was important to describe his research methods in such detail. Who was his audience, and why do you think he felt they needed to know so much about his data collection and data analysis methods?

5. In the "Discussion" section, Roozen asks what "attending closely and carefully to the repurposing of discursive practice across activities bring[s] to our understanding of disciplinary development" (para. 54). What is his answer to this question?

Applying and Exploring Ideas

1. In his conclusion, Roozen notes that some researchers suggest that we need to help students "replace" what he calls "extradisciplinary practices" (reading and writing practices from outside their major, for example) and *instead* learn disciplinary practices. He argues against this view of "replacing" old ways with new ones, and instead argues for "encouraging learners to view [extradisciplinary practices] as flexible resources for creating, maintaining, coordinating, extending, altering, and perhaps even productively disrupting networks that provide access to disciplinary expertise" (para. 61). Explain what this means, and then give an example of what this could look like in your own life as you learn to write for your major and profession.
2. In Table 1, Roozen provides a list of literate activities in which Lindsey engaged, and all of the related texts he collected for each literate activity. Try to brainstorm a similar list for yourself. Make two columns, and in the left list three to four literate activities in which you engage now or in which you have engaged in the past. In the right column, list all of the texts you can think of that you composed for that literate activity. What can you learn from making and looking at this list for yourself?
3. In Chapter 3 of this book, James Porter describes what he calls "intertextuality," the idea that all texts contain "traces" of other texts and that there can be no texts that don't draw on some ideas from other texts. Do you think this idea relates to the ideas outlined here by Roozen? Write a brief one-page response in which you apply Porter's notion of intertextuality to Roozen's claims and findings.

Meta Moment

Do you think about your regular activities with reading, writing, and composing differently now than you did before reading Roozen? How do you think this enriched understanding of literate activity can help you be a more successful writer and reader?

Past Experiences and Future Attitudes in Literacy

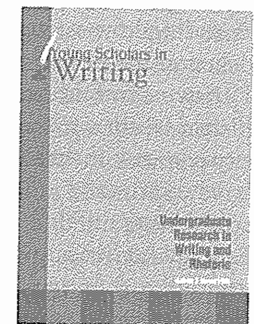
ERIKA J. PETERSEN

Petersen, Erika. "Past Experiences and Future Attitudes in Literacy." *Young Scholars in Writing* 5 (2007): 131–36. Print.

Framing the Reading

Erika J. Petersen wrote this piece as a first-year student at Utah Valley State College in 2007. It began as an assignment for her College Writing II course, which used a writing-about-writing approach. This piece was Erika's major research project for the semester. Erika's interest, obviously, was in how people's previous experiences with reading and writing influence their attitudes toward it, and she wound up pulling together a diverse range of research on motivation in learning, psychology, and literacy education to interpret data gathered from her primary research, which included both a set of literacy narratives and interviews with people of a range of ages and life circumstances, from high school students to college graduates.

Erika's professor in the course was Doug Downs (co-editor of this book), who on seeing the final version of her project in class encouraged her to submit the piece to the journal *Young Scholars in Writing*, which publishes undergraduate research, like Erika's, on subjects related to writing, literacy, and rhetoric. As is the case with other pieces in this book published in *YSW*, Erika revised her essay in preparation for submission, and then sent it to the editor. The piece was then peer-reviewed both by other college students and by a professor at another college (on the *YSW* editorial board), and then Erika was asked to make further revisions and development to the piece, refining and polishing it in ways that closely resemble the revising process every other article in this textbook went through when it was submitted for publication.



We all have memories of how we obtained literacy, but did those experiences shape the basis of how we feel toward literacy in the future? Did the praise or discouragement we obtained lead us to certain attitudes?

Learning how to read and write is universal and personal all at once. We all have memories of how we obtained literacy, but did those experiences shape the basis of how

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we feel toward literacy in the future? Did the praise or discouragement we obtained lead us to certain attitudes? While there have been studies done in this area, none seem to focus on people's actual physical experiences of praise versus discouragement. This distinction became clear in my own study of written literacy narratives and interviews, thus creating a clearer picture of the role of praise in literacy attainment that both supports and extends previous research findings.

2 It's easy to overlook and take for granted the complexity of the process of learning how to read and write and ultimately become literate. At such a young age we learn to do such incredible things. There are usually many people playing different roles in teaching literacy to young children: mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, teachers, and so on. In *Language and Literacy in the Early Years,* Marian R. Whitehead argues that we make associations with books and the people reading them to us at those early stages in life. In "Child Development and Emergent Literacy," Grover Whitehurst, the first director of the Institute of Education Sciences, and Christopher Lonigan, a leading researcher in the areas of preschool literacy instruction and assessment, describe the labyrinth of processes taking place from before preschool into kindergarten that children go through when learning literacy. Starting with gaining knowledge of the alphabet and progressing to inventive spelling and associating written words with meanings, the acquisition of literacy is a highly complicated process indeed.

3 As you can imagine, everyone goes through the learning process differently and, in turn, runs across different experiences when doing so. Learning how to do anything involves emotional development, and at such a young age children are sensitive toward doing things right or wrong. Critiquing children with the sincerity and outspokenness you would adults or teens could potentially crush their fragile egos, making them feel less able. Being aware of the emotional and delicate side of learning literacy is vital.

4 If we can find similarities existing within a substantial sample of literacy histories, then it would help us gain a clearer picture of if and how our past experiences in literacy have influencing capabilities. Two researchers who have conducted studies like this are Rick Evans and Alisa Belzer. In Evans's study he gained a knowledge of numerous middle-class college students' literacy histories through detailed questionnaires and interviews about how and what they read and wrote in the past. He focused mainly on three different types of reading and writing, analyzing how students encounter them and how their feelings toward them differ. Belzer's study focused on in-depth interviews with five African American women. She wanted to compare their past experiences with their present attitudes toward literacy as adults to look for patterns and gain ideas for more effective adult literacy education.

5 While I didn't want to reproduce the same study as Evans and Belzer, I did use similar methods. To begin my study, I acquired eight "literacy reflections" from other students in English 2010 at Utah Valley University (UVU). In these literacy reflections students were asked to reflect on their literacy pasts and presents, to explore how they read and write different assignments, and their

studies, the intent was to get students thinking about the different kinds of reading and writing they do and why they do it. I was hoping that by studying these students' reflections I would be able to see patterns of past experiences playing an influential role in how these college students felt toward different literacy tasks.

6 I then interviewed twelve other people of all different ages, ranging from eleven to forty-four. I did this because I wanted not only college students' perspectives on writing but also those of children at all levels of learning and adults at different points in their lives. I wanted to interview people who were not given the assignment to write a paper on their literacy histories in order to remove bias from the study. Evans's and Belzer's articles both interview relevant groups of people (mainstream college students around eighteen years old and middle-aged African American women), but I wanted to show that no matter what stage of life we are in, we all have a literacy past that potentially affects our future, even well past the schooling part of our lives. Therefore, I interviewed two girls in the fifth grade, four kids in high school, and three people in college (I interviewed fewer college students because I felt that I had a good representation of them from the literacy reflections). I also interviewed three people who were thirty-three and older and out of college because I hypothesized that even when you're out of school, your literacy past still plays a role in your life. I began each interview by asking about the participants' earliest memories of reading and whom they remembered teaching them. I asked them about their favorite and least favorite teachers and why they liked or disliked them. I also got an idea of how their reading styles had changed—for example, what their favorite kinds of books were when they were children compared to their favorites now. I asked the same kinds of questions concerning writing, too. We talked about what kinds of writing they enjoyed in the past compared to now, what kinds of writing they make time for in their schedule, etc. I wanted to get a good feel for which experiences with literacy learning the interviewees remembered most clearly in order to determine if a lot of people remembered the same kinds of experiences. I also asked them about any awards or recognition they received in classes in certain subjects to see if that affected their subsequent aptitude and interest in them. I wanted to know not only how they responded to recognition in literacy but also how they pursued it, so I asked them if they showed what they'd written to teachers and friends or talked about what they were reading to others.

7 After reading through all the literacy reflections and reviewing the interviews, it became clear that there was one event that everyone seemed to have gone through in one way or another. It was also addressed in both Belzer's and Evans's interviews within their studies. All interviewees talked about an experience with a teacher—either one that had influenced them to continue using their successful literacy skills, or one that had made them feel lost and hopeless about reading or writing. The students who had teachers discourage them suffered a loss in their confidence and became weary about their writing.

in which she read in front of the class, revealing how badly it affected her emotionally and physically. Something Evans's and Belzer's articles didn't do was examine in depth what occurs in your body, chemically, when you are praised and feeling good versus being discouraged and feeling bad. It's a valid thing to think about when looking into praise and how it may motivate you. Your body is responding to your situation, and I don't know about you, but if my body is responding in a way that's negative I doubt I will want to do whatever is causing it again. Dr. David Yells, associate professor and chair of the Department of Behavioral Science at UVU, said that while we have plenty of research results on the body's response to positive experiences, there is little data available on negative responses because it would be inhumane to test on people or animals. He did say that the central nervous system's response to situations like being called on in class could be looked at as bad if it is a particularly embarrassing situation. Your central nervous system reacts and you blush, get sweaty palms, stutter, etc.

8 I also noticed that everyone's really bad or really good experiences with literacy were recalled with great detail, as if they had happened yesterday. How could they remember them so clearly? In "Getting the Brain's Attention," Ingrid Wickelgren argues that dopamine is "a neurotransmitter supposed to react on the brain's reward system to produce feelings of pleasure" (1). It is released into the nucleus accumbens, which is known to be activated by pleasurable behaviors. Wickelgren also states that there is new data suggesting that dopamine released in the brain draws attention to certain significant or surprising events and that dopamine cells respond to reward only when it happens unpredictably. Some scientists believe dopamine causes frontal neurons to hold onto some temporary memories for longer, which may make them easier to remember in the future. Could the dopamine released during our experiences of learning literacy be why we remember those experiences so well? These good or bad experiences the students had with literacy probably stuck with them because of the impact they had on their self-confidence: good or bad. In fact, dopamine delivers a message while other parts of the brain respond with emotion; whether that be pleasure, excitement, or fear depends on the situation (6).

9 From my study of multiple literacy narratives, I have found a recurring pattern: when students were good at certain literacy skills and it was brought to theirs and others' attention, it resulted in positive literacy growth. The following pages highlight some of those occurrences.

10 The fifth grade girls I interviewed talked about being most interested in reading and writing that involved everyone and showed them to shine above others. One of the girls talked excitedly about her reading skills and accomplishments, but when I asked her about writing her attitude changed. She said she has not received feedback about her writing but that her teachers and friends always talked about how well and how much she reads.

11 One of the Brigham Young University students I interviewed is minoring in editing, so you can imagine what her literacy skills are like. She loves to read

in the form of words and awards. She entered a story into a Disney writing contest when she was in her teens; although she didn't win, she was praised immensely by her family for entering the contest. Her award-winning poems are framed and hanging up in her grandparents' and parents' homes. She loves to read history books and has always been described by her parents and friends as "a reader."

12 The older people I interviewed were very enthusiastic and excited to look back at their literacy pasts. Although sometimes it took a little longer for them to remember details, their answers were very similar to those I had gotten from the younger students. All of them grew up in homes where reading was encouraged greatly. One of them even said that her mom would buy her a book at the store instead of candy. Another said that he couldn't remember having any bad experiences with reading when he was younger and was quite good at it. His writing wasn't as important to himself and others until he got into college, where he learned and excelled in writing for communications. He makes time in his busy schedule today for reading books and writing in his journal, both of which he enjoys doing very much. He also covers sports for the *Deseret Morning News*, a local paper in Utah.

13 It was very apparent after reading the literary reflections and reviewing the interviews that following a discouraging event when learning to read or write, most students felt incompetent or felt like something was wrong until an encouraging teacher or event came along. In contrast, one college student from the literacy reflections and three high schoolers from the interviews seemed never to have had a bad experience with reading or writing. The college student excelled in literacy at a young age and was awarded and praised for it continually. He still loves both reading and writing and is very confident in his abilities to do so. The three high schoolers are all very avid readers and writers. They all had been given awards for their proficient reading skills and creative writing. When I looked over the questions I had asked them dealing with their literacy pasts, I found a pattern of praise, starting from childhood and continuing through the rest of their schooling up to this point in their education. All of them had had different experiences, of course, but all of them were very positive. Their family and friends were all very supportive. Something else I noticed that was interesting was that all three of them had gotten an early start with their literacy skills, from either a phonics program, a computer program, or homeschooling. This enabled them to have teaching opportunities with other kids in their classes who may have been struggling, therefore making them feel happy and good about their advantage in literacy skills. Dopamine release could play a part here as well as praise received for their accomplishments.

14 An article by Jennifer Henderlong, an assistant professor of psychology at Reed College, and Mark Lepper, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, both supported most of my findings and contradicted a few. They talk about the negative and positive effects of praise, motivation, and sincerity on children. When children sense insincerity in praise, it is disregarded and

the child is, the more likely he or she is to think about what the praise could mean and take it wrong, while younger kids do not really look into complexities of praise (778). According to Henderlong and Lepper, praise could be motivating if it's guiding children to feel capable and not comparing them to others' progress (785), but in my research the students seemed to enjoy being compared to others. The students highlighted some kind of class progress chart for reading, explaining that being ahead of others felt very rewarding and influenced them to pursue energetic reading. It seems that effective praise depends on how it is delivered and the situation and people it involves. Praise can lead to motivation and be a great tool when done right. You have to consider the environment and factors that could alter your desired effect on the child you are praising.

15 Belzer concluded in her study that schoolwork needs to be applicable in and out of school. Students should be able to find connections with their schoolwork and how it may apply in their own lives. Out of my interviewees and Belzer's, there was only one person who enjoyed or looked forward to reading things that she was assigned to read at school, or writing things that she was assigned to write (on topics not of her choosing). This particular person said that what she read from her textbooks was interesting and it did not bother her to read them. In her family they are expected to do very well in all their classes and be honor students. She's the youngest in her family, and all of her brothers and sisters have been 4.0 students. It doesn't surprise me that she's more willing to read and learn from the material she is given in classes than the other high schoolers. If other students were in her position, I'm sure they'd feel that if they didn't get good grades they would be performing inadequately or disappointing their parents and might be teased or pressured by siblings. Two of the college students I interviewed, like the high school girl above, grew up in homes where doing very well was an expectation as well. They were both praised and encouraged for their achievements in literacy while growing up, but it was more of a requirement than an accomplishment.

16 The rest of the high schoolers and college students said they would do the assigned work, and most of them got good grades for their efforts, but they did not enjoy it and considered it almost irrelevant to their lives. Students in Evans's interviews and my own were similar in that they tended to write things that they knew their teachers would want and not what they really thought. During a good portion of our schooling, we're learning how to write the kinds of papers that we would never use in our everyday lives. Yet the experiences we have while learning how to write those kinds of papers can discourage us from reading and writing throughout the rest of our lives.

17 During the process of writing this essay, I found my own experience representing exactly what I have been researching. I've never thought of myself as being a writer. Back in elementary school was the only time I remember being excited about writing. My first grade teacher loved my stories and always shared them with my parents during parent-teacher conferences. She made me feel like writing was something special and I was very good at it. Other than

my siblings were. Parents are supposed to support you in your endeavors, so it was harder for me to take their opinions as seriously as teachers or peers. So I dropped that off of my list of things that I was good at. When I wrote papers for classes, I was always self-conscious about them and hated other people reading them. I assumed they just were not very good or had anything special about them compared to those of other students. I never received bad grades on papers, but I never had feedback, either. Therefore, I assumed my teachers probably were not really reading them or, frankly, just passed out As to almost everyone in class. Only when I continued getting As for my college papers and started getting positive feedback from my college professors did I begin to believe I actually could write. Then, during the process of writing this paper, I received a lot of compliments, encouragement, and praise for my writing abilities from my professor as well as my relatives, friends, and peers. This made me start feeling even better and a lot more confident in my writing. The dopamine in my brain was definitely flowing. I felt a rush of energy and happiness whenever I got papers back that had positive feedback, which encouraged me further. Now I want to write more and make time to do further research on this subject as well as others.

18 Assessing the research, literacy reflections, and interviews, it's apparent that past experiences with learning literacy appeared to play a role in these people's future attitudes toward reading and writing and that praise continues to change your attitudes throughout your entire learning experience.

19 I wonder how parents and teachers can sometimes be careless toward something so obvious but so consequential, like praise. Praise and encouragement should be taken into more consideration when teaching literacy. As I said before, parents and teachers play a huge role in helping their child develop a healthy relationship with writing. Literacy is an integral part of a successful future for everyone. Something like that should be handled with as much care as other aspects of life. Literacy really does affect us emotionally, physically, and socially. The experiences we have with it growing up create a strong literacy backbone and good attitude that we may not be able to gain later on in life. It may even affect how we teach it to our future children.

Many thanks to Dr. Downs, who encouraged and changed my attitude toward writing, and Shannon Carter, for the friendly help and encouragement with the editing process.

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Questions for Discussion and Journaling

1. Notice how Petersen weaves various sources together with her discussion of her findings from her own primary research, so that with each page we seem to be encountering new sources or discussion of them. At the same time we're learning about what Petersen learned in her interviews. How does this weaving of sources and primary data compare with other pieces you've read so far?
2. What would you say Petersen's central finding is? Is it surprising? (Why or why not?)
3. How does Petersen justify her research—that is, what does she give as reasons why this research was worth doing, or why it covered ground not already covered by previous research?
4. Petersen writes in a very personable, conversational manner, including using "I" frequently when describing her own experiences, and writing fairly informally with lines like "I also noticed that everyone's really good or bad experiences with literacy were recalled with great detail" (para. 8). How does this compare to other pieces you've read from the book? Do you appreciate this personability or wish the piece were written more formally?

Applying and Exploring Ideas

1. Petersen's findings suggest that most of us have indelible memories of very good or very bad moments relating to reading or writing, and that these often center around teachers and schooling. Interview members of your family and several of your friends and see if the pattern that Petersen saw holds among people you know.
2. List three things that, when you've finished Petersen's article, you wish she'd explained more thoroughly or said more about. Is there any pattern to the items on your list?

Meta Moment
Do you think you could do a study like Petersen's and publish it? Write about the reasons for your answer.

Photo by Lisa Fischoff

Writing What Matters: A Student's Struggle to Bridge the Academic/Personal Divide

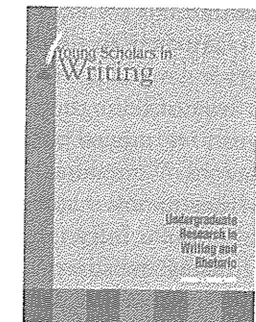
EMILY STRASSER

■ Strasser, Emily. "Writing What Matters: A Student's Struggle to Bridge the Academic/Personal Divide." *Young Scholars in Writing* 5 (2007): 146–50. Web.

Framing the Reading

Downs (a co-author of this book), in the entertainment room in his house, has a rug with the words "Partying" and "Studying" written upside down to each other. Leave the rug lying in one direction, and you read "Partying"; spin it 180 degrees and it reads "Studying." It's possible Emily Strasser would not think much of this rug, as she argues for an integration of personal and school lives, of a "whole being" that is at once scholarly and intensely personal. The rug, she might argue, should say both "Partying" and "Studying" all the time, at the same time.

Strasser wrote her piece on how to achieve this melding of personal and academic in her first year at Vassar College. She was, at the time, a tutor in Vassar's Writing Center, and as such spent a notable portion of her time reading other students' writing and working to give them advice on it. This piece was written in her College Writing class with instructor Lee Rumbarger. Strasser took what might seem like an obvious point—"without the personal, emotional, and the exciting, writing will never mean anything"—and opposed it to a controversial opinion piece by über-professor Stanley Fish, which advocated that writing courses should focus purely on the mechanics of syntax and principles of logical reasoning. If a professor of the prestige of Fish was not able to see the importance of the personal value in writing, Strasser, even as a first-year college student, was willing to argue back.



Stanley Fish, in a 2002 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article titled "Say It Ain't So," writes, "No composition course should have a theme, especially not one the instructor is interested in. Ideas should be introduced not for their own sake, but for the sake of the syntactical and rhetorical points they 1

He argues that beginning writing courses should teach grammar and style only, while students' opinions and experiences should be dispensed with immediately. If, in fact, the purpose of writing education is to produce grammatically adept writers, Fish's boot-camp approach may do a fine job. Yet I would argue that writing can and should be much more than sophisticated sentence structure and nuanced word choice. The devices of grammar and rhetoric remain superficial skills until a writer employs them to express important and powerful feelings, thoughts, and ideas. Students leaving Fish's course will never love what they are writing, and so their abilities to construct complicated grammatical structures will not be put to meaningful purposes. Other writers do advocate, in marked contrast to Fish's grammar-centered approach, methods centered on students' experiences, interests, and ideas. Gerald Graff and bell hooks, for example, each present a vision of writing as a marriage of the personal and the intellectual, enabling self-empowerment and the possibility of challenging institutions and inspiring communities. In advocating a pedagogy that values the personal as essential to the academic, I draw extensively on my own experience as a student writer: in my own development as a writer, the assignments that mattered most were those in which I used persuasive and analytical skills in personally meaningful writing. Writing and education are useless tools if they fail to speak to a student's life, experience, and passions; therefore, teachers in all settings should value their students' voices, encouraging them to write and claim their own stories and expressions.

Writing can and should be much more than sophisticated sentence structure and nuanced word choice. The devices of grammar and rhetoric remain superficial skills until a writer employs them to express important and powerful feelings, thoughts, and ideas.

2 My own love affair with writing began with just such a teacher—my eighth grade language arts teacher, Janna. In her class, I learned to value writing as a way of telling my own stories and expressing my thoughts. Throughout the year, we moved through units of myths, fairy tales, Shakespeare, and superheroes. We read selections from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and were assigned to write our own stories about transformation. We explored alternate versions of popular fairy tales, and then wrote our own retellings. We wrote essays addressing questions such as "What are the essential elements of a superhero? Why do we create these superhuman beings?" I was excited to write about these topics—to express my voice and create my own story in response to what we were studying. Fairy tales and myths were not written and owned by famous authors and intellectuals, but passed down orally from generation to generation, told around the fire on dark midwinter nights, embellished and altered by each subsequent teller to express personal creativity and the values of the times. As eighth graders, we, too, had stories to tell and values to express within the timeless and ancient forms of myths. As if we were just storytellers

3 Today we have moved beyond the oral tradition into a written one, yet even though our books are copyrighted by single authors, ideas and stories are built from myriad voices who have come before. No work is completely original and isolated. Writers must enter previously existing discourses with their own voices. Gerald Graff, in his book *Clueless in Academe,* criticizes the way the academy perpetuates "cluelessness" by making intellectual discourse appear opaque, specialized, and inaccessible, and by accentuating a false divide between popular and intellectual culture (1). Graff asserts that argument in academic discourse is not so different from argument in popular culture, the media, or daily life, yet that higher education manages to obscure these similarities. He proposes that to mend that divide, teachers should teach students to incorporate their street smarts and common skills of argumentation and persuasion into academic writing, illuminating their similarities rather than their differences. If students can learn first to write analytically about superheroes, something that they know, they can learn how to apply those critical thinking skills to loftier subjects in the academy. Graff points out that one of the foremost ways academia perpetuates a divide between popular and intellectual culture, between outsiders and insiders, is by discouraging simple outsider questions such as "So what?" and "What's the point?" as naive. Instead, Graff encourages his students to address basic "So what?" questions in their writing, thereby situating their argument within an academic conversation, responding to real voices and ideas. Just as academics will have to propose and defend their points within the context of what other academics have said, Graff's students will learn to claim their arguments within a previously existing conversation. In Janna's class, we learned to write stories that responded to and built off of other stories, adding our versions to the long histories of tellings. Like Graff, Janna believed that her students had something worthwhile to say, and she encouraged us to say it.

4 Just as Graff criticizes how the academy makes intellectual life appear foreign to students' lives and experiences, bell hooks disparages the separation of mind, body, and spirit that she sees prevalent in the academy. She writes, "I learned that far from being self-actualized, the university was seen more as a haven for those who are smart in book knowledge but who might be otherwise unfit for social interaction" (16). Indeed, students and professors in higher education are often expected to value academic and intellectual pursuits over personal health or a balanced lifestyle, as if academic and personal life cannot coexist. In my experience as a college student, I see the image of the sleepless, caffeine-crazed student glorified. Professors and peers expect students to stay up all night to finish a paper, and then stay out all night on the weekends partying. Fellow students are surprised if I tell them that I get at least six hours of sleep a night and make some time to read for pleasure. College culture, as I have seen it both at college and as portrayed in the media, does not encourage a well-balanced, healthy lifestyle, but values extreme separations of "study" from "party," mind from body, and work from play. In *Teaching to Transgress,* hooks advocates a holistic pedagogy that reintroduces fun, excitement, and pleasure

human beings, both intellectually and emotionally, who care not only for the analytical abilities of their students, but for their emotional and spiritual well-being. She says that students and professors should regard one another as "'whole' human beings, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world" (14–15). Students cannot be expected to care about learning and writing if they themselves are unloved and unfulfilled.

5 Janna was one of those teachers who nurtured both her students' intellectual and emotional well-being. She cared deeply for each of us who passed through her classroom, feeling for our poor, mixed-up adolescent selves. Some days, she would sense that our spirits were down, or our bodies were restless, so she would read to us, or let us play outside. Janna saw us as people, not nameless students, and because she respected us as such, we respected her endeavor to teach us. Now, five years later, I still look to Janna as a teacher, mentor, and friend.

6 Those who suffer most from the separation of popular and academic culture that Graff describes are those who have limited access to academic institutions—the impoverished, the illiterate, the marginalized. Working at a summer program last year for underprivileged and at-risk minority middle school students—Katrina evacuees, children of alcoholics and convicts—I saw this firsthand. Attending the worst schools in the state of Georgia, these particular students had not had teachers like Janna, teachers who valued their voices and encouraged their personal expression, teachers who understood that the academic is lifeless without the personal. From their experiences, the students understood school as an endless memorizing of dates, writing of expository essays, and reading of literature, that was completely alien from their lives. As Graff calls it, "the same old 'school stuff'" (6). bell hooks writes that students should "rightfully expect that my colleagues and I will not offer them information without addressing the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences" (19). Without a community that valued their voices, or an understanding of how the academic could and should connect to their lives, these students did not see that expression through writing could be self-empowering.

7 Despite this, there was one girl in the program, Danielle, who surprised and impressed me with her dream to one day become a writer and publish her own autobiographies. Danielle had a difficult home life, with an absent father and overworked mother. In some ways, she was overly mature for her age, carrying herself like a woman, making sophisticated observations. On the other hand, she was often absent, or came to the program moody and irritable, purposely causing problems in the classroom; her behavior was perhaps a reflection of her troubled home life. Yet despite her difficult childhood and marginalized position in an unequal and racist system, Danielle understood that her experiences were important and relevant. She had the desire to share her voice with the world, and to add her stories to the public discourse.

8 As in the cases of eighth graders writing their own fairy tales, Danielle writing her life story shows that writing can be important and powerful in all set-

accomplishment could be hugely empowering for a student: for an illiterate Haitian woman, learning how to write a grocery list helped her become more self-sufficient in a foreign country, while for a Mexican mother, learning enough to read and respond to notes from her son's teacher allowed her to be actively engaged in her child's school life. Graff speaks of the way that the academy creates a division between public and intellectual life, while hooks criticizes the mind/body/spirit division. Our society too often values only a small group of voices, marking divisions by age, class, race, gender, and language. I am arguing that the voices of every age, class, race, gender, and language are important and valuable, and writing can be a tool for self-empowerment and expression, no matter where it falls on the spectrum—from grocery lists to dissertations. Teachers of writing everywhere, from ESL to the academy, should bring the intellectual closer to the personal, to encourage their students to express their voices through writing what matters to their lives.

9 I have struggled all of my life to find the overlap between the ideas that intrigue and stimulate me, and my emotions, experiences, and the world. I grappled with this issue especially in my freshman high school English course. My teacher, Mark, presented writing as an intellectual challenge, a skill to be mastered. His demanding assignments and incisive questions challenged me like never before. Yet while I loved the class, the books we read, and the ideas we explored, I often wondered how they could be applicable to the world. During class discussions, or while writing a paper, I was excited by the moments when ideas came together, or opened up to show a spectrum of possibilities, yet at the end of the day, I had homework, was tired and hungry, and my world seemed very distant from Odysseus's adventures, or Miranda and Prospero's enchanted island.

10 That same year, Janna was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a complete surprise, and everyone who loved her was shocked and scared. I was frightened and disoriented; I wanted to show my love and support for her, but I didn't know how. During that time, we had been studying Shakespearean sonnets in Mark's class. He assigned us to write a Petrarchan or Shakespearean sonnet, with optional meter. I knew that this would be the perfect gift for Janna—for the woman who had taught me to love writing, I would write a poem from my heart. I chose a Petrarchan sonnet because they tend to end more optimistically. Incidentally, they also have the hardest rhyme scheme. I had to put all of my intellectual abilities to work to write this sonnet—figuring out rhyme, meter, and metaphor so that it would fit into the seamless, loving, supportive poem I wanted to give her. In "Soaring the Tempest," I made Janna a mockingbird, to reflect her love of languages and stories, and her cancer a storm she had to fly through:

She sings as sweetly as a mockingbird,
Well-versed and wise in ev'ry tongue and lore.
For ev'ry bird, she is the troubadour.
When she is near all other birds are spurred
To sing so bold and sweet that all are heard,
Inspired by her brave shining inner core

So small a bird to fly the windy weather.
She found a way to safely sail rough sky.
But tempest comes, air dense with gale to pour.
This small bird doesn't know how she will fly.
All loved ones flock to take it together
Our dear one will be strong and she shall soar.[1]

That sonnet was the hardest thing I had ever written, and it mattered the most. I had to blend intellectual abilities with deeply personal feelings. Indeed, my sonnet is my argument made manifest—when struggling to express what I cared deeply about, only the demands of a stringent form would do. Yes, Stanley Fish, students do need to learn the mechanics of writing, yet without the personal, emotional, and the exciting, writing will never mean anything. 11

Fish argues that writing should be taught first with rigorous grammar in complete isolation from interesting content and student expression. Yet this type of teaching increases the division between the privileged and the underprivileged, and between the intellectual and the personal (and produces writing that is intellectual to the exclusion or loss or denial of the personal). I believe that writing should be taught with the purpose of empowering individuals across divides such as age, class, race, and language. When students write what matters to them, they write better, more passionately, and more strongly; claiming agency in their expressions, they take on the power to affect change in their lives and in the world. Teachers of writing in all settings should strive to help their students write what matters to their lives, and encourage them to express their voices and tell their stories. 12

Notes

1. After some scary months of uncertainty, Janna did recover. Today, she is healthy and still teaches eighth graders.

For their influence, directly and indirectly, on this paper, I would like to thank Janna and Mark, Stanley Fish, bell hooks, Gerald Graff, Doug Downs, and Lee Rumbarger, for whose class I wrote it.

Works Cited

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Questions for Discussion and Journaling

1. Strasser writes that "The devices of grammar and rhetoric remain superficial skills until a writer employs them to express important and powerful feelings, thoughts, and ideas" (para. 1). Why? And do you agree?
2. What seems to be at issue for Strasser is creating "personally meaningful writing" in response to school assignments. Is there actually anything in Stanley Fish's advocacy of a writing course that teaches reasoning which would seem to rule out such personally meaningful writing? In other words, is Strasser right to assume that Fish's insistence on writing in order to exercise one's grammar will actually lead to meaningless writing?
3. In your experience, does school create a separation of mind, body, and spirit that Strasser quotes bell hooks as identifying (para. 4)?

Applying and Exploring Ideas

1. Write your own explanation of how the "academic" and the "personal" interrelate. In what sense is your schoolwork *personal*, and in what sense do you bring your "personal" into your schoolwork? How does one shape the other?
2. If you have also read Erika Petersen's *YSW* piece on literacy in this chapter (p. 191), compare the ways the two articles use sources. How does their treatment of use of sources look similar, and how does it differ? Write an analysis of the effects that differing uses create.

Meta Moment

Strasser's argument about the importance of connecting the personal and the academic seems to treat the academic as *not temporary*, not "just" four or five years of one's life that is removed and isolated from the rest. Do you view your college education as a part of your life, or as something disconnected from your life that is simply to be gotten through so you can get on with your life? Would Jackson's reasoning work if you understood academics as the latter?

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Shirley Brice Heath, "Protean Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever-Shifting Oral and Literate Traditions" (from *Spoken and Written Language*, 1982).

Discussion of Heath's landmark ethnographic study of children and adults from "non-mainstream" backgrounds in the Piedmont Carolinas.