. "I want to place a challenge before those students who study writing with me," Murray writes in his fall report. "I want them to experience the craft of writing and rewriting. I want them to approximate whenever possible the job of the professional writer." That job, as Murray understood it, was one of identifying and solving the myriad problems that arise for the writer during the act of composing. In this way, Murray conceived of writing as a kind of problem-solving activity—for himself and his students. "I believe that my teaching has a vitality because I am solving the same problems of writing which face the student," he explains, and therein lies a third additional important element of Murray's early theorizing about composition pedagogy: writing teachers and writing students are on the same plane, trying to solve similar kinds of problems and, engaged, essentially, in the same task (Murray, Report on First Semester).

MAKING WRITERS OF TEACHERS

As I suggested earlier, Murray's earliest work in what was at this time barely an academic field can be situated within accounts published by composition

historians who, with Patricia Stock, have argued that collaboration with K–12 teachers was foundational to the growth and development of composition and rhetoric from the 1960s through the 1990s. While Murray was not a member of a school or college of education he was drawn, as we have seen, into teacher education via his involvement in the expository writing course at UNH. In his report to Dr. Bingham on his second semester in the classroom, Murray describes his preparations for teaching the course again the next fall and how “in order to make it a more effective course for teachers,” he had visited a number of area high schools to try to better understand how writing was being taught in English classrooms of the day. In this way, Murray was drawn further out of his writer’s study and away from his writer’s desk and into the world of K–12 education. Then, during his second year at UNH he had another experience which drew him out and away even further (Murray, Report on Second Semester).

Zebroski argues that the “social formation” that became contemporary composition studies was largely a “bottom[s] up” undertaking, created not by, or not *just* by, professors of college English but, rather, by what he dubs “early informal, unstable, often antidisciplinary collectives of people” who were engaged, in one way or another, with the task of teacher education (29). As I’ve argued above, Murray’s work during his first years in the profession can be situated within this claim, with his most significant early engagement in the kinds of “collectives” Zebroski describes beginning in the fall of 1964, when he gave a public lecture on writing in Hollis, New Hampshire that led to a multi-year collaboration with NESDEC. A regional professional association for school administrators, NESDEC, not exactly an “antidisciplinary collective,” was a key early partner for Murray, who was all too happy to provide the antidisciplinarianism. Its executive secretary, Richard Goodman, formerly the superintendent of schools in Hollis and the person to whom Murray dedicates the first edition of *A Writer Teaches Writing*, was concerned with improving the teaching of writing in K–12 education and so was interested in Murray’s efforts to devise new approaches to composition pedagogy.²⁵ From 1964–1971, under Goodman’s leadership, NESDEC served as Murray’s most important collaborator and sponsor, validating his authority and expertise and giving him a platform from which to speak. If Murray’s early work at UNH in Expository Writing had given him access to a small audience of future teachers to influence and educate in his emergent writer-based approach to composition pedagogy, his work with NESDEC offered him access to a much larger audience of practicing teachers with whom to further develop his ideas, approach, and arguments. If, as Raymond Weaver puts

25 Murray’s dedicatory note to Goodman reads: “This book is dedicated to Dick Goodman who must accept full responsibility for luring the author into the maze of elementary and secondary education.”

it in the epigraph at the start of this chapter, “[The] process by which successful writers have brought their work to its final form has not been the interest of the pedagogue,” Murray, with NESDEC’s help, would try to make it so.²⁶

Murray’s work with NESDEC got underway in 1964 when he penned a professional development proposal for a program to “improve the teaching of composition in secondary schools” by applying “the experience of the professional writer to the teaching of composition in the high school.” The idea, as Murray explains it, was “To encourage the student to approach the task of composition in the same way that the writer does his job” (Preliminary memorandum). Following this first proposal Murray soon got to work on a short pamphlet entitled *What a Writer Does*, to set down, for the first time, his philosophy and method of composition pedagogy. The plan was that NESDEC would publish *What a Writer Does* and distribute it to members of its teacher network and Murray would use the pamphlet as an instructional aid during professional development workshops and seminars with NESDEC teachers. As the pamphlet evolved, however, eventually expanding into *A Writer Teaches Writing*, so did Murray’s work with NESDEC. In the summer of 1967, he designed and led a first-ever summer professional development workshop for teachers at Bowdoin College at which he and a small cohort of NESDEC instructors initiated attendees in Murray’s emergent writer-based approach to composition pedagogy. This work continued for three more summers, giving Murray the chance to interact with and learn from and about practicing school teachers.²⁷

Beyond directing summer workshops Murray expanded his professional development work with NESDEC during the 1967-68 academic year when he taught his first graduate course, *Writing and the Teaching of Writing*, at NESDEC’s headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Here an important change in his approach to professional development took place as he shifted away from trying to tell teachers about what writers do (as he had done at Bowdoin) and towards trying to make writers of teachers. At the first Bowdoin workshop in 1967, for example, Murray had organized each day around a series of lectures

26 Weaver was among several English professors who argued for the benefits of having professional writers work with writing teachers. In a post-mortem on the 1962 Project English summer conferences, Erwin Steinberg makes a similar suggestion, advocating that NCTE establish an advisory board of “highly competent professional writers to work with college professors of English on composition courses and programs” (150). Others also argued, as well, that teachers of writing should, themselves, be writers. In *Teaching Creative Writing*, Lawrence H. Conrad writes, “The teacher should be himself a writer. He need not have attained fame, or even have published his work. But his knowledge of the problems of the writers, and his sympathy with them, will proceed out of his own continued endeavor to write” (Conrad, qtd. in Myers 116).

27 In 1969, Murray brought this work back to campus when he served as the lead composition instructor in a National Defense Education Act (NDEA)-sponsored summer workshop held at UNH.

and discussions on writerly topics such as pre-writing, writing and rewriting; motivation; assignments; correcting papers; diagnosis and treatment of common writing problems, etc. Nowhere, however, does the itinerary from the workshop indicate that there would be time for participants to actually *write* or consult with Murray, a member of his staff, or other participants *about* writing (NESDEC Summer Workshop in the Teaching of Writing).²⁸ This changed in Cambridge, however, where Murray organized his syllabus around not writerly topics or concepts but, rather, the production of two major writing projects: a biography or autobiography on a subject of the students' own choosing and an expository or persuasive piece "concerning a method of teaching writing" (Syllabus and Registration Form) The syllabus for the course shows, further, that Murray established staggered monthly deadlines for students to submit drafts of their work-in-progress throughout the year-long course and designated two hours of each class meeting for individual conferences. In the promotional materials for the seminar, Murray summarizes his approach thus: "The teacher will write so he will experience the problems and solutions of the published writer. At each step he will be shown how this approach may be adapted to the classroom" (Syllabus and Registration Form).

In this way, that year of 1967-68, and with the help of pre-publication chapters of *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Murray walked his students through an early version of what he understood to be a "process" approach to teaching writing, so that they could go back to their own classrooms and do the same with their students. Also Murray began to develop an approach to professional development that would become common in both teacher education programs and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiatives: ask teachers to write, ask teachers to reflect on their writing, ask teachers to consider the implications of their learning for their teaching of writing.

The most ambitious, albeit unrealized, aspect of Murray and Goodman's collaborations during these years came in the form of a funding request, called Project Write, to launch "a national program to train high school English teachers to become effective writing instructors" (Project Write 13). In their request, Murray and Goodman outline their plans to develop and implement a pilot protocol that would train over 200 New England English teachers in Murray's writer-based approach to composition pedagogy. These teachers would then

28 Eventually Murray adjusted his approach at Bowdoin, as he explains in his article "Your Elementary Pupil and the Writer's Cycle of Craft": "At the week-long workshop in the teaching of writing which I conduct for the New England School Development Council at Bowdoin College each summer, I make the teachers write, and when I do they become pupils. They are surprised when they suffer the agonies of their students and even more surprised when I tell them they suffer the agonies of the writer" (9).

implement his method in their classrooms and submit to an assessment protocol that would evaluate the effectiveness of the method with roughly 2,000 students. From the assessment results Murray and Goodman would make adjustments to the approach and launch a more ambitious program to reform the teaching of writing nationwide. Project Write was not just about changing writing pedagogy, however, it was also about changing English. “Composition is but a small part of the English curriculum,” Murray and Goodman write in the early pages of their funds request. Citing findings from a joint U.S. Office of Education/NCTE report they point out that composition is “emphasized only 15.7 percent of the time” in U.S. English classrooms. This, they argue, stems from the fact that teacher education programs do not emphasize composition instruction enough and do not call on actual writers to help shape the training endeavor. In this way, then, Project Write was more than just a proposal to change the way writing is taught in schools, it was also an argument for the reform of the discipline of English, itself (Project Write 10-11).²⁹

A PRACTICAL METHOD OF TEACHING COMPOSITION

While their Project Write funding request stands as the most tangible sign of the scope and extent of Murray and Goodman’s ambitions, the most concrete outcome of their work together, without a doubt, is *A Writer Teaches Writing: A Practical Method of Teaching Composition*. Now a key work in composition’s canon and the most-frequently cited of all of Murray’s publications according to Google Scholar, *A Writer Teaches Writing* stands as an artifact of a specific historical moment—in both Murray’s career and in the development of composition and rhetoric. Published three years prior to that other canonical early text, Emig’s *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, *A Writer Teaches Writing* predates and anticipates much that was to come in the emergent modern field, beginning with the notion that to learn how to teach writing effectively we must examine the writing processes of writers. In his 1983 review of Emig’s book, Ralph F. Voss argues that *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* was “the first significant study of student composing processes, giving impetus to the consciousness of writing as process that prevails in today’s composition theory and pedagogy” (278). While Voss’ first assertion is certainly true, his second is surely debatable

29 As far as I have been able to tell, after two rounds of trying Murray and Goodman were unsuccessful in identifying a partner to fund the initial stage of their Project Write work, for which they sought \$325,000 or roughly \$2.5 million in today’s dollars (the all-in price for the full project they envisioned was \$1.5 million or roughly \$12 million in today’s dollars). Still, their funding request signals the scope and scale of their plans as well as their intention to reform the teaching of writing and English far beyond NESDEC’s regional school network.

since Murray, in *A Writer Teaches Writing*, got there first, albeit via a less empirical methodology—autoethnography.³⁰

For students of Murray's work, *A Writer Teaches Writing* is many things, a book that was (and still is) unlike almost any other of its kind.³¹ It is, first and foremost, an argument for the reform of composition pedagogy and, more broadly, the discipline of English. Second, it's a kind of research report on Murray's writing process,³² which he takes to be *the* writing process and therefore universally transferable but is really just his interpretation of the process by which he wrote (mostly nonfiction).³³ Third, *A Writer Teaches Writing* is a guide to an inductive, responsive method of teaching writing. It's also a compendium of axioms and advice on writing by famous poets, novelists, and journalists. And it's a plea for student-centered pedagogy. Finally, and most personally, it's an act of retribution against the teachers of Murray's youth. In fact, we might say that when read within the context of Murray's early academic struggles, he had been writing *A Writer Teaches Writing*, or preparing to do so, his entire life.³⁴ Looking back on his career from the perch of retirement he admits as much himself: "I feel a sense of accomplishment. I am not the great poet and fine novelist of my dreams, but I have published articles, poetry, novels, and a textbook on teaching

30 Voss points out, correctly, I believe, that Emig's "science consciousness," something Murray lacked, was largely the cause of her book's successful reception within what was, then, a scientifically aspirational field.

31 It's interesting to note that in the exact year that *A Writer Teaches Writing* was published, in the pages of *College Composition and Communication*, English professor David V. Harrington issued a call for the very sort of book that it was. "It should be said in passing," Harrington writes, "that too many textbook descriptions of how to [write] appear based exclusively upon teaching tradition, hardly at all upon how the writers themselves actually write. There is a need for more introspection, more candidness, even a need for something like a testimonial approach to composition teaching" (7).

32 Writerly self-study was nothing new for Murray. During his years as a freelancer he had taken small steps towards trying to understand his own writing process (his livelihood, after all, depended on it!), keeping daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly word counts of his output and analyzing patterns in his production.

33 To be sure, Murray did not seem to imagine or at least did not much emphasize, at this point in his career, that the process of writing might differ with the genre, audience, or purpose of the task (i.e., the rhetorical situation). As we saw in the last chapter, there was little in Murray's background to give him the language to speak about writing in rhetorical terms. He would later acknowledge that "process" was more complicated than he first understood it to be, claiming that "There is not one process, but many. The process varies with the personality or cognitive style of the writer, the experience of the writer, and the nature of the writing task" (*A Writer Teaches Writing*, 2nd ed. 4).

34 Of the first edition of the book Murray would later write, "To me, *A Writer Teaches Writing* will always be an autobiographical document, the narrative of one writer who attempted to become a teacher of writing in mid-life" (*A Writer Teaches Writing*, rev. 2nd ed. xii).

writing, a satisfying act of revenge against my high school English teachers” (*The Lively Shadow* 47).

To read the first edition of *A Writer Teaches Writing* is to read a writer who is testing new arguments with new audiences and in many cases trying to respectfully push back against the status quo. It is to read a writer who knows he has no right (or interest) to claim membership in the scholarly community of English his colleagues at UNH inhabit, but is just beginning to claim and assert membership in a new, emergent disciplinary community focused on the study of writing and its teaching. It is also to read a writer who is on the cusp of a major professional and life transition and has no idea what’s coming. Writing *A Writer Teaches Writing* was a delicate balancing act—Murray wanted to establish credibility and authority with schoolteachers, advance his “practical method of teaching composition,” and challenge the existing orthodoxy in English but not in a way that would alienate those, like his UNH colleagues (and former mentors), who were, at the very moment he was drafting the book, deliberating over whether or not he should be awarded promotion and tenure.

My analysis of the first edition of the book suggests that it contains both a curriculum and a hidden curriculum—the former focusing mostly on writing and its teaching, the latter focusing on the relationship between teachers and students. Let’s take these one at a time.

Curriculum

If there is one idea around which the official curriculum of *A Writer Teaches Writing* is built it is the proposition that student writers need to experience and understand writing as professionals do, which, according to Murray, is as an activity in which individuals in the process of trying to say something to someone for some reason work to identify and resolve the myriad problems of composing that inevitably arise along writing’s way. Professional writers, Murray knew, were, at root, *problem-solvers*. Student writers, however, inexperienced in the problem-solving nature of writing, would not be up to the challenge of real writing (and re-writing, and re-writing *again*), Murray knew, if they were not deeply invested in their work. “The student must spend his time in the lengthy process of discovering and solving his own writing problems,” Murray explains in *A Writer Teaches Writing* (105). Students would not, he felt, have the energy to do so if their motivation to write in the first place wasn’t grounded in a genuine desire to say something to someone about something important to them.

Through his experience teaching Freshman English at UNH, but also observing high school English teachers in the field, Murray had become acquainted with the kinds of topics English teachers frequently assigned during this era (e.g., in Freshman English: How to Be a Good Friend in a Time of Need, etc.).

All too often Murray found such prompts to be trite, silly, and schoolish. He wanted students to be able to bite into open topics that they, and not their teachers, found meaningful. Further, he felt that English teachers made a mistake when they tried to teach writing by asking students to write about literature. “It is a matter of dogma in many English Departments,” he writes, “that students have nothing to say until literature is poured into their heads. We cannot assume that literature is the primary interest of our students—or even that it should be” (106). In a writing class, Murray argued, students should write about multiple different topics in multiple of forms, modes, or genres (the more the better). It mattered that they feel deeply invested in their work. If sufficiently invested they would have a chance to learn what Murray wanted them to learn most—i.e., how to trouble-shoot and problem-solve *while* writing so as to produce an effective working draft.³⁵

The idea that English teachers must help students become writing problem-solvers is among the most valuable and interesting curricular elements of *A Writer Teaches Writing*. Who else was talking about writing-as-problem-solving at this time? It wasn’t until the mid to late 1970s and 1980s, when scholars like Janet Emig, Nancy Sommers, Sondra Perl, and Linda Flower and John Hayes began to study student writing processes, that we began to understand and develop a language to talk about the problem-solving nature of the work. Murray’s ideas in *A Writer Teaches Writing* pre-date and anticipate this way of thinking and they grew out of his concern with an issue that has always been at the heart of our field’s work: learning transfer.

Fundamentally, Murray saw his task in *A Writer Teaches Writing* as one of analyzing and dissecting what it was he did when he wrote to identify a transferable process that could be shared with English teachers who could then teach it to students who could then use it to navigate the numerous writing situations they would encounter in and out of school throughout their lives. Given Murray’s experience and the state of knowledge in the field at the time, it was a project that made a good deal of sense. “How does the writer write?” Murray asks on the very first page of *A Writer Teaches Writing*. His answer: “We cannot discover how the writer works merely by studying what he has left on the page. We must observe the act of writing itself to expose to our students the process of writing as it is

35 For the record, while Murray encourages teachers in *A Writer Teaches Writing* to help students find topics about which to write that interest them he’s not overly concerned with autobiographical writing (prior to coming to UNH to teach Murray produced very little, if any, such writing himself). The important thing in teaching writing, Murray argued, was not that the student “open a vein” on the page but, rather, that she own the content of her work. So, for example, a student wishing to write an essay about how to ride a motorcycle might also be encouraged “to write a proposal for a new motorcycle law, a letter to the editor answering an editorial against motorcycle riders, a definition of a good motorcyclist, an argument for a new motorcycle design” (134).

performed by the successful writer” (1). Such a process, Murray felt, would help students develop a transferable process that would serve them well wherever they ended up. After all, as Murray reminds his readers, “We are teaching writers who will write descriptions of automobile accidents and living room suites which are on sale, reports on factory production and laboratory experiments, political speeches and the minutes of League of Women Voters meetings, love letters and business letters” (154). As a professional writer from beyond academia, Murray understood, in ways that most English teachers and professors probably did or could not, where students were headed as writers after high school or college and he wanted to try to help prepare them for these myriad writerly futures.

Of what did Murray’s early teaching-for-transfer approach consist? In *A Writer Teaches Writing*’s first chapter Murray outlines what he understands to be the seven core activities of writing, which he then develops and elaborates on in greater detail in following chapters. The writer, he argues, discovers a subject, senses an audience, searches for specifics, creates a design, writes, develops a critical eye, and rewrites. While the genre, for Murray circa 1968, may change, the process doesn’t. “If you can write a sonnet you can write an advertisement,” he posits, “if you can produce a novel you can produce a company report” (231). Well, not really, as we now know. In the fifty-plus years since *A Writer Teaches Writing* was published, our knowledge of what happens when writers write (and of how transfer happens...or fails to) has broadened, deepened, and expanded exponentially. We should not blame earlier theorists and scholars, however, for not knowing what we know now. *A Writer Teaches Writing* is a product of its time—a time, in this case, when few, if any, empirical studies of writers writing had been published, when the term rhetorical situation had only recently been coined, and when the notion of *genre* in the English classroom referred to literary forms (poems, novels, short stories, and plays). In light of all this, Murray’s investigations into his own writing process circa 1966 or so as he worked to draft *A Writer Teaches Writing* can be likened to an amateur archeologist stumbling into an undiscovered cave with a flashlight. The report on the process of discovery might not hold up to later scrutiny, and the conclusions drawn from the investigations will, later, be reconsidered and revised, but you must still give credit to the early investigators for their attempts to explore and understand what was previously not understood.

Murray’s interest in and advocacy for explicit reflection in *A Writer Teaches Writing*, too, counts as a significant element of his curriculum worth highlighting. “It’s helpful,” he urges his readers, “to have students write about writing. . . . When you write about writing you have to focus on how to write as well as what to write, and the combination can be very helpful for the student” [170]). From the perspective of history, then, what I see as the core of *A Writer Teaches*

Writing's curriculum—a vision of writing as problem-solving, a focus on transfer, and an early articulation of the value of metacognition to the writing process, are not small contributions to the knowledge of our field. Murray's concern for these issues pre-dates and sets the stage for much of what was to come in composition scholarship in the years to follow.

Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum of *A Writer Teaches Writing*, perhaps harder to discern, is woven throughout the book and is principally about the relationship between teachers and students. It's in the hidden curriculum that we find Murray's arguments for a student-centered approach to teaching and learning that forwards the causes of empowerment, social justice, and diversity. Mina Shaughnessy is largely credited with embodying this vision during the field's earliest days but a decade before Shaughnessy and a half dozen years before NCTE's "Students' Right to Their Own Language" Murray was working, in his own way, to inscribe in composition and rhetoric the deeply humane pedagogical vision that has long been an essential characteristic of our discipline.

While the immediate exigence for *A Writer Teaches Writing* was, as we have seen, rooted in Murray's work with NESDEC, a deeper exigence can be traced to his own debilitating early years of schooling, to his literacy narrative. Deep into the book one finds evidence of the way in which Murray's own personal story influenced and informed the book's writing:

This may be the time to mention that I quit high school each year and did not graduate. My parents were told that I did not belong in school. When I see how quickly and how permanently many of our students are evaluated, I cannot forget the years when I was told I was stupid, year after year, and I believed it. (160)

As we saw in the last chapter, Murray felt himself to be an outsider in school. He considered himself a casualty of what he dubbed the "not-so-good-old-days" of public education and of a Depression-era school system that he felt failed to account for the diversity and difference—in knowing, in thinking, in learning, in communicating—that he brought to the classroom. In sum, the personal exigence for *A Writer Teaches Writing* was Murray's lifelong belief that as a child he was a victim of educational injustice. His books and articles, starting with *A Writer Teaches Writing*, were efforts to set things right.

Given Murray's painful, silencing experiences in school growing up it's perhaps not surprising that the word *listen* plays such a prominent role in the hidden curriculum of *A Writer Teaches Writing*. In the second chapter, Murray lists

“He Listens” as the first of the seven skills that an effective teacher must learn and practice. Inhabiting what might be called a *listening stance* was an essential element of an empowering pedagogy for Murray. Teachers must learn to become effective listeners, he believed, so that they could see, understand, and, most importantly, accept each student as he/she was. “When you talk to those teachers who motivate students,” Murray writes, “you begin to see [that] they are all interested in knowing the student as an individual. They listen to the student and the student knows it” (151). To be fair, this was a tall ask for high school English teachers facing 100–150 students a day, but Murray asked anyway because he felt it was what students, and especially those students who didn’t easily fit into an inflexible educational system, were due.

Enacting a listening stance, as Murray goes on to explain in *A Writer Teaches Writing*, does not mean the teacher must “accept the student’s view of the world if it is irrational, illogical and expressed in an illiterate manner.” It does mean that the teacher must “listen to what he [*sic*] has to say,” not what he or she “wish[es] he would say but what he has to say. . . . Each student is at a different point” (16). This idea of *difference*, of each student being “at a different point,” is another important element that Murray develops and elaborates throughout *A Writer Teaches Writing*, a key aspect of the hidden curriculum, largely under the umbrella of acknowledging, accepting, and celebrating intellectual diversity (not a term Murray used). “Each student,” he writes, “is working at his own pace and his relationship to other students in the class is relatively unimportant” (16). Education, for Murray, wasn’t a race to the top, nor should it be. It was a highly individualized developmental process to which teachers needed to adapt themselves.

If, for Murray, the teacher must be a person who listens, then the classroom must be a different kind of place than what it usually is. Murray advocates for nothing short of a reversal of roles between teachers and students. “The relation of the teacher to his students,” he writes, “should be the opposite of the relationship one would expect to find.” Usually, he continues, “it is the teacher who knows, the student who learns. Here it is the student who knows, or should, and the teacher who learns, or tries to” (17). In this way, in Murray’s reformed classroom, the student reads and writes about the things he or she knows or wishes to know and the teacher listens (on the page, in the classroom, in the conference) and responds. In this way, teaching becomes a process in which teachers do research on students and their learning in order to discern how to teach them effectively. Murray never uses the term *student-centered* in *A Writer Teaches Writing*, but as all of this suggests, it’s very much what he had in mind (throughout his career, Murray preferred to think of his approach as *responsive* or *conference* teaching). In this way Murray, writing circa 1966 or so, very much anticipated one of the key tenets of what would become the writing process movement:

students, their writing, and their processes of learning to write constitute the “content” of a writing class.

As a savvy rhetorician anticipating push-back from his elders, Murray cues into the historical moment of cultural upheaval in *A Writer Teaches Writing* to argue, finally, that a responsive, listening-based pedagogy is necessitated by the times. In an era of “mass society, mass communications and mass mind,” Murray writes, there can be no more important task for a teacher than to empower his or her students to develop a sense of voice by listening to them (17). Further, he argues, tapping into the emergent social justice ethos of the era, “What we should do is attempt to give everyone freedom of opportunity [to learn] regardless of his background, his race, his religion, or the limitations with which he came to the classroom” (154). In offering all students the opportunity to write (which is to say to speak, to be heard, to be listened to), Murray invites his readers to situate the day-to-day work of teaching and learning in a truly humanistic vision. “A man’s drive to tell another what he knows about life—to relate, to sympathize, to incite, to educate, to entertain, to persuade—starts with a baby’s first cry and lasts until an old man’s final words,” Murray writes. “The effective writing teacher mobilizes this force simply by allowing his students to speak” (151). Within this vision, writing, finally, is an act in which “one single human being [is] speaking to another single human being” (17). Humans speaking to humans—this gets at the heart of the hidden curriculum of *A Writer Teaches Writing*.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have tried to show how Donald Murray’s early teaching at UNH and his collaborations with NESDEC were instrumental in drawing him into a new career path as a reformer of composition pedagogy, the discipline of English, and the traditional processes of schooling. NESDEC offered Murray the opportunity to take ideas and theories he had begun to develop through his work with pre-service teachers at UNH and operationalize them via numerous professional development initiatives and, ultimately, a proposal for an ambitious (ultimately unfunded) grant-seeking effort (i.e., Project Write). It also provided him with resources to write his first book about writing, *A Writer Teaches Writing*. In short, with NESDEC’s help Murray went from being a writer and aspiring novelist to something he had never planned to become—a writer teaching writing—and teaching *teachers* of writing, as well.

What makes Murray’s work during these years notable is the extent to which it was all so unexpected and unanticipated. As we have seen, Murray’s intention when he transitioned to UNH was to find more time to write fiction, but in a 1968 memo to new English Department chair Jack Richardson, he outlines

his “changing role” at the university without even mentioning those plans. Of his primary role, the one he was hired to play as head of journalism, Murray notes that his work in this regard has “not expanded.” Of his newfound role as a “teacher of teachers of composition,” Murray explains, his work in this area is “expanding, especially on [the] graduate level.” It is, he writes, his “greatest interest, now and for a few years” (Letter to Jack Richardson).

Murray’s teaching schedule, publication trajectory, and growing calendar of speaking engagements all confirm that he was, by the mid to late 1960s, committing himself to an entirely new professional path. While he continued to teach journalism and non-fiction throughout his career his teaching schedule at UNH, beginning in the early 1970s, regularly included graduate seminars in composition theory and pedagogy (he taught UNH’s first such course, Seminar in Teaching Writing, in the fall of 1972). His publishing agenda underwent a complete overhaul at this time, as well. Each year from 1963 to 1967 the number of articles Murray placed in periodicals like those in which he had published prior to transitioning to UNH declined. In 1968, for the first time, he placed no such pieces but, instead, presented two papers at professional conferences for English teachers, published his first articles on writing and pedagogy in small academic journals, and published *A Writer Teaches Writing*. With regular invitations to speak about writing and teaching at schools in New Hampshire and beyond and commitments to serve on various state education boards and committees, including the New Hampshire Council for Teacher Education, Murray’s professional transformation was, by the early 1970s, mostly complete.

As we learn from his personal correspondence from this time, however, Murray’s new work with teachers was not always easy or happy. It was even something he sometimes tried to escape. In the winter of 1970, for example, in a letter in which he urged NESDEC to abandon its plans for a fourth summer workshop at Bowdoin, Murray writes, “I am too impatient to work well with teachers in in-service programs, and prefer to concentrate on developing written materials which other people may choose to use in such programs” (Letter to Robert S. Ireland). In a lengthy letter written about this same time to Dick Goodman, Murray is more expansive on the nature of his struggles. “I can not seem to make education central to my life,” he writes. Further, he admits, while he has enjoyed working with teachers, he would like to make such work “less a part of [his] life.” In a particularly damning and, frankly, surprising passage, he expresses the full extent of his frustrations, claiming that it’s actually teachers who are the main thing that is “wrong with education”:

We can do a lot to improve the education of teachers, and I think we have. . . . But we can’t seem to do much about the

kind of people we get in education. . . . The more I work with teachers the more I am convinced that the majority of them are frightened of their students, terrified of their administrators, resentful and afraid of parents and taxpayers, scared of each other, and apprehensive that there may be some change in the subject matter they teach. This is not a matter of education, for the teacher can raise the sophistication level of his jargon, add graduate degrees, and still be an essentially frightened and passive individual. (Letter to Dr. Richard Goodman)

It's an uncomfortable indictment from a man who, elsewhere, was a champion of teachers but apparently still carried with him the legacy of his childhood struggles. Murray acknowledges as much himself, confessing that his problem with teachers is just as likely to stem from his own failures, as he is, he admits, too often "arrogant, impatient, and idealistic." Nonetheless, he explains, in the years ahead he will "remove [him]self more and more from working directly in education outside of [his] own university courses" (Letter to Dr. Richard Goodman).

Of course, that's not what happened. Murray's work with teachers was far from over in the early 1970s. It was, in fact, just beginning and while his audience evolved over the years, with his writing and talks increasingly addressing college-level writing instructors and researchers, Murray never stopped speaking to K–12 teachers. As composition and rhetoric evolved as a field during the 1970s and 1980s, Murray did, too, though. He was able to do so, in large part, and as we will see in the next chapter, because of his extensive work on campus at UNH, as he worked to build on and extend the legacy of Dr. Carroll Towle to create a new culture and community around the study of writing and its teaching.