WRITERS ON WRITING: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

by

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ABSTRACT

Writers on Writing: Implications for Educators

The purpose of this study was to identify issues and themes about writing, as described by writers who were interviewed and videotaped by the Knowledge Network at the 1994 Vancouver Writers' Festival, that might be of interest and possibly provide some direction for educators in the teaching of writing.

Data from unedited video footage of seventeen writers was analyzed and sorted under five main subject areas:

1. How/why the writers started to write

2. How the writers learned to write

3. The writers' philosophies on writing

4. The process of writing

5. Suggestions for the teaching/learning of writing

Using data obtained from interviews which were conducted by different interviewers posed some restrictions on the findings. The writers did not necessarily comment on all the five main issues, and many answers were superficial in nature.

Main themes of interest elicited from the data analysis that have implications for the teaching of writing include:

1. The correlation between liking to tell stories and reading, and becoming a writer

2. The effect of exposure to live writers

3. The attributes of being a writer

4. The reasons writers start to write

5. The ease of some genres, ie. poetry as the first experience in writing

6. The relationship of music to writing

7. The experience of immersion and involvement in the writing

8. The preferred modes of writing

Most of the writers did not learn to write at school. Many believed that writing was an innate talent and could not be taught. Others thought certain aspects of writing might be taught if the teachers were writers

Further study is suggested to explore differences in writer comments based on gender or writing genre, to identify or develop teaching strategies to implement the suggested implications for educators, and to replicate the study using one interviewer and a consistent set of questions for the writers

DEDICATION

My years completing this thesis

and

learning about the mysteries of writing

are dedicated to

my two sons, Cleal and Robin.

Storytelling, reading, and writing,

like loving,

are

forever.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify issues and themes about writing, as described by writers who were interviewed and videotaped by the Knowledge Network at the 1994 Vancouver Writers' Festival, that might be of interest and possibly provide some direction for educators in the teaching of writing.

Of special interest is what the writers described as the personal attributes and characteristics that they believe predispose them to their successes in writing. If these attributes could be taught, would it create writers? This study does not attempt to answer this directly, other than to suggest that educators might find the list of attributes and characteristics interesting, and that it might have implications for the teaching of writing. Also, it was not the intent of this study to criticize, argue, or refute the writers' comments by comparing the findings to that of other writers, teachers of writing, and writing scholars. Nor was it within the scope of this paper to provide a complete and exhaustive examination of how to best teach writing.

Rationale

This study evolved based on two beliefs: one about writing, and one on education. Firstly from Mamchur's SFU Educ 832 course (1993), came the belief that writing is a joyful activity, one that has inherent value for the writer, and that the qualities, skills, and attitudes of a writer can be taught. The second belief is that education should be authentic, referring to the notion that it isn't enough for a teacher to be knowledgeable about the subject, but that the teacher be personally connected and passionately interested in the subject, open to new ideas, and able to engage students by understanding and using the students' passion and interest in the subject (Heathcote, 1988). To this end, the best way to learn about the subject of writing might be from writers themselves. If experienced writers admit to learning how to write from a certain set of practices, or from having specific attributes, then these need to be identified and reviewed with intent to be incorporated into the teaching of writing. These beliefs progressed logically into the development of this study.

Can writing only be learned by those who possess an affinity for writing? Or can writing be taught effectively to those with limited experiences or abilities in writing? My interest in this subject developed into a pilot project for my writing course. I viewed videotapes of six of the writers at the Writers' Festival and identified four main themes. emerging from the writers' comments:

1. How and why they started their careers in writing
2. How they learned to write
3. The techniques they use to write and
4. The advice they give to potential writers.

Most did not specifically identify where or how they learned to write, but described the kind of person they were, as if having those qualities or attributes was what made them a writer. Some described themselves as being more observant, more curious, or more imaginative than others. This intrigued me. Perhaps writing itself cannot always be taught. but the attributes that make a writer can be developed, once they are identified.

Methodology

This study was initially begun as a project to identify what the writers might say about writing that might be of interest to educators. As themes and issues were identified from the data, a further step in the analysis became apparent: implications for education. This step required more detailed review of the data and analysis, and expanded the study into a thesis.

The Knowledge Network interviewed 17 writers at the 1994 Vancouver Writers' Festival. I analyzed the unedited footage of these interviews by transcribing and sorting the comments according to the four headings determined during a pilot project in which six of the interviews were analyzed. Further data sorting indicated a need to add a heading on writers' philosophies about writing, and to expand the techniques used in writing category to include the more spiritual side of the process of writing. The five main headings used to sort the data became:

1. How/why did the writers start to write

2. How the writers learned to write

3. Philosophies on writing

4. Process of writing

5. Suggestions for the teaching/learning of writing.

I chose to use the writers from the Vancouver Festival because they were current, popular writers and not necessarily academic experts in the field of writing. Their comments reflected their personal experiences rather than academic or scholarly perspectives. This approach has been used by others who have sought practical advice on writing (Cameron, 1973; Pack & Parini, 1991). Pack and Parini, in support of talking to experienced writers noted:

> Much of the best criticism and most of the useful practical advice about writing has come from writers. (However) the language of criticism has become so technical, even jargon-ridden... (that) the domain of criticism--and writing about writing--has been give over to "experts", many of whom are far more interested in the theoretical aspects of literature (in itself a good thing) than in the process and techniques of writing. One should pay special attention to what writers have to say about writing--about past and present authors, about their own works, their craft in general. (p.vii)

It is with this directive that the writing practitioners, included in the 1994 Writers' Festival, were chosen for this study. It is their insight and experiences with writing that could lend a practical perspective to the issue of teaching writing.

I also liked the notion of pre-selected (by the Knowledge Network) writers by virtue of their popularity with general readers in this coastal region. The findings, based on their comments, might then be more relevant to regional educators.

The use of existing interview footage of the writers posed some strengths for this study. The selection of the writers, the questions used for the interviews, and the interviews themselves were not influenced by me or the issues related to this study. By avoiding these elements of investigator bias, Silverman (1993) suggests that data might be more reliable and valid (p. 91).

The interviews were conducted from an interactionist position (Silverman, 1993) whereby the questions were open-ended and the writers' perspectives and experiences

were captured in free-flowing anecdotal stories rather than formalized positivist question-answer format. The breadth and depth of the stories or comments were left entirely up to the comfort of the individual writer.

This study has some limitations which are explored in detail in Chapter Three, but will be mentioned briefly here. Some are related to the interactionistic approach to interviewing, which could influence the objectivity of the interpretation of the data, and could limit the value of the findings for application in current practice of education. First, the interview questions were not asked in a consistent way nor were the writers asked the same questions by the various interviewers. Second, the writers answered the interview questions according to their own biases and interpretation of what the question might have meant. Rarely did the interviewer direct the writer to a consistent understanding of the question.

Another limitation is the use of popular writers instead of acknowledged experts in writing who have spent years reflecting on the nature of writing. The writers in this study might not have been as reflective or articulate in their understanding of their writing abilities. Conversely, many of these writers might have been asked these questions in previous interviews and thus their responses might have been more rehearsed and scripted.

A possible limitation is that the writers represent a variety of work including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, art books, and technical writing which might make the responses too broad to be meaningful.

Also possibly influencing the interpretation of the data is the term "writer," used throughout the interviews, which might have different meanings for each of the writers. If someone likes to write, is he/she a "writer," or is the term used specifically to describe only those who are professionally recognized as such? This question and the much larger philosophical query, "What is writing?" are briefly discussed in Chapter Two, to help frame working definitions for the purposes of this study. These definitions are based on the notion that writing is best described as the act of *composing* using *expressive* language (Berthoff, 1993, Britton, 1991, Protherough, 1983). A writer might then be considered to be one who engages in literary practices (writing stories, poems, plays, etc) by *composing* creatively and expressively. A more thorough investigation into the two broad queries,

"What is writing?" and "What is a writer?" exceeds the scope of this study despite the obvious relevance that clarity on these issues would make to the interpretation of data related to writing

Summary

This study elicits some opinions from writers about writing that might be useful to educators. The findings of this study, based on the comments from the seventeen interviewed writers, are not necessarily in accordance with my own beliefs about education and writing. It is up to educators to determine whether the identified issues and characteristics should and/or could be incorporated into practice, and how they might be reflected in current curriculums

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

"I am convinced more and more day by day that fine writing is next to fine doing, the top thing in the world".   John Keats (1795-1821)

Introduction

The interest conveyed in this study is mainly about what writers have to say about why they write, how they learned to write, the processes they use when writing, and how writing should be taught. Inherent in these topics are the discussions of the attributes/characteristics of writers and the notion of giftedness.

To help frame and clarify the broad subject of what is meant by "writing," and to explore the underlying value and importance society puts on writing which may be central to this discussion, some brief comments from educators and experts of writing are included in the first section, an overview of writing. The main focus of this study however, is to investigate what popular writers say about writing, and as such, their perspective is given prominence for the remaining five sections of this literature review.

This chapter is divided into these six sections that address these key issues for this study

1. Writing: an overview
2. How/why did these writers start to write
3. How these writers learned to write
4. These writers' philosophies on writing
5. The process of writing as described by these writers
6. Suggestions for the teaching/learning of writing

Writing: An Overview

Our society values the abilities to read and write. Our educational systems operate on the premise that students will learn to read and write. But what is writing? Why is it so important? This section will briefly explore these two issues to help frame and contextualize this broad concept of writing in order to attribute meaning to the comments made by writers in the later sections

The Value and Importance of Writing

"Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man."

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

Writing appears to serve two main philosophical purposes: As a means of communication to connect us with other people and our culture, and as a process of interpretation of our environment. Stegner (1988), wrote on the connectedness of writing:

> Writing is a social act, an act of communication both intellectual and emotional. It is also, at its best, an act of affirmation -- a way of joining the human race and a human culture. (p. 71)

Berthoff (1993) also talked about this connectedness in terms of the *Ineinandersein* or "in-one-anotherness" of writing:

> (Good writing) engages our minds because it is dialogic and provokes us to ask more questions about life and language. It has the power of the discourse, and the interest due to the Ineinandersein of the particular and the more general, and indeed, of the universal facts of human life. (p. 9)

She wrote that the use of language to name/oppose/define are the ways we symbolize and make sense of our world.

> O'Brien (1991), noted that what is written has purpose in our lives:

> Writing is essentially an act of faith -- in the heuristic power of the imagination...that the story will lead, in some way, to epiphany, or understanding, or enlightenment (p. 179)

The use of language and the heuristic ability of the human mind is stimulated and improved by the act of writing. This heightened understanding of our world and the inherent value we place on connectedness with others form the foundation for the value modern society places on writing.

Students have a more practical view of the value of writing: to have better qualifications, to obtain a job, to succeed in a career, to meet the social and personal needs for communication, and to do schoolwork (Protherough, 1983, p. 5). In Protherough's study, students rated writing for pleasure or for the need to express their own feelings and ideas as low in importance. This student perspective has a significant

implication for the teaching of writing. Should writing be taught for primarily practical purposes? Not according to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1988), who have stated: "Our primary mission in elementary and secondary schools is to produce students who speak, listen, read, and write not only capably, but with a joy that will have a profound impact on their personal habits and will carry over to later phases of their lives"(p. 48). This issue of the what the main goal is for writing to be taught will not be explored in detail in this thesis, however it does influence the role education plays in the development of future writers, and as such, will be reviewed in the section on the teaching of writing later in this chapter.

From the comments of writers and experts about the value of writing, it appears that two main purposes for society are served by writing. Writing is a means of precise communication and a process of interpretation of the world around us. It also has personal value for the writer--a sense of omnipotence and immortality.

What is Writing?

"Any writer who's worked in various forms can tell you from experience that it all feels like writing" (Gardner, 1994, p. 217).

Protherough (1983), suggested that there are considerable misconceptions about what constitutes as "writing." He wrote that the confusion is prolific and most deleterious among teachers because they are looking for different signs that their students are writing effectively. He identified five different but often overlapping interpretations of writing:

1. Orthography (using letters and words in a pattern to make meaning)
2. Writing using correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation
3. Technical writing for a practical purpose, ie. essays, letters, memos, etc
4. Literary work, ie. stories, poems, plays, etc.
5. Career or professional writing, ie. journalism (p. 15)

Protherough claimed most educators are concerned with technical and literary writing, and that the term *composing* better describes the act of writing for those purposes. Berthoff (1993) also identified *composing* as the more precise way to describe the simultaneous act of reading and writing. Britton (1991) defined composing as a process of reading, writing,

and speaking. "Talk prepares the environment into which what is taken from reading may be accommodated: and from that amalgam the writing proceeds" (p. 77).

Britton (1991) identified three functions of writing, that are, in some ways, similar to Protherough's list: *Transactional*, to get something done; *expressive* , using the writer's own language and situation; and, *poetic*, using language that is contemplated in itself and for itself (cited in Farrell, 1991, p. 63). He believed that it is expressive writing that best develops a hermeneutic sense of the world, and is the closest link to the spoken language. In a study on student uses of writing, Britton noted that most were transactional (63%) and the least (5%) were expressive. He suggested that educators should focus on teaching students to be expressive writers because "the use of expressive language may be intimately related to inner speech, mediating between thought and its expression, and regarded as a route to mastery of both transactional and poetic modes, the languages of discourse and reflection" (p. 118). For these above reasons, the writers reviewed for this thesis are those primarily considered to have creative, expressive, and literary practices.

This overview of writing provides a sense of what the various notions of writing are, and what value writing has for society. The comments made by writers in this literature review, and those made in the interview transcripts of this study, can then be contextualized within this paradigm

How/Why Did The Writers Start To Write?

Who are writers and why do they write? Are writers any different than non-writers? Most writers speak of not intending or setting out to be writers (French, 1993; McGahern, 1993; Paretsky, 1993) Nevertheless, many describe their childhood experiences, their personalities and personal characteristics, and give practical reasons as major influences on their abilities and early desires to write

Childhood Experiences

The writer's own perception of his/her childhood, good or bad, and the early exposure to reading and writing are considered significant influences by many of the writers for their early desires to write

Perception of Childhood

The belief that a sad life helps to stimulate one to write, presumably as a means of coping, is rather prevalent among the creative writers (Gardener, 1994, Paretsky, 1993). "They say that to be a writer you must first have an unhappy childhood" (Rylant, 1989, p. 15). Simenon (in Cowley, 1958), noted:

> Writing is not a profession but a vocation of unhappiness, I don't think an artist can ever be happy...because if a man has an urge to be an artist, it is because he needs to find himself...through his characters, through all his writing. (p. 141)

Wilder agreed with this notion saying, "One form or another of an unhappy childhood is essential to the formation of exceptional gifts", although he claimed to have had a balanced and normal life (in Cowley, 1958, p. 107). Mantel (1993), attributes her motivation for writing to being chronically unhealthy, "and writing is a job that not-very-healthy people can do" (p. 44). Other writers took deliberate pains to clarify that unlike their misfortunate counterparts, they came from loving homes, had happy childhoods, and now live contented and healthy lives (Forster in Cowley, 1958; Welty, 1984)

A troubled life undoubtedly provides descriptive and interesting material with which to work. It also seems reasonable that writing is perceived as a way of coping and controlling one's life separate from the demands and restrictions inherent in an unhappy reality. A sad childhood and a perception of a miserable life do not, however, appear to be prerequisites to developing a desire to write

Early Exposure to Reading and Writing

Having a strong literary influence, and reading early as children, featured prominently by the writers as influencing their desire to write (Ellman, 1993; Cary, Forster and Parker, in Cowley, 1958, Gardner, 1994; Hill, 1993; Huddle, 1991; McGahern, 1993; Stegner, 1988, Welty, 1984) Many future writers were read to at very young ages, and were encouraged to read early. It is the exposure to the use of language, the discovery that reading delights and stimulates the mind, and the exposure to worlds of information, that writers say helped them to discover how and why to write. Stegner wrote on the learning of writing "We learn any art not from nature, but from the tradition, from those who have practiced it before" (p. 26)

Storytelling

Some writers claimed that their development as writers evolved from their ability and need to tell oral stories, beginning in their childhood (Cary, in Cowley, 1958). Gardam (1993), suggested that the storytelling influence of families is a mysterious, yet powerful connection to writing: "So what about a story-telling gene? Story-telling, like a facility for languages (and music and mathematics) does tend to run in families"(p. 11). From their early exposure to listening to and telling stories, the writers claimed they developed a love for the sound of words and an ability to use accurate and vivid language.

Personal Characteristics

Smith (1981) wrote it is a myth that writers are any different from non-writers:

There is no evidence that writers are any more intelligent, sensitive, talented, dedicated, disciplined, or persevering than people who do not write. Writers come from no exclusive kind of background. (p. 2)

Unlike Smith, other writers readily described their individual attributes as if to imply that the possession of those identified qualities determine a person's ability to be a writer. While it is foolhardy to think that all writers, as individual people, have the same attributes, it is interesting that some consistent themes emerge from the literature. The characteristics of writers tend to fall under three main general categories: pleasure in the use of language, heightened use of the senses, and attributes for a successful career in writing.

Pleasure in the Use of Language

The thrill of using words and creating a story using vivid and precise language was frequently noted as an attribute of writers (Gardner,1994; O'Connor, in Cowley,1958; Stegner, 1988; Welty, 1984). Some authors specifically talked about their fascination and pleasure/comfort with the *look, feel, shape*, and *colour* of letters and words (Brown ,1991, McGahern, 1993) MacKay (1993) described: "The look of words, the way they affect one another, the reactive colours of individual letters and numbers, the characters of characters have always fascinated me"(p. 77) Not so for Hill (1993), who stated:

I have heard writers declare that they are in love with words. I do not understand what they mean. Words are tools, like bricks. I can be in love with a great house, but the materials themselves do not interest. (p.120)

Heightened Use of the Senses

Being an exceptionally perceptive person was often stated as a quality for a good writer (Faulkner, Mauriac, and Parker, in Cowley, 1958; Gardner, 1994; Protherough,1983; Stegner, 1988; Welty, 1984). Stegner wrote that a writer's "eyes and ears are acute and active"(p. 16) and that a good writer finds the right words to convey what these senses perceive. Welty's autobiographical writing features chapters on *listening, learning to see*, and *finding a voice*. These three attributes were well described by writers and will be briefly elaborated on in this review.

The notion of listening is an interesting one connected to Britton's (1991) theories about talking and writing. He suggested that the act of reading is as closely aligned with listening as is the relationship between speaking and writing. Several authors mentioned how they listen for their stories, sentences, or characters (Banville, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1993). Welty (1984) wrote: "There has never been a line read that I didn't hear" (p. 11). O'Connor agreed with this notion, explaining: "I have terribly sensitive hearing and I'm terribly aware of voices...If I use the right phrase, and the reader hears the phrase in his head, he sees the individual" (in Cowley, 1958, p. 169). Faulkner appears to take an opposite perspective when he said, "I prefer to read rather than listen. I prefer silence to sound, and the image produced by words occurs in silence" (in Cowley, p 134).

Welty (1984) also wrote that "listening *for* [stories] is more acute than listening *to* them" (p. 14). In other words, writers listen to the world around them as a means of making sense of it. The act of listening refers more to the active involvement or interaction in the world rather than the mere ability to hear sounds.

The attributes of being observant and alert, having an imagination, and being eager to *see* and make discoveries in the world, were discussed frequently by writers as significant attributes (Gardner, 1994, Hill, 1993; Jolley, 1993; Moore, B, 1993, Murray, 1968, Parker, in Cowley, 1958, Stegner, 1988, Welty, 1984) "The writer sees what we do not see in what we all see" (Murray, p 11) Again, this may refer more to a figurative

meaning of paying attention to life rather than actually using optic vision. Blind individuals, as in the case of Thurber, can still write effectively. Mauriac (in Cowley, 1958), expanded on the concept of being alert: "I don't observe and I don't describe; I rediscover" (p. 42).

Interestingly, one author emphasized that she does not have an imagination: "What talent I have is for seeing the connections between things, and in finding a dramatic form for abstract ideas" (Mantel, 1993, p.45).

Attributes for a Successful Career in Writing

The need to have self-confidence in order to request, accept, and learn through criticism is an attribute cited by many authors (Faulkner in Cowley, 1958; Gardner, 1994; Mantel, 1993; Stegner, 1988). The writer must have the courage to objectively judge his own work, and revise it in the process. Wilder (in Cowley) wrote: "Every writer is a critic, each sentence is a skeleton accompanied by enormous activity of rejection" (p.117). Mantel (1993), stressed that a writer needs to be arrogant, "You write to impose yourself on the world, and you have to believe in your own ability when the world at large shows no sign of agreeing with you" (p. 45) While this attribute is identified as important for writing, it does not nevertheless come easily. As Huddle (1991) wrote, "Criticism is a natural act, but receiving criticism is not" (p. 77).

Many writers suggested that a good writer must be older and *mature*, that good writing can only happen after a long literary apprenticeship (Mauriac in Cowley, 1958, Stegner, 1988) Presumably this infers that a writer will have had more life experiences to draw upon and a more expansive use of language. Thurber identified a paradox with this notion however, when he stated, "Writers have a fear of aging, coupled with the curious idea that the writer's inventiveness and ability will end in his fifties. And of course, it often does" (in Cowley, p 98)

There are other identified attributes that some writers noted they possessed. Gardner (1994) wrote that a good writer is *intuitive, a symbolist, a careful student of character,* and *opinionated.* Welty (1984) wrote that a crucial element to her development as a writer was to have a sense of storytelling chronology and to view life events as a series of *scenes*

Several writers also identified some rather unflattering attributes they believe writers possess to live a "writer's life". B. Moore (1993) asserted that writers tend to lead isolating and dull lives. Gardam (1993) wrote that writers are:

> Engaged in indoor activity, haemorrhoidal, prone to chilblains, poor of circulation. It is a life under stress, schizogenic... intense, draining, exhausting, solitary, anti-social, mad. (p.10)

Mantel (1993) agreed that living a life as a writer wasn't normal:

> You don't have a life anymore, you just have writing opportunities. Things don't happen to you; you generate material. At the worst, you don't have friends, you have characters.(p.43)

MacKay (1993) wrote about the "torment" of the writer--never to be able to enjoy a scene or landscape for its own sake without automatically translating the image into words.

These identified attributes (both positive and negative) serve to highlight some prominent themes. Unlike Smith's (1981) assertion that writers are not any different from non-writers, these writers suggest that they have a heightened awareness and perception of what they see, hear, and think of the world around them. The writers say they find life worthy of a more intense scrutiny and are able to use language effectively as a means of conveying what they have discovered. Writers also apparently like to write for the sake of writing. Faulkner summarized these attributes in Cowley (1958). "A writer needs three things. Experience, observation, and imagination, any two of which, at times any one of which, can supply the lack of the others" (p. 133).

Practical Reasons for Writing

Most writers described their early beginnings of writing as something unintentional. They did not deliberately plan to become writers. Writing was something they did either for pleasure or simply to pay the bills, with the works eventually being published and recognized (Hill, 1993, Ellman, 1993, Parker, Simenon, Algren, Wilson, all in Cowley, 1958). Faulkner (in Cowley) admitted he started out by pretending to be a writer because he liked the lifestyle he perceived writers had, then discovered that the act of writing itself was fun. Similarly, Forster (1993) wrote initially just to try it out. Wilder

(in Cowley) explained one of his purposes for writing is purely functional: "...in order to discover on my shelf a new book which I would enjoy reading"(p. 116).

One of the problems with identifying themselves early as writers, was their understanding of what a "writer" was. Thurber (in Cowley, 1958) stated that there was a faulty but prevalent notion amongst writers that an individual would not be considered a writer unless he/she had published a large work of prose of at least 5000 words (p. 94). Delbanco (1991) indicated that one wasn't given status as a writer until recognized as such from other writers. Mantel (1993) suggested that even if a person hasn't any contacts in the literary field and is unpublished, he/she should steadfastly define and consider him/herself a writer and ignore feeling guilty about it.

How Did The Writers Learn to Write?

The previous section reviewed what writers said it takes to be a writer. Some of the attributes and qualities noted thus far, overlap into the realm of how they say they learned to write. For example, writers are often avid readers, and say that this exposure to writing was instrumental in their desire to write and the development of the ability to craft the writing. This section examines what writers additionally reported as having helped them learn to write. Also included here will be a discussion of the ongoing debate among writers about whether or not writing is an innate talent/gift. The discussion on how best to teach writing will be reviewed in the last section of this chapter.

Formal Education

Learning to write in school was hardly mentioned by these writers. Only two referred to formal education, and both with the implication that they already had the talent for writing before they entered the system. It isn't known if these writers were students at a time when writing wasn't taught in school curriculums, or was taught in the traditional way of focussing on literature, linguistics, and grammar. Brown (1991) wrote that if a person has an ability to write, it will eventually be noticed by the teachers, who will then encourage more writing. Huddle (1991) spoke of a more negative relationship between writers and teachers of writing classes. He stated that *true* writers have an innate and essential *survival aptitude:* "to take what is needed from every teacher and every class,

and disregard what wasn't needed or what might be harmful" (p. 74). He claimed that if children have a survival aptitude in school, they will take what will be of benefit to their writing and develop as a writer. He said that if this quality is lacking, "no amount of writing education will make you a writer"(p. 74). Faulkner supported this position by adding:

> There is no mechanical way to get the writing done, no short cut. The young writer would be a fool to follow a theory. Teach yourself by your own mistakes; people learn only by error. The good artist believes that nobody is good enough to give him advice. He has supreme vanity". (in Cowley, 1958, p.129)

Informal Education

The strongest theme that emerged from writers about how they learned to write was that they were apprentices in the field. (Stegner, 1988; Delbanco, 1991; Protherough, 1983; Wolitzer, 1991). The writers believed that their learning of writing came from the act of writing. With experience, the act of composing became automatic and the *Ineinandersein* of the writer and the writing took place (Berthoff, 1993; Smith, 1981).

Exposure to other writers, as in a membership in a writing community, or a mentorship relationship with a writer, was frequently suggested as a way to learn about criticism and to learn to develop the person's natural strengths and voice in writing (Delbanco, 1991). Stegner (1988) noted, "Writers teach other writers how to see and hear"(p. 27). Thurber (in Cowley, 1958) believed in a close relationship with an editor who will "clear up sloppy writing"(p. 92). Other writers were more guarded in their views about belonging to a writing community, or in discussing their work with other writers (Algren, Faulkner, Wilder, in Cowley, 1958). Cary felt that other writers shouldn't solve a writer's technical problems for him/her; instead, the writer should use trial and error to work the problems out for him/herself (in Cowley). Other writers referred to not wanting to discuss their work with others, because it was either not a pleasurable experience, or because it took the mystique away from writing the story. Wilson explained:

> Fiction writing is a kind of magic, and I don't care to talk about a novel I'm doing because if I communicate the magic spell, even in an abbreviated form it loses its force for me. And so many people have **talked out** to me books they would otherwise have written. Once you have talked, the act of communication has been made" (p. 266, 1959 Paris Interviews)

Wilder (in Cowley, 1958) was more concerned about young writers needing regular, if not daily, contact with non-writers who would represent a more balanced perspective on the world, and would provide a larger variety of experiences from which to write.

Delbanco (1991) talked about the two paradoxes in the learning of writing:

1. The only way to learn one's art is through back-breaking labour that must not seem like work.

2. After the seeming-impossible has become difficult, the difficult habitual, and the habitual easy, true mastery begins. (p. 40)

Wilder echoed this perspective by saying, "[Writing] is as difficult an exercise in technique as it is in honesty; but it should emerge as immediately, as spontaneously, as **undeliberately** as possible"(in Cowley, 1958, p. 118). This notion of hard work and years of apprenticeship in the development of writing ability is explored by other writers, most notably Mark Twain:

Writing is a craft requiring years of hard work and apprenticeship... there is always a demand for writers who are willing to give time and effort to their writing...the public is the best judge of the worth of a composition...the [best way to become a writer] is to work at it for nothing until one's value is recognized" (cited in Fried, 1961, p. x)

Protherough (1983) also reflected this perspective when he rejected the common notion that writers either compose by "awaiting the divine spark... and writing happens as an unplanned, automatic process" or simply "a matter of following a sequence of steps, like a recipe"(p. 145). He stated that writing involves a great many different processes at different levels of difficulty and complexity that takes years of maturity to develop.

The Notion of Giftedness in Writing

"There is an art of reading, as well as an art of thinking, and an art of writing."
                                            Isaac D'Israeli (1766-1848)

The terms *gift* or *giftedness* are commonly used in our language to denote an innate ability, genius, talent, or aptitude that represents exceptional performance that cannot be acquired alone by study or practice (Palmquist & Young, 1992). It is a vague but powerful assumption related to such notions as originality and creativity

From the literature, it appears that writers were intensely divided on this issue. In support of writing as an innate ability, Stegner (1988) wrote:

> Writing is not a function of intelligence or application. It is a function of gift--that which is given and not acquired. All a teacher can do is work with what is given. (p. 13)

Other writers agreed with this position (Brown, 1991; Wolitzer, 1991). Delbanco (1991) acknowledged the dichotomy of the teaching of writing versus the learning of writing by saying, "Writing cannot, we are told, be taught; it must nonetheless be learned" (p. 35). Huddle (1991), also struggled with this issue saying, "Writing can be taught, but only a small number of people can learn to be writers" (p. 35).

Even Mark Twain alluded to the notion of giftedness in his statement on good writing

> aptness of language--denoting a shrewd faculty of selecting just the right word for the service needed... it is a high gift. It is the talent which gives accuracy, grace, and vividness in descriptive writing. (cited in Fried, 1961, p. 3)

Others were more cautious about taking such a position. Protherough (1983) believed that writing is a natural and enjoyable drive for everyone, especially beginning in childhood, with such evidence that virtually all children will happily draw and scribble on anything anywhere. It was his belief that the majority of children eventually lose the urge to write or develop resistance to it as they get older, partly due to negative attitudes at home and at school that suggest that writing is arduous work. Others agreed that the natural act of creative writing in children can become distorted by academic requirements (Huddle, 1991, McCormick Calkins, 1986)

Palmquist and Young (1992) studied the effect of the belief of giftedness on student performance in writing. Their findings indicated that the large number of students who strongly believed that writing ability was a gift, had higher levels of writing apprehension, lower self-assessments of their abilities as writers, and were more likely to choose school and career paths that avoided the need for writing. Students who believed that writing ability was a gift, and they *considered themselves as gifted*, scored highly in writing confidence. Interestingly, students who did not believe writing was a gift, were also confident of their ability to achieve proficiency in writing. Mauriac (in Cowley, 1958)

supported this notion: "I write with complete naiveté, spontaneously--I have never had a preconceived notion of what I could or could not do"(p. 40).

· Students who believed they were poor writers because they lacked giftedness in writing were found to have had previously negative experiences with writing teachers. Palmquist and Young explained, "The notion of giftedness, one of the most pervasive of the modern explanations for exceptional writing performance, may be in some way associated with attitudes that subvert writing performance"(1992, p. 160). ₋

Palmquist and Young (1992) acknowledged that the issue of whether or not writing is a gift is unresolved, even after centuries of debate, possibly because it is the wrong question

> Conceivably, one might grant the existence of a creative gift and even that teacher and student can reliably detect its presence or absence, but doing so does not necessarily carry with it the implication that without such a gift the student cannot hope to become a good writer. (p. 162)

Protherough (1983) took a similar position with the question "Can writing be taught?" He wrote that the question might be better framed as "Can teachers help children to become writers?" to which his answer would be "yes" (p. 16). B. Moore (1993), on the subject of innate talent, commented, "We are not geniuses, most of us who write novels, but we are, many of us, people who have chosen to live the surrogate life of the imagination" (p. 54)

The learning of writing, according to writers, is based primarily on the act of writing and rewriting, and learning from one's own mistakes. Belonging to a writing community is supported by some as a means to improve the craft of writing, whereas others caution that exposure to too many writers might inhibit creativity. The issue of giftedness continues to confound and influence the discussion on the teaching and learning of writing. The whole notion of giftedness needs to be studied in more detail, especially as it pertains to our deeply-rooted attitudes, beliefs, and expectations related to writing. More on what the writers have to say on the teaching of writing will be reviewed in the last section of this chapter

The Writers' Philosophies on Writing

This section attempts to look at some of the more philosophical reasons writers gave for writing, distinct from the practical reasons for why they began to write given in the second section of this review

Writers spoke of the magic and power, and impulse, or the uncontrollable urge they have to write and to keep writing (Bell, 1991; Hill, 1993; Swift, 1993; Thurber in Cowley, 1958) L Moore (1993) explained this phenomenon

> In more scientific terms, the compulsion to read and write—and it seems to me it should be, even must be, a compulsion—is a bit of mental wiring the species has selected, over time, in order, as the life span increases, to keep us interested in ourselves (p 199)

Many writers talked about having a moral responsibility when they write (Davies, 1993, Hart, 1993, Mortimer, 1993) While some writers described their motivation for writing as simply wanting to share their own moral learning, as a justification for their existence (B Moore, 1993, Wilder in Cowley, 1958), Gordimer (1993) attempted to explain the philosophical basis for morality in writing

> Morals have bedded with story-telling since the magic of the imaginative capacity developed in the human brain—and in my ignorance of a scientific explanation of changes in the cerebrum or whatever, to account for this faculty, I believe it was the inkling development that here was somewhere where the truth about being alive might lie The harsh lessons of daily existence, co-existence between human and human, with animals and nature, could be made sense of in the ordering of properties of the transforming imagination, working on the "states of things" With this faculty fully developed, great art in fiction can evolve in imaginative revelation to fit the crises of an age that comes after its own, undreamt of when it was written (p 225)

O'Connor described a simpler reason for writing "[You write because] you enjoy it, and you read it because you enjoy it not because of a serious moral responsibility to read or write" (in Cowley, 1958, p 172) Banville (1993) claimed, "As a writer I have little or no interest in character, plot, motivation, manners, politics, morality, social issues," viewing writing instead as an artistic expression of his innocence in the world (p 107)

Some writers referred to having a loyalty or responsibility to the reader, or having to engage the reader in a relationship (Gardam, 1993; Hill, 1993). Jolley (1993) wrote:

> The great loyalty of the fiction writer towards the reader is on the attempt to distill from landscape and experience particles of culture and background and to put this material into an available and acceptable form. To be loyal both to background and to reader, the writer needs to exercise judgment in order to select and choose, to concentrate and to refine and to reject non-essentials, so that the best material is offered in the best way. (p. 165)

There was also a notion amongst writers that they need to write as a means of expression, and keep writing to improve or to achieve perfection, which they feel is never realized (Forster, 1993, Faulkner, Simenon in Cowley, 1958).

Wilder talked about the power of language in writing, "The future author is one who discovers that language, the exploration and manipulation of the resources of language, will serve him . . . language for him is the instrument for digesting experience, for explaining himself to himself (in Cowley, 1958, p. 107). O'Brien (1991), also talked about language as a tool. "Words serve as explicit incantations that invite us into and guide us through the universe of the imagination. Language is the apparatus --the magic dust--by which a writer performs his miracles"(p. 177). Oz (1993) considered it a writer's duty not just to use language, but to defend and protect language from becoming banal and misused (p. 234)

Some writers connected reading and writing to music in some way (Banville, 1993). L. Moore (1993), "obsessed with songs" all her life, tries to "make the language sing" in her writing (p. 202). Hart (1993) looks for "the hypnotic power of the hidden beat in language" to create a magical world for the reader (p. 211). Boylan (1993) wrote that Burgess had said that he didn't listen to music when writing because his writing was "itself a kind of music" (p. 248)

Writing was thought to be an advanced process of oral storytelling, with a similar philosophical basis and process (Swift, 1993). Gardner (1994) wrote that although oral storytellers and writers both figure out the world by talking about it, writing has more precision and power because it can be reworked, and refined as a final piece. Some writers are more articulate in written form than they are in speech. As Wilder (in Cowley,

1958) pointed out, "Many great writers have been extraordinarily awkward in daily exchange" (p 108).

Smith (1981) suggested that writing's unique potential compared to speech, is that the writer, in revising, reorganizing, and evaluating his work, is able to manipulate time. Faulkner (in Cowley, 1958) agreed with this notion and described feeling "like God" when he writes because he can create his own people and move them around in space and time. Writing can also be preserved in its original form, adding an element of immortality to the writer and the work. Faulkner described this sense of immortality:

> The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again because it is life (p 139)

Many writers avoided discussing their philosophies of writing, or why they wrote. Protherough (1993) offered one explanation:

> Authors are not always good at self-analysis: their descriptions are inevitably highly personal, their retrospective accounts cannot necessarily be trusted, and their chief concerns tend to be with the circumstances -- the conditions, their blocks, the criticisms, their agents and publishers -- rather than with the process of writing (p 138)

Wilder (in Cowley, 1958) gave another reason for the poorly articulated responses to the questions of what writers do and why they choose to write. "Yeats warned against probing into how and why one writes, he called it 'muddying the spring'" (p 117). Presumably, the more a writer analyzes his ability or reasons for writing, (the analysis is often noted as a painful and difficult process in itself), the more it will inhibit his creativity (Boylan, 1993, McGahern, 1993, L Moore, 1993)

The Process of Writing

How a writer actually writes, or sets about composing a literary piece is described by the writers in two distinct ways as a spiritual/mystical process, and as a more technical one, concerned with the specific routines, techniques, and methods that writers use to write

Spiritual Aspects

A condition often expressed by writers is the notion of being obsessed or overtaken by a mysterious, mystical, and creative process when writing (Swift, 1993; Tremain, 1993). Many talked of becoming deeply absorbed and engrossed in the writing, at the exclusion of all other things (Simenon, Wilder, Mauriac, in Cowley, 1958). Wilson wrote, "Once one starts writing, the histrionic gifts--the divine passion or whatnot--are liable to take control and sweep you away" (in Cowley, p. 257). Forster (in Cowley), challenged this notion of being driven to write:

> I think I am different from other writers; they profess much more worry. I have always found writing pleasant, and don't understand what people mean by the "throes of creation". (p. 35)

Faulkner added a curious perspective on the mystical process "An artist is a creature driven by demons. He don't (sic) know why they choose him, and he's usually too busy to understand why"(in Cowley, 1958, p. 123). Gardam (1993) also refers to writers having visitations by demons who "kick-start" the imagination (p. 12).

Writers referred to other unique ways of getting ideas for stories. Some hear sentences (Hill, 1993; L. Moore, 1993). Warner (1993) sees an image or scene: "I'm racing to transcribe in words a picture scrolling in front of my eyes" (p. 32). Hart (1993) completes the story in her head before beginning to write it down.

Thurber (in Cowley, 1958) described writing as a kind of pleasurable addiction, of needing to write, being miserable if not writing, and experiencing frustrations while writing. Boylan (1993) referred to a similar pleasure/pain cycle of writing:

> Writing fiction is a paradox because all of it comes out of ourselves. There is nowhere else for it to come from. Yet when the characters of a novel have been established the fiction writer's task is to remove himself and his influence, and let the characters get on with their lives. This, more than anything, is the essence of this work—the investment and then the withdrawal of the fiction writer—the agony and the ego—although I think it should be the other way around. (p. xiii)

Many other writers also talked about the phenomenon of the characters "taking over" the plot or direction of the story, or of assuming the life of the character (Mortimer, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1993). Hart (1993) supported Flaubert's belief that characters choose

the writer to tell their story, not the other way around. Moggach (1993) described her experiences with this mystical process:

> Once a character has gelled [sic] it's an unmistakable sensation, like an engine starting up within one's body. From then onwards one is driven by this other person, seeing things through their eyes, shuffling around the shops as a 57-year-old divorced man and practically feeling one has grown a beard. Looking at women, too, the way a man looks at them... Novelists are actors—luckier than actors, actually, because we can become our own characters and make up our own lines. (p. 135)

Not all writers agreed with this notion. Banville (1993) scoffed at this understanding of writing:

> When I hear a writer talking earnestly of how the characters in his latest book 'took over the action' I am inclined to laugh (or, if I am in a good mood, acknowledge a colleague doing his best to get through yet another interview). Fictional characters are made of words, not flesh; they do not have free will, they do not exercise volition. They are easily born, and as easily killed off. (p. 107)

On a similar vein, Mantel (1993) provided an explanation for why she thought writers talk about characters in such a way:

> I have no time for people who talk in a vaguely mystical way about characters "taking over". If your characters have taken over there is something wrong with your book and something pretty seriously wrong with you. I think what these people are trying to say is that things have been written without much (apparent) premeditation, that the writer has performed certain work without being quite conscious of doing it. That is as it should be. It seems to me that a good part of the business of fiction is performed half-consciously, even subconsciously. (p. 38)

Some authors referred to the importance of waiting patiently for a story to develop. Gardam (1993) wrote, "Most novels of any weight at all seem to have been inspired by ideas long kept silent" (p. 9). Mantel (1993) referred to this as "a method of growing a book rather than writing one" (p. 45).

Tremendous amounts have been written about the writer's *voice*. Elbow (1985) and Keithley (1992), wrote that the identity of the writer should be evident in wording and style of the writing. It is a notion of the writer's *passion, connectedness* and *personal imprint* on their work. Many writers supported the significance of this characteristic (Gardner, 1994, Mantel, 1993, Welty, 1984). Parker (in Cowley, 1958) referred to voice

as: "a good writer not only sees, but has a point of view" (p. 78). Wilder talked about possible interferences with developing one's own voice:

> [Young writers shouldn't seek vocations in advertising, journalism, or teaching English because] all are unfavourable to the writer. If by day you handle either the conventional forms which are journalism and advertising, or in the analysis which is teaching English...you will have a double, a quadruple difficulty in finding **your** English language at night and on Sundays. [Writers need to come] refreshed to writing. (in Cowley, 1958, p. 116)

Technical Aspects

The notion of being disciplined is described by some writers as crucial to the process of writing (Boylan, 1993, on Burgess and Pritchett). Others refute the need to be disciplined to write. Ellman (1993) described her approach to writing:

> I HAVE no self-discipline—if novels really depended on that, I wouldn't have written any. Mine are the result of pure stagnation. (p. 126)

Mantel (1993) wrote, "Once [writing] becomes the way you earn your living, the question of self-discipline is irrelevant"(p. 45).

Some writers admitted needing a special environment, time of day, or mnemonic devices or routines to help trigger their creativity (Mantel, 1993; Warner, 1993;Wilder in Cowley, 1958). Others, like Faulkner, believed that

> All a writer needs is a pencil and some paper--not a certain environment or economic freedom. Nothing can destroy a good writer. (in Cowley, p. 124)

Wilson agreed with this notion by saying, "I write very easily...when the book is going well, the only thing that stops me is sheer exhaustion" (in Cowley, p. 255).

The technical process of writing and editing one's work is mentioned by few writers. Writing longhand is considered a crucial part of the creative and editing process by some writers (Boylan on Bainbridge, Kanga and Pritchett, 1993; Hart, 1993, Weldon, 1993). Authors edit is several ways. Some draft and redraft. Hart (1993) described editing (unlike writing) as a "physically exhausting" but "intellectually exhilarating" and "additive" exercise—"the painful pursuit of perfection" (p 210). Weldon (1993) viewed the processes of writing and editing as needing two distinct personalities, who negotiate with one another.

A is the one who produces the first drafts: A is creative, impetuous, wilful, emotional, sloppy: she works by hand. B does the editing—works from the printout, achieves the subsequent drafts and is argumentative, self-righteous, cautious, rational, effective, perfectionist, ambitious...Both are strong personalities: both are in perpetual argument one with the other, but are only truly happy when in accord, hand in hand. (p. 185)

Several writers edit by reading their drafts aloud (Boylan (1993) on Bainbridge, Welton, 1993). The rewording occurs if the line doesn't sound right.

Strategies for getting ideas for stories are mentioned by some writers. Warner (1993) uses historical data in libraries; Mantel (1993) eavesdrops on strangers. Some writers deliberately asserted that their stories and characters weren't about real people or circumstances in their own lives, but were "influenced" by their personal experiences (B. Moore, 1993; Paretsky, 1993).

The process of writing, its spiritual and technical aspects, again appear as varied as the reasons the writers give for why they write. Mantel (1993) summed up the process of writing this way:

Two things I think about writing—one is that it is a strange, remote, singular and mysterious business, and the other is that it *is* a business and it pays the bills. When you start explaining things like [images as signals] to people—that, like it or not, this is how it is done—they think you are mad. Perhaps you are. But as you sit down each day to work you have to conceal this fact from yourself. The time for paranormal phenomena and cork notice-boards has passed. You now proceed with a cool, calculating sobriety, as if you were making up your quarterly accounts. You just put a comma. Then perhaps you move it. Just one little word. Then just another. (p. 45)

The Pedagogy of Writing

It is not within the scope of this paper to provide an exhaustive examination of the current thinking in the teaching of writing. The focus is primarily on what *writers* say about the learning and teaching of writing, from their own experiences and perspectives. Nevertheless, it is prudent in this section to highlight briefly key points on current teaching philosophies and practices from a few educators in writing to help understand the main issues in current writing education.

Learning to Write

Section two reviewed what the writers said about how they started to write, and section three described their understanding of how they learned to write. Many of their comments were worded to apply as their suggestions for new/young writers learning to write. Key learning concepts from the writers' comments cited earlier in this chapter are:

1. Read voraciously and keep writing. The more one reads and writes, the better at writing one becomes.

2. Develop a mentorship with a writer, or belong to a writing community. From this exposure, one will learn about criticism and about developing one's own voice.

3. Rely on trial and error.

4. Have many experiences from which to write and write about what you know.

Teaching Writing

The teaching of writing is recognized as a very complex and dynamic process, with ongoing interplay between the student, the writing, and the teacher (McCormick Calkins, 1986; Mamchur, 1993; Smith, 1981). Strategies for the teaching of writing are varied and often interrelated. However, for the purpose of this brief review, key issues on the teaching of writing will be presented in a simplified way, to help contextualize the subject of writing education within the comments made by the writers in this review.

The philosophical beliefs of individual writers on whether writing is a gift or not, or could be taught or not, influenced what they suggested for the teaching of writing. Those holding the assumption that writing is not necessarily a gift and could be taught, tended to identify specific teaching strategies and a more formal curriculum to develop writing abilities in all children. Those who believe that writing is an innate talent, suggested ways to enhance the learning environment, to advise and guide those who already show promise as a writer, and to teach technique, but steadfastly assert that the spirit or creativity of writing itself cannot be taught (Boylan, 1993; Gardam, 1993; McGahern, 1993). Despite these two opposing philosophical perspectives, the two approaches, a formal writing curriculum, and creating a writing environment, are very interconnected in the teaching of writing. Many experts believe that these processes are

best used together for the teaching of writing (McCormick Calkins, 1986; Mamchur,

1993). For the purpose of this discussion, they will be separated for ease of description.

Some writers also had some thoughts about the qualifications of a teacher of writing.

These will be included at the end of this section.

A Formal Writing Curriculum

Murray (1968) and Mamchur (1989), suggested that students can improve their

ability to write, and increase their enjoyment of writing, if they are aware of and follow a

set of teachable steps. Murray's *The Writer's Seven Skills*, a consistent set of basic skills

used by experienced writers, are suggested by Murray and Mamchur to be taught in a

somewhat chronological order for ease of understanding and practice by writing students.

Murray's seven skills are: discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for

specifics, creating a design, writing, developing a critical eye, and rewriting. McCormick

Calkins (1978) wrote about successes in teaching children to make choices during the

writing and crafting process, similar to Murray's seven basic steps. Protherough (1983),

although he doesn't agree that the teaching of writing as a series of steps is necessary to

develop creativity, recognized the value of this approach for children who would

otherwise be overloaded by the "different processes (of writing) at different levels of

difficulty and complexity...that is more automatic in mature writers"(p. 147). He claimed

the attention of children is usually on simpler, low-level writing skills.

Mamchur (1989) accepted that a series of teachable steps might assist students to

write *better*, but was clear that it is not a linear, isolated, or static process.

> Any systematic representation of the writing process, even the most
> brilliant, such as the one defined by Murray in the first edition of *A Writer Teaches*
> *Writing* (1968) is only a representation. Any definition is only a tool whereby we
> can learn and teach writing process. But definition cannot remain frozen on the
> page. Defined process melts into the heated reality of the writing. The process
> changes with each act, emphasizing different components, moving in different
> directions. Art, literacy is not a solid state, it is fluid, it is motion, it is alive. That
> good writers and great teachers are aware of this fact is evidenced by Murray
> himself in his second edition of *A Writer Teaches Writing* (1985). Even though his
> first book presented an excellent analysis, a most effective tool for teaching
> writing, he abandons it, insisting that rather than one process, there are many
> (class handout)

Mamchur also alerts students in her writing classes to the importance of other oft-stated strategies in their development as writers, i.e. having choices, being respected, being given positive feedback, and ultimately enjoying the act of writing for its own sake (1993). These strategies correspond with Heathcote's (1988) notion of being an authentic teacher.

Another commonly accepted strategy in the teaching of writing is exposing students to a broad range of literature. The key seems to be to select material that liberates imaginations, is relevant to students' interests, and challenges their minds to make sense of what they have read (Bradbury, 1993; Britton, 1991; Farrell, 1991; Protherough, 1983). As "inheritors of literary traditions," students need to be exposed to "superb paragraphs and beautiful sentences" (Berthoff, 1993, p 15). Goldberg (1986) described the importance of reading other writers as an act of connecting to other writers—of becoming immersed in how another writer writes. He noted that rather than producing someone who copies the writer's work, the ability to write is inspired. Mamchur (1993), also supported the notion of a unique style or voice developing and evolving from reading the work of others

Also well represented in the literature as a strategy for developing writing ability in children, is the importance of students talking about their writing (ASCD, 1988, Britton, 1991; Protherough, 1983). "[Writing] builds on the natural, oral competence of students" (Browning & McClintic, 1995, p 105). The use of talking helps students to develop their topic by discussing ideas with others. Talking and sharing anecdotes and stories with others will increase the student's confidence that their experience is interesting. Talking also acts as the transition from what was read and understood, to what might be the writing

Some other, more practical and traditional teaching strategies related to the technical aspects of writing were suggested by many of the writers (Berthoff, 1993, Protherough, 1983, Stegner, 1988) In learning to write well, the writers suggested that students be taught how to use language effectively This includes the basic and standard uses of grammar and syntax Others suggested that it is *how* effective use of language is taught that is significant to the enjoyment and development of writing While recognizing that writing should ultimately be edited, many felt that students shouldn't focus on the

mechanics of language, i.e. grammar and spelling etc., while drafting their work because it could inhibit their creativity and reduce their overall enjoyment of the writing process (McCormick Calkins, 1978,1986; Klauser, 1987; Mamchur, 1989; Murray, 1968; Smith, 1981). Further exploration into the ongoing debate of whole language versus traditional methods of teaching literacy is beyond the scope of the review, although it is prudent to acknowledge that the issue is relevant to the teaching of writing.

Another strategy is to instruct and encourage students to develop productive · writing habits, such as rapidwriting (Klauser, 1987). Students need guidance in the use of literary tools and techniques, for example, writing about an action and being specific (McCormick Calkins, 1978; Mamchur, 1993). Without some of these basic, but often referred to qualities of good writing, the writers indicated that students may not develop their full potential as expressive writers.

Last, to truly investigate the best way to teach writing, one needs to be clear on the goals of the curriculum. Is it to create "writers," such as those quoted in this review, or is it to develop a writing ability that will serve and satisfy the individual throughout his/her life as identified by the ASCD (1988)? Perhaps, central to this discussion again is the notion of what (who?) a writer is. According to Murray (1968), "The successful writer is the person who conveys information, ideas and experience across the barriers of time and distance," regardless of the genre of the writing (p. 2). To be able to write and enjoy writing is to be a writer. That writing is a life-long, enjoyable and desirable activity, worthy of all students is supported by other educators of writing (Berthoff, 1993, McCormick Calkins, 1986; Mamchur, 1993). Others suggested more specifically that their goal wasn't to develop writers in the professional sense, because writers will write regardless of their education (Stegner, 1988). Huddle (1991), stated, "It is not [a · teacher's duty] to tailor teaching to each individual student, it is not my duty to attempt to make writers of my students"(p 75)

Creating a Writing Environment

Most of the advice and suggestions from writers came from the belief that students should be helped to *feel* like writers, as a prerequisite to improving writing ability · · (Berthoff, 1993, Britton, 1991, Goldberg, 1986, Protherough, 1983, Huddle, 1991,

Stegner, 1988)   Browning and McClintic (1995), in their study of sixth graders, believed
that a positive classroom environment, ie teaching students to act, talk, and think like
writers, can encourage writing They identified several strategies, content areas, and
outcomes, that arise from having a writing environment that corresponds with strategies
and notions expressed by other writers and teachers of writing

1   The act of writing stories can be made to be fun Berthoff (1993) supported
    this by saying "I'm tired of all the talk about the AGONY of writing, I think
    we should let our students in on the fact that it can be fun"(p 14)

2   Students come to accept that stumbling blocks, mistakes, and need for
    revisions are a normal part of writing McCormick Calkins (1978) and Smith
    (1981) also described the sometime painful but ultimately positive process of
    doing revisions in creating good writing

3   Students are encouraged to write to please themselves, not the teacher
    Huddle (1991), in his Elements of a Writer's Code stated "The one
    relationship that counts is that between you and your writing If you feel good,
    then it's good" (p 85)

4   Students learn that stories are usually based on real experience, but the reality
    can be reshaped for a story McCormick Calkins (1986) and Mamchur (1993)
    described the powerful impact of using a personal situation as the basis for a -
    written story

Possibly, the most significant environmental influence is that students become a
member of a learning community where they work in mixed-ability groups and participate
equally as listeners, readers and writers As a result, students learn to request feedback
from other students as a necessary part of writing They learn to critique and revise their
own writing They strive to make more sense and be more detailed in their descriptions
Stories of others, and talking about writing, trigger additional student stories, and/or help
develop the story better This approach to teaching writing is supported by other writing
educators (McCormick Calkins, 1978, Mamchur, 1993) This closely relates to the
opinion that writers belong to a literary community or writers' group, described by some
of the writers (Goldberg, 1986)

One of the more significant aspects of this curriculum is that the students are encouraged to develop their own ideas, use of the language, and choices of events in their stories. In this process, they discover their own voice in their writing. Again, it is the notion of capitalizing on their passion and experience as a basis for their writing, well supported by many other teachers of writing (McCormick Calkins, 1986, Mamchur 1993).

Also according to Browning and McClintic (1995), the physical environment plays a role in helping students to feel like writers. The room should have lots of visible and available writing. Displays could include work by students of different ages, articles, books, magazines, etc. Writing must be demonstrated as a fact of everyday life, not as a separate entity.

While Stegner (1988) supported the idea that student writing should be taken seriously, and that students should be encouraged to write, he believed, unlike Browning and McClintic, that "students should be discouraged from thinking they are writers" (p 20) It was his position that if students believe they are good writers early in their lives, they will be set up for devastating failure as writers once they leave school. L Moore (1993) agreed, suggesting

> Better to think of *writing*, of what one does as an activity, rather than an identity—
> to write, I write, we write, to keep calling a verb rather than a noun, to keep
> working at the thing, at all hours, in all places, so that your life does not become a
> pose, a pornography of wishing (p 204)

Clearly, there are two issues at odds here. The ability to write proficiently and enjoy the process for its intrinsic value, versus writing with the intent to make a career out of it. Without clarity on this point, it is difficult to determine a list of strategies that would apply for both goals. However, the writers and educators of writing reviewed in this section have highlighted many key strategies, under the two main themes of a formal writing curriculum and creating a writing environment, that if implemented would improve student writing. Teaching one strategy in isolation of the others, would undoubtedly inhibit the ability to teach writing effectively. As Mamchur (1991) pointed out, teaching writing is best understood as a holistic endeavor between teacher and learner.

> Process by its very nature is built upon the aspect of change. Expressing yourself
> with language is a complex intellectual linguistic process which must be
> conceptualized as a series of steps. By focussing on these steps teachers can

discover the tools and techniques the student needs and the knowledge he must develop in order to make good choices along the way. However, the steps and choices are personal and interactive and change constantly as the teacher and learner teach, learn, develop and discover (Proet & Gill, 1986). (cited in class handout)

Teacher Qualifications

The most consistent suggestion from writers on the teaching of writing, and from teachers of writing was that teachers should be writers themselves (Bradbury, 1993; Browning & McClintic, 1995, Huddle, 1991, Mamchur, 1993; Protherough, 1983; Smith, 1981). Inherent in this belief of the writers, is the assumption that teacher/writers would model writing as something interesting, possible, and worthwhile. The teacher/writer presumably would understand the difficult and sometimes painful process of writing, and thus would be a sympathetic and encouraging reader of the students' work. A teacher/writer would not focus on error-detection, but would respond thoughtfully and respectfully to the process and the content. The teacher/writer would be actively writing and modelling the writing process at the same time the students are writing. If the teacher wasn't a writer, then some suggested having writers come into the class to discuss writing.

Stegner (1988) wasn't nearly as committed to the belief that teachers should be writers because, as he put it "How can anyone **teach** writing when he himself, as a writer, is never sure what he is doing?" (p. 9). In a similar vein, a good writer might not make a good teacher of writing. A teacher/writer must possess the requisite knowledge of good teaching practices. D. Sumara, summarized the teaching of writing by saying, "Yes, writing can be taught, but only by someone who knows what it feels like to live a life that includes the practice of writing—and who knows how to teach" (personal communication, June 1995).

Palmquist & Young (1992) and Protherough (1983) suggested that the risk in having a non-writer/teacher who may be uncomfortable and inexperienced with writing, is that the students' writing might be devalued. The teachers may have their own beliefs about innate talent in writing and may not encourage students who require more guidance. Mamchur (1989) noted that teachers of writing have traditionally been English teachers, who are experts in the study of literature, linguistics, and grammar, but not in the process

of writing. They may have strong opinions about what constitutes good writing, but may have unrealistic expectations for the process or the quality of the finished product.

Smith (1981) strongly supported the assertion that teachers of writing must model the joy and value of writing. He does not believe that they have to be "professional" writers any more than athletic coaches have to be "professional athletes." He summarized the issue of how teachers should teach writing in this way:

> Teachers should learn [to write] the way children should learn, in the mutual effort of writing with a purpose—the primary initial purpose being one's own joy and satisfaction with what is written—and in the delight of reading widely from a writer's perspective. The easiest way for teachers to learn these things in order to teach children in this way is to learn them *with* children, to share the writing activities with the children themselves. In this way, teachers and children alike should be best able to avoid the tyranny of all the myths of writing, and in the process discover that writing is a natural, attainable, enjoyable, and highly productive way of spending one's time (p. 798)

From this brief review of the literature about what writers say about the teaching of writing, the success of a writing program appears to depend on four main factors: Exposing students to literature, teaching students the basic steps in the writing process, helping students to *feel* like writers, and having a teacher who models writing. Interestingly, none of the writers reported learning to write this way in the school system

Summary

The review of the literature of what writers say about writing is instrumental in the identification of themes that may be useful for the teaching of writing. Writers do not always understand or articulate clearly how or why they write. Perhaps it's because they are split on the notion of whether writing is an innate talent or one that can be taught. Clearly, the belief that writing is or isn't a gift heavily influences the discussion on how best to teach writing. Writers do however, have a sense of their personal attributes that help them to be good writers, and are willing to suggest how others might learn to write.

Faulkner described a formula to be a good novelist: "99% talent, 99% discipline, 99% work, and [the writer] must never be satisfied with what he does" (p. 123, 1959, Paris Interviews). This may very well serve as an apt summary to what the writers have

described in this chapter about writing. This discussion of writing lends itself well to the remaining chapters of this thesis. What do current and popular writers, interviewed by the Knowledge Network, say about writing?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

To facilitate the understanding of how this study developed, this chapter will begin by describing the initiation of the thesis idea and selection of the Knowledge Network videotaped interviews of writers as the source of the data. Second, issues related to interviewing as a research method, using archival data, and the practice of transcribing videotaped footage will be reviewed and described. The limitations inherent in this study will be identified and discussed. Finally, this thesis was piloted for a course at S.F.U. and this process and findings will be described.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992), in their recommendations for choosing relevant data-gathering techniques for the purpose of research, suggest three criteria:

1. Elicit data needed to gain understanding of the phenomenon in question
2. Contribute different perspectives on the issue
3. Make effective use of the time available for data collection (p. 24)

These criteria will be fully addressed in this chapter.

Data Source

The Knowledge Network, a division of the Open Learning Agency (O.L.A.) in Vancouver, conducted videotaped interviews of seventeen writers who attended the 1994 Vancouver Writers' Festival. Their purpose for the interviews was to produce a series of television programs on writers and writing. The Knowledge Network producer responsible for the program mentioned to me that she found it interesting that none of the writers interviewed had said they had learned how to write in school. As an educator of writing, I was intrigued and wondered what they did say about learning to write. The producer agreed to provide me with six of the unedited videotapes for an initial review. This developed into a pilot project whereby the writers' comments were sorted, categorized, analyzed, and presented as a class assignment. After the pilot project was completed, and my report was submitted to O.L.A., the producer provided the eleven remaining unedited tapes and consented to my review of the interviews for my Master's thesis requirements for S.F.U.

I chose to use the writers from the 1994 Vancouver Writers' Festival because they are contemporary, popular writers and not necessarily literary experts in the field of writing. Their comments reflect their personal experiences with writing, rather than academic or scholarly perspectives. This approach has been used by others seeking insight and practical advice related to writing from experienced writers (Brooks, 1963; Boylan, 1993; Cameron, 1973; Pack & Parini, 1991). I hoped that the comments from these writers might lend a more practical perspective to the issue of teaching writing. The writers were invited to the Writers' Festival in Vancouver, presumably because of their popularity with general readers in this region.

For the interviews, the Knowledge Network selected a variety of writers from the festival, representing a broad range of writing genres. The majority of writers wrote fiction. (mystery, romance, historical novels and short-stories); but writers were also interviewed who wrote non-fiction, children's art/pop-up books, or more technical pieces (i e journalism). This breadth of writing experience elicited some patterns of writing attributes or processes common to all. It also provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the different genres in terms of learning to write, or the process of writing.

Each writer was interviewed once by the Knowledge Network. The value of using one-time interviews with a larger number of people versus spending extended and repeated periods with a select few is described by Glesne and Peshkin (1991), as trading depth for breadth of understanding. For the purposes of my thesis, my interest is in what is being said by those whose lives are spent as writers. This general overview of what several writers say about writing is fundamental to my intention to seek out patterns and relationships that may be helpful for educators of writing.

Use of Existing Interview Footage

"The interview is seen to give greater depth than other research techniques" (p 95, Burgess cited in Silverman, 1993). I chose the analysis of interview data as my preferred research method because interviews represent an element of spontaneity, immediacy, and give a phenomenological perspective to the data I wanted to collect. Although I was not

involved in the actual interviewing process, this section will explore and comment on this aspect of data collection as it relates to this study.

Silverman (1993), describes two types of interviews and their respective data focus One is positivism, whereby the data consists of valid and reliable facts, generated by standardized questions with objective, often multiple-choice type answers. The other is interactionism, whereby the data consists of the experiences (the "actively constructed" social worlds) as described by the interviewee, which are usually generated by unstructured, open-ended questions based on the interviewer's knowledge of the interviewee The interactionist approach is considered to be more humanistic than the positivistic approach (p 95)

Silverman (1993) notes that interactionists prefer the open-ended questioning format over standardized interviews for three reasons:

1. Interviewees can define their world in their own individualized way
2. A fixed set of questions is not suitable for all interviewees
3. Interviewees will feel free to raise and discuss issues that are important to them that are not outlined in a set of scheduled questions (p. 95).

The Knowledge Network conducted these interviews for their Schools TV programs Their primary goal was to gain information that would be of interest to their target audience of high school students The programs were also shown on Cable TV and were accessible by the general public, and as such, possibly provided a degree of entertainment Although research methodology was not an issue for the Knowledge Network, the approach of the interviewers can be categorized as interactionistic for the purposes of this study

There were six different interviewers for the seventeen writers (itself a limitation, which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter) It is evident that each interviewer had prior knowledge of the writer, had read the writer's works, and had generated questions based on this knowledge While the intent was to talk primarily about writing, the specific interview questions varied significantly from political issues in the writer's country, to complexities in specific storylines The questions were mainly open-ended and many of the writers' perspectives and experiences were captured in free-flowing anecdotal stories The breadth and depth of the stories and comments were left

primarily to the comfort of the individual writer. However, on occasion, an interview had ended and someone outside of the camera picture was heard reminding the interviewer to ask about a specific aspect of writing, i.e. "What advice might you have for young writers?" The interview was then reestablished to include the writer's specific comments. Clearly, the Knowledge Network had some structure to the material they hoped to elicit from the writers. Other issues and limitations related to the open-ended interview format will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

Another issue relevant to the interactionist approach to interviewing is the relationship of the interviewee to the interviewer. Silverman (1993) writes that even in an open-ended format, it is the interviewer who creates the interview context and environment, and the interviewee merely complies with or resists it. This is evident in the Knowledge Network interviews because the six interviewers had drastically differing approaches to the interviews. Some asked short and simple questions restricted to the subject of writing. Other interviewers talked about themselves, about what they had read or written, and gave their own perspectives on writing, presumably to identify themselves as someone the writer could relate to. Others asked very general questions related to the more spiritual or holistic aspects related to writing.

Responses by the writers to these approaches were mixed. Some gave very succinct and specific answers. In some of these cases, the relationship appeared very formal, using the standard interview question-answer-question format. In other interviews, the writers moved from topic to topic on their own, generated from one open-ended question. The relaxed and informal approach of some interviewers seemed to contribute to the comfort of the writer. Often a writer began to answer an especially relevant question on writing, only to have the interviewer interrupt to add something personal, which then inadvertently redirected the writer onto an other unrelated subject. Many interviewers neglected to explore or redirect the writer when a vague or unrelated answer was given.

Glesne and Peshkin (1991) emphasize the importance of using effective communication skills in an interview in order to enable the interviewee to feel comfortable and willing to talk about the focal subject. They specifically identify and describe the value

of creating a basic structure of relevant questions, of being open-ended and prepared to follow unexpected directions during the interview, and of using probing and redirecting skills. Some of the Knowledge Network interviewers were able to use this skills effectively in the interviews while others were not. This variety of approaches could restrict the value of the responses of some of the writers. Davies (1993), described how a poorly conducted interview can influence a writer's answers:

> If the interviewer is a skilled hand, the interview becomes an agreeable conversation. But such interviewers—informed, friendly, acquainted with the author's work – are not met with everywhere, and too often the interview becomes an hour-long interrogation, sinking to unanswerable queries such as, "Where do you get your ideas from?" and "What's your work schedule?". The interrogation of a bad interviewer is comparable to that of the secret police, and the author grows restless and then weary as it goes on for a long afternoon in a hotel bedroom. A time comes when he will say anything, admit to anything, to bring the questioning to an end. (p 217)

The use of the existing interview footage as archival data poses some strengths for this study. The writers' comments were not influenced by me as the researcher, or by the issues related to this study. By watching and listening to existing data, I made inferences from their active conversations with the interviewers.

Another strength in using this archival data, is that I did not influence the selection of the individual writers. They were chosen by the Knowledge Network prior to my involvement. I did not know who the Knowledge Network had interviewed until I received the tapes with a corresponding list of names. This blind (to me) selection of writers provides a much more objective account regarding the participants in this study

Transcription Issues

Silverman (1993), cites Heritage's (1984) advantages of using transcripted data. It

1. Does not rely on intuition and recollection of the interviews
2. Can be reexamined, possibly extending the range and detail of the findings
3. Can be accessed by other researchers, allowing public scrutiny of the findings
4. Can be reexamined and re-used in the context of new findings (p 119)

Glesne and Peshkin (1991) wrote that it is unnecessary to have a verbatim transcript if it is not crucial to the research. They described the agony of transcribing, and that the researcher must weigh the value of the detailed transcripts against the benefits of being time-efficient and getting the relevant observations. Silverman (1993) argued that detailed transcripts are preferable and that preparing transcripts is a simple technical detail prior to the more demanding step of analysis.

I watched 649 minutes of unedited videotaped footage. Despite Glesne and Peshkin's (1991) recommendation to use transcribing equipment and/or enlist the help of an experienced transcriptionist, I chose to watch the videos myself and take concurrent notes. My decision was based on my desire to contextualize the writers' statements within the interview environment by capturing the nonverbal messages and the overall tone of the interview. When the discussion was on subjects other than writing, i.e. politics, I did not transcribe the footage. I chose to not transcribe discussions about specific plotlines or characters of an author's book, again as an attempt to keep my focus on the more generic issues of writing. I was attentive during unrelated subject discussions however, because often I heard a relevant statement on writing amidst a lengthy dialogue of an unrelated subject. For example, one writer was describing what life was like in Argentina during the Somosa regime, and off-handedly stated that her first works of published writing were used as a political tool against the government. She then described her use of erotic poetry as an act of rebellion.

When the subject was directly related to writing, I transcribed their comments verbatim. I often summarized the interviewer's questions if they were rambling and leading. If so, I entered the statement in the transcript, separate from preceding or following conversation. I spent a great deal of time rewinding and rewatching the tapes, and rewriting my notes to ensure that I had captured the right words, or the gist of the conversation.

My transcription abilities developed and became more proficient as I progressed through the videotapes. My initial transcriptions during the pilot project were primarily paraphrased, whereas the majority of the remaining interviews were almost totally verbatim. I agree with Glesne and Peshkin's perspective that transcribing is an arduous

task As such, I also agree with their belief that being time-efficient is highly desirable over a completely verbatim and unedited transcript.

As Silverman (1993) pointed out, natural conversation is not grammatically correct, and in written form, is very difficult to read out of the context of visual or auditory cues For this reason, I watched and transcribed only one or two writers at a time, and then typed from my handwritten copy while the context of the interview was still clear in my mind In the typing of the transcript for this study, I "tidied-up" the language to be more readable and understandable for the purposes of the analysis Several of the writers did not speak English as their first language, and used awkward terminology and grammar This made transcribing especially challenging, so again, I used discretion in minor paraphrasing or editing of their comments I did not change any key words, or attempt to rewrite their statements Most of the writers' conversational language lacked a subject to complete the sentence, so for clarity, I added it in the transcript For example, one writer said, " Never really have had writer's block", and in the transcript, I wrote, "I've never really " As Glesne and Peshkin (1991) noted, it is best to quote enough words to authentically capture the person's speech, but to avoid including sounds or manners of speech, that will try the patience of the reader (p 169)

As is evident in the quotes used in Chapter Four, I have attempted to keep the writers' comments as verbatim as possible, including some errors in grammar or use of unfamiliar words, for example, "intellection" In some cases, the quotes used as examples of data in Chapter Four are slightly condensed versions from the original transcript, in the interest of being succinct to support a point

Ultimately, the data collection and transcription was subject to my own perspective and discretion at four separate steps in the process First, I decided what to transcribe and what to exclude from the writers' comments while I watched the videos, i e comments related to writing versus unrelated topics Secondly, I wrote most of their comments virtually verbatim (eliminating manners of speech, i e Hmm, uhh), in my rough-draft, hand-written working copy " Took me time to realize that what I had to say, my voice, was valuable my voice and what I had to say was valuable. Needed to be down to come up what I understand that to write about what I write about is what I've been given "

(Huggin). Next, I transcribed my rough-draft to a type written copy, and made the minor changes to sentence structure etc. at that time: "*It* took me time to realize that [repetition deleted]... my voice, and what I had to say, was valuable. *I* needed to be down to come up. What I *have come to* understand *is* that to write about what I write about is what I've been given." Last, I condensed lengthy discussions from their original transcribed form to succinct comments for the purposes of supporting themes in Chapter Four: "*She was glad for the time-out because she said she* 'took time to realize that my voice, and what I have to say, was valuable'." The complete verbatim transcript is included in the Appendix for reference.

Limitations

This study has some limitations which may restrict the value of the findings for application in current practice of education. Many limitations are related to the interactionist approach used in the interviewing process. Silverman (1993), noted that despite the prevalent notion that open-ended questions in interviews are driven by the interviewee's interests, the very selection of the questions will still shape what the interviewee will say, and will indicate to the interviewee what the interviewer thinks is relevant. Conversely, Silverman also noted that if the interviewer is too passive and does not direct the dialogue in some way, the interviewee may not readily identify what data is relevant to discuss. For this study, it might then be erroneous to assume that the open-ended questions used with the writers will uncover any data truly relevant to the writer.

Silverman (1993) also refuted the notion of humanism in interactionistic interviewing, that of discovering some unique human attribute.

> This, of course, is the irony. The media aim to deliver us immediate "personal" experience. Yet what they (we) want is simple repetition of familiar tales. Perhaps this is part of the post-modern condition. Maybe we feel people are at their most authentic when they are, in effect, reproducing a cultural script. (p. 96)

This was evident in some of the interviewers' more leading questions, i.e. "Writers talk about a kind of magical experience when they write. does this happen with you?"

Silverman (1993) outlined several other problems that occur during interviews that can alter distort the responses of the interviewees.

1. The differing roles of the interviewer and interviewee
2. The interviewee does not feel comfortable with, or has difficulty talking about himself
3. The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is brief, therefore there is an increased likelihood of fabricated stories
4. The interviewee may be reluctant to reveal his/her private life
5. The relative status of the interviewer to the interviewee, or vice-versa
6. The context of the interview. (p. 97)

In this study, some of these difficulties arose during the interviewing processes. The interview questions were not the same, nor were they asked in a consistent way by the six interviewers from the Knowledge Network. The interview styles were significantly different, based on the interviewers' own comfort with interviewing, and his/her knowledge of the writer and writing. For example, some interviews lasted only 27 minutes, whereas others lasted up to 85 minutes. Second, the writers answered the questions subject to their own perception and interpretation of what the question might have meant. The more open-ended the question, the more opportunity there was for misunderstanding. Rarely did an interviewer redirect the writer to a clearer understanding of the question. Some complex questions were given simple answers, and the interviewers did not probe further. These difficulties in interviewing lead to a vast array of responses from the writers, some relevant to writing, others not. This has influenced the ability to analyze and interpret the data.

Another limitation is, contradictorily, one of the project's identified strengths: using popular, contemporary writers as subjects instead of acknowledged experts in the field. Literary experts may have spent years reflecting on the nature of writing, whereas some of the writers in this study, as novices, might not be as reflective or articulate in their understanding of their writing abilities. Conversely, as Silverman (1993) suggested, another limitation is that many of these writers have been interviewed many times before, and their responses may be more rehearsed and scripted. It was not known in this study how many times each writer had been interviewed in the past, or how it influenced their answers if they had.

The variety of writing genres that the writers represent, while presenting a broad base to review, might also make the responses too broad to be meaningful. For example,

the author of children's pop-up books sees herself primarily as a visual artist, not as a writer, thus, her comments focused on her artistic abilities.

Another issue related to the limitations of a research method is that of researcher bias. Glesne and Peshkin (1991) recommended that the researcher try not to eliminate all personal subjectivity, because it is what drives the research question in the first place. They stressed that it is critical, however, for the researcher to identify the sources of the subjectivity, to tame some elements of it, to monitor its application in the research process, and to minimize any negative influence (p. 106). I recognize some elements of my own subjectivity in the discretion I used in transcribing and interpreting the data. I chose what was relevant to include and what was not. At times, I could not understand what was being said in the interviews and thus did not include that data. I chose to paraphrase some writers who were not being succinct, and may have missed some relevant points.

Finally, another limitation was my lack of knowledge as to who the writers were and what they had written. Most were unfamiliar names to me. As such, this might have hindered my understanding of their work contextually, and influenced the importance I put on their comments. For example, the author of children's pop-up books described how she considered herself a visual artist, not a writer. Her answers to questions focused on how she developed her pictures for the books, rather than the writing aspect. If she had not been clear on this distinction, her comments related to writing would have confused me.

Pilot Project

I developed a pilot project as a class assignment for Education 835, that has served as a prototype for this thesis. I previewed six video interviews of writers from the Knowledge Network and analyzed the data. Using Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) coding process for classifying and categorizing data, I sorted data concepts into "major code clumps", then redefined and resorted data into "subcodes" (p. 133). I identified four main themes which emerged from the comments of the six writers:

1. How and why they started their careers in writing
2. How they learned to write

3. The techniques they use to write

4. The advice they give to potential writers

These themes tended to be directed by the kinds of questions asked by the interviewers. For example, several writers were asked how or why they started to write. Other comments related to these themes were evident in their general discussions of writing, or in specific comments related to how they had written a particular piece of work that the interviewer was asking about.

The writers described different routes into the field of writing, some wanting to write from an early age, and others discovering their writing talents as adults. Most did not specifically identify where or how they learned to write, but described the kind of person they were, as if having those qualities or attributes was what made them a writer. Some described themselves as being more observant, more curious, or more imaginative than others. None identified learning to write in school.

The findings from the pilot project served as a basic blueprint to formulate the categories used to sort the data from the remaining eleven writers. Data collection and analysis methods used in the pilot project were replicated for this study. For example, I watched the video footage with the four data categories in mind, but transcribed all comments related to writing as I had done in the pilot project. After each writer's comments were transcribed, I identified which comments were related to the four already identified themes and subheadings. During this process, it became apparent that the main themes from the pilot project required modification based on the additional data. For example, the heading, *Techniques They Use to Write*, was initially restricted to the technical aspects of writing. The data from the writers in this study also strongly supported a spiritual aspect to the writing process. Accordingly, the heading was revised as the *Process of Writing*, to include both the spiritual and technical elements described by the writers. Also added under this main heading is a subheading on how the writers get their stories and ideas.

A new main theme emerged from the data analysis in this study. Many of the writers had something to say about why they continue to write. These comments were generic and philosophical, and differed from the more specific reasons given for why they

started to write. For example, writers described starting to write as a way to fulfill a practical need or impulse, such as *to tell a story*, or *for political purposes.* · The new thematic heading, *Philosophies on Writing*, reflects the writers' comments related to their views on what writing means to them. For example, data under this heading relates to issues such as the *moral responsibilities of writing*, and the *reader writer relationship*. The original transcripts from the six writers used in the pilot project were reviewed in the context of the revised and added themes, and relevant data was included in this study.

In summary, this study was inspired by my desire to learn more about writing and the teaching of writing, from writers. Despite the limitations outlined in this section, the data elicited from the writers was of interest to me, as an educator of writing, as a writer, and as a parent of children learning to write. The presence of the Writer's Festival in Vancouver, and the ability to access the Knowledge Network interview tapes, was extremely timely and relevant to the development of my topic of interest. Without these connections, this thesis in this context would not have been possible

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Several themes emerged from the writers' comments during the interviews. This chapter presents and analyzes the data as it has been sorted under five main headings:

1. How/why did the writers start to write

2. How did the writers learn to write

3. Philosophies on writing

4. Process of writing

5. Suggestions for the teaching/learning of writing

Some writers were asked these questions directly whereas other writers referred to this content in answering other related questions. The data to support these themes has been collected from both the writers' explicit comments, and also from implied statements. The inclusion of the numbers of writers who have said something about the thematic heading is to indicate significance only if the number is high. A low number of comments does not imply insignificance or lack of agreement among the writers, due to many writers not being asked the same questions. For a brief overview of the authors, the comment themes, and the numbers of authors who made reference to a theme, refer to Table 1 Data Grid, page 65. Detailed transcriptions of the interviews are included as Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Data summaries are presented under each main heading, related subheadings, and specific comments, as outlined in Table 1. The themes are listed and described in descending order of the highest number of writer comments to the fewest number of comments, although this order may not represent importance or significance given the variation of questions asked.

How/Why Did the Writers Start to Write?

Childhood Influences

Ten writers claimed that they had "always wanted to write" and that they wrote actively as children. Many began writing at very early ages. Writing was perceived as a pleasurable and desirable activity when they were children.

Nine writers stated that when they were children, being a writer was a "secret ambition," or "a dream," perhaps suggesting it wasn't something children would normally or openly aspire to be. Despite an early affinity for writing, most didn't think they would or could have writing careers. Only one writer, who was exposed to current writers as a child, said he was told by his teachers that he'd be a writer one day.

Four writers deliberately noted that they didn't have an urge to write in their early years. Two of these are the authors of children's picture books, one who considers herself a visual artist rather than a writer. The other three didn't develop their interest in writing until adulthood.

Six writers noted that a strong influence in their writing was their reading at an early age and developing a love for books. The writers remembered being read to at very early ages, and then wanting to read as much as they could when they were older. One liked "to feel the power of words" as a child. Another loved the elocution of the words "to have lovely things to read to people aloud." One spoke of "getting into the habit of reading" as a child.

Several noted that they read and wrote as a result of their circumstances and environments as children. Two writers had extended illnesses and hospitalizations that they said influenced their interest in reading and paying attention to the world around them. Others noted that the lack of television and radio in their homes enabled them to read more, and did not distract from their interest in writing.

Five writers referred to listening to stories as children, either from story-telling members of their families, or from making up stories themselves about objects and/or people around them. One writer, who had a father with a dramatic flair for storytelling, stated, "I learned more from my father's stories about literature, then I learned from university." The writers suggest that the stories helped stimulate their already active imaginations.

Personal Characteristics

The writers were never specifically asked a question related to their personal characteristics or attributes. Many writers, nevertheless, answered the question, "Why did you start writing?" by describing the kind of person they were, as if having those qualities

or attributes was what made them a writer. From their comments, some themes emerge as to what characteristics they claim to possess that help make them writers.

The most prominent theme was that of having an imagination and of liking to envision images, from storytelling scenarios, or simply from daydreaming. Six of the writers remember spending hours as children creating stories about the people and things around them, or of idly watching a scene, or of daydreaming.

Three writers thought they were more curious about the world, and always wanted to discover something new. A few writers noted that writing was a tool they used to help them satisfy their own curiosity about the world. They found that by writing, they discovered things about themselves and the world that they didn't know they knew.

Three writers specifically noted that writers are "control freaks" or obsessive. Others alluded to this trait when they described their writing habits and the discipline required to write at the exclusion of other aspects of their lives. 'Two writers specifically denied having this trait when asked directly by the interviewer.

Three writers referred to writing as an inherent talent or gift. One described his obligation to readers as "to recognize that as a gift to say as well as I can what I saw...to create the pattern." Another described writing as a "God-given talent."

Two writers spoke of having a love of words as children and remembered being verbal at a very young age. One writer began her love for writing by her joy at reading stories aloud in elocution lessons

Two writers identified themselves as having stronger feelings or emotions than others. They perceived themselves to be more humanistic and more caring of people. One writer described novelists as having "to feel things, they don't have to live them."

An increased awareness of the world, by listening and watching, was identified by two writers as a valuable trait for a writer. One writer credits having a long hospitalization at a young age that helped her to develop her awareness and sensitivity to human interactions and processes

Two writers noted that they had backgrounds in music. One linked his affinity for rhythm to the writing of poetry, and the other author connected her love for music as influencing her development as a writer

Reasons for Starting to Write

The main themes for starting to write tended to focus on what many writers' perceived as a transition from "amateur" to "professional" writer. For some, their "formal" writing did not take place until they were older with established careers in other disciplines, although they had started to write earlier as a sideline activity or hobby. The writers' comments primarily reflected their interpretation of why they began to write professionally, although some did suggest this began in childhood.

The predominant reason for writing was "to tell a story." Five writers described wanting to write the stories that they were thinking. One writer talked about the joy of being able to "fashion your own words" to make a story. Another spoke of the thrill and the power of being "able to name things and make new associations" when writing. One writer heard the stories about his family and felt it "was fertile ground for a book."

Three writers had very practical reasons for starting to write. Two writers who were teachers describe writing and publishing a book to serve as an example for their classes. A third made a children's picture book for her own children.

Three authors wrote either to emulate writers they liked, or because they were convinced they could do a better job of it compared to what they read. One author wrote his first book simply to prove that it was an easy thing to do. Another read mystery novels and thought he could do a better job. Another didn't like the books available for teenagers, and as a teacher, he thought he could create books the kids could relate to.

Two writers described their early writing as a hobby, an activity done on the side if time permitted. One writer notes that writing was his way of getting rid of stress from his busy life as a lawyer. Many of the writers were in other jobs/careers and found themselves writing for the joy of it, and eventually "the writing took over."

Two writers used their early skills in writing as tools of rebellion. One wrote erotic poetry, and the other wrote counter-culture poetry while in university.

Two writers talked of their early writing as a way "to discover the world," "to describe and make sense of life." One felt she could keep control of her life by being able to write about her perception of the world.

Early Works

Many of the writers were asked about their early writing. These comments reflect what they identified as their early works. The writers' current writing genres will be described in a later section.

Eight of the writers began writing poetry as children. Two authors continue to write poetry, although only one continues to write poems exclusively. One writer began to write novels as a child. Two others wrote their first novel as adults. Two writers wrote short stories as children. One continued to write short stories as an adult. The first works of two authors were children's picture books which they wrote as adults. Two writers wrote plays as children. One author began writing in a personal journal at the age of eight, and continues to do so.

How Did the Writers' Learn to Write?

Most of the writers were not asked and did not specifically address this question, although some comments that allude to the learning of writing were threaded throughout the interviews.

Formal Education

Only one writer referred to school, and only in terms of being "encouraged to write" by her teachers. Another writer was told by his teachers that he'd grow up to be a writer, although he does not describe learning or being influenced by his teachers.

Self-taught/Influencing experiences

The writers saw themselves as primarily self-taught. One admitted to actually using "how-to" books to learn to write mysteries. Most however, talked about the value of being well-read and of being story-tellers first. Three other themes emerged from the data that the writers' identified as influencing their ability to write. The work of other writers, trial and error, and interactions with other writers.

Some writers admitted to initially imitating the writing styles of their favourite authors, or they identified writers that "inspired" or "influenced" them in some way. One writer claimed he "steals shamelessly certain techniques of other writers."

The skill of writing well seems to have been by trial and error for the writers. Many learned from their own successes and failures in writing. One writer described learning to "find her voice" by writing regularly in a journal as a child. Feedback from publishers is mentioned as providing specific direction for some. Many of the writers began to try new ways of writing as they became more experienced.

Two writers commented that they actively seek feedback from other writers. One is married to a writer and said she started her writing career by discussing her stories with him. The other writer is a member of a writer's group.

Changing Genres

Eight writers have changed genres since their writing career has been established. Most started out by writing poetry and short stories, and have progressed to writing novels. Some explained that this was because they had developed a need to express more, or to have more meaning than they felt a poem or short story could convey. One writer noted that as he got older, he "had the instinct to tell full stories, not fragmented poetry." One moved from poetry to mystery writing, because "contemporary poetry seemed like chopped-up prose." This writer believed his "poetic impulse went into the prose" of his novels.

Some writers liked the challenge of moving from one genre to another as a means of "telling a different kind of story." An author of teen novels moved from realism to historical fiction. A writer of children's picture books has become interested in writing novels.

Philosophies on Writing

Depending on the interviewer, some writers discussed their philosophies about writing in great detail and others barely or never addressed it. Some writers were asked "Why do you write?" and these themes surfaced from their answers. Others described their philosophies while they were discussing a specific piece of their work. Other themes related to philosophies emerged from their language, or the way in which they described their writing, such as using music metaphors.

To Try Life Out/To Discover

Seven writers referred to the ability to live, discover, or gain knowledge through the stories they create. As one writer noted, "I work my personal life into my writing...on paper, writers' have a chance to try life out." Another wrote "to see life from many different perspectives." One author wrote to "find out what you know...or to express something that is unclear to you." Another wrote "to discover something, although you don't know what you're writing to discover". One writer described writing a book like a "manifestation," where she becomes so focused on a subject that "things are coming from me that I didn't know, didn't realize I knew about." Many of the writers felt that by writing, they had opportunity to try situations and experiences out in their stories, that would otherwise be too difficult or unrealistic to experience in their personal lives.

To Develop a Reader/Writer Relationship

Six writers discussed the importance of creating a relationship with the reader when they write. They described wanting to be "the reader's companion" and of "learning alongside" the reader as they write. Two writers explained that they create the "pattern" of the story or poem, but it is the readers who bring their imaginations, emotional and spiritual dimensions, and energy that "completes the story." One author said that "there wouldn't be any point to writing without a reader." One writer admitted to writing to meet the market demand of readers, to fulfill the "appetite of human beings for stories."

Conversely, one author admitted to writing without an audience in mind. She noted that "the actual creative process has nothing to do with the people en masse out there for me. I write exactly how I want to."

As a Social/Moral Responsibility

Five writers referred to creating a story that should have a meaningful purpose for the readers. One writes about the struggles that men and women routinely face, and tries to create stories "where people come away from reading it feeling hopeful." Another writer likes to ensure that his main character has had to "learn something" with each book.

Two writers referred to the danger of writing "politically correctly" which ends up stifling their creativity and restricting the nature of their stories. They choose to write about issues that regular people face, no matter how unpleasant or unpopular

For Self-esteem/Love/Immortality

Four writers referred to writing as a means of fulfilling their own emotional needs for love and acceptance. One woman writer stated that it's true that "most women writers write to be loved . to lay out the deepest treasures of your soul, or yourself . and if people love them, then it's the most wonderful thing that you could do." Another writer said, "The mere act of being a writer in our culture is an enormous act of ego—an assertion of self." One writer admitted to changing his storytelling from writing to video and computer venues, as a way of staying popular and accepted by "the mainstream." In referring to writing as a route to immortality, a writer said that writing poetry is a "thinking desire for permanence."

"Driven" to Write

Three writers described being "driven" to write. One writer talked about getting "irritable" if he's away from writing, and that "writing and creating fulfills some need" for him. He described having "an urge to produce something." Another said she gets pictures and images in her head "that won't leave me alone . and I have to do this [write]." Another writer claimed he just doesn't want to be away from writing.

Only one author specifically noted that "I'm not the kind of writer who has to write anything or else I'm going to *die*." She stated that as a writer, she didn't have to be prolific to be good.

Music Metaphors

Three writers described writing in terms of musical metaphors. One said that he creates a pattern for a story and "listens to the individual come to life in the pattern, like a composer does [with music]." Another writer described "When you write something, the language is the instrument, playing the instrument builds the music, and builds the world that has to do with the human condition." One writer described his process of writing poetry as, "Oral rhythm has a vitality, and I hear it. The body hears it, the beat that draws before any meaning. I see an image, then hear the rhythm." He stated that he spends a lot of time with music, and that he's "fascinated by the structure in process, not the words, but the passion," like in his poems.

For Pleasure/Power

Although alluded to by almost all of the writers, two specifically stated that they write for the pleasure, power, or satisfaction of being able, as one writer put it, "to sit and create and bring people to life, to know what happens next."

To Use Skills/Gift to Create for Others

Two writers referred to the obligation they feel to use their abilities to write so that others can enjoy their talents. One writer puts it this way, "People are generous to me as a writer, and my obligation is to recognize, that as a gift, I must say as well as I can what I saw."

The Process of Writing

The writers described two distinct approaches to how they actually write. The spiritual aspects have to do with the mysterious, creative processes that some writers claim enable them to write. Technical aspects include the mechanics, routines, and techniques the writers describe using to write.

Spiritual Aspects

Ten writers referred to mystical, magical process, described by one as "spooky," when they are writing. This has to do with either feeling as though they have assumed the role of the main character, or that they follow the direction that the characters give them. To the writers, the characters and the story come to life, and as they write, the writers live it. One writer described this as "a shift in writing when something magical happens and you move into a different dimension when reality disappears and you are in the reality of the fiction you can hang in that dimension for hours and hours."

Writers referred to "listening" to their characters. One noted that "writing is not an act of intellection[sic] I follow characters, whatever it is they are doing---I am just in their service, in some sense." Another writer stated that his characters don't dictate everything, "but a character has told me on occasion that he wouldn't do something or that I've got it wrong." Another writer said she has become "totally immersed in a character's life and mind, and I followed her and went with her." She described writing as "an act of intense empathy." One writer said that he uses "the voice of the main character to drive the story, although another character's voice can take over and alter the story"

One writer said he starts with an image, then rhythm, "then another voice comes in, one of my 'friends,' someone else I've read." He believes that other poets' voices help direct him in writing his poetry.

Related to the reality shift between the characters and the writers is the "mysterious" process of the story going off in its own direction. Four writers described starting the story off with an idea or a premise, but that the story unfolds on its own. One writer stated, "I've never known where a story is going when I begin it... what's at the end, I don't know." One mystery writer noted, "I don't solve the crime before I start... I don't always know who the killer is... I let that work out from the characters, otherwise, I'd be bored." Another writers said he is "always a beginner when I write... with every new page, I don't know what will happen... it's a new adventure for me each time." One writer described writing "like giving birth—I don't try to control it." He said that it is "harder work to allow the book to go in different directions."

Conversely, two writers said that they exert control over the direction of their stories. One writer noted that when writing short stories "you have to go straight to the point, without losing your time, or your way, or your path." A writer of mystery novels also described following his outline closely, of "already knowing what will happen in the end, otherwise I would go off in directions."

Four writers referred to the need to take time to write. One writer said that she's a slow writer in that she rewrites her stories "draft after draft, to find the right components." which may ultimately change the story. Another writer said that it takes her a long time to write, because "I have it all in my head, and I want to really exactly have it." One writer stated he writes in longhand, because he believes that "it takes time and time is part of the work. I touch the work as I write it."

Three writers described themselves as being an oracle for fully developed stories that exist and need to be put down on paper. One writer described an unconscious act of completing the story in his subconscious, "so when I sit down, I find the line of the story and follow it." Another writer said she "sees the story, like a theatre in my head. it's like typing dictation." One writer of poetry noted that the poem "always has a 'gut' to it," and that he doesn't always revise his poems because "sometimes the work just pours out."

Three writers commented that the physical act of writing is intrinsically connected to their creativity. One writer stated, "Writing for me is the process of exploration and discovery... the best ideas happen when I'm writing, not going away and thinking about it." A writer of poetry noted that "the act of writing is part of the poem." One writer described disciplining himself to write "if the juices are flowing and I'm on the tail of a character or the line of a plot," implying that the act of writing will help him seek or discover these elements.

Two writers discussed writing from images or pictures in their minds, "like a snapshot." They take a visual image and create a narrative story based on describing the image.

Two writers described the importance of finding their own voice in their writing. One writer shifts his voice from third to first person, depending of the story and the characters. Another writer said that she took a hiatus from writing after her first book was published because she thought the issues she wanted to write about would be considered too trivial. She was glad for the time-out because she said she "took time to realize that my voice, and what I have to say, was valuable."

Two writers made a point of noting that smell is significant in their writing. One said that "I've a keen sense of smell, and write about it all the time." The other writer also said that her books are "full of smells... it's a very sensual thing the way people smell... it is a very jarring detail and you have to be absolutely accurate."

Technical Aspects

Six writers referred to the discipline required to sit and write. One writer mentioned "writer's block" only to say that he had never experienced it. Another writer described the need to put in time "to get the momentum going, I'll try to put in my 4-5 hours a day in, and if I can't do that, I'm still thinking about it in some way." One writer said, "It is questionable if writers have something to say everyday. if I haven't anything to say, I don't write. if I do have something to say, I become very disciplined and write so many pages per day. but I can't do this for too long—its gets too boring." He also noted that he has to discipline himself not only to write, but to take breaks. Another writer talked about the importance of taking breaks by saying that he "intersperses writing with

doing something physical, like working on my boat...writing and manual labour go well together...they energize each other."

Three writers said they considered themselves slow writers. One described herself as "a slow writer technically and physically...it takes me a very long time until I find a quiet space to be imaginative." Another writer described needing time to think about her story while sitting at a computer, and her frustration when the "screen-saver" suddenly appears on the computer, as if the computer is "always telling me I'm too slow." One writer said that he writes purposely in longhand instead of using the computer to keep the process slow, because "time is part of the work."

Two writers said that they write fast. One described writing "the way I speak—no punctuation and fast... I run at it like a bullet." Another writer claimed to write very quickly, despite being in longhand. He described writing as fast as "at the rate I think."

Three writers said they write in longhand. One writer described wanting to keep the pace slow. Another described writing his first drafts in longhand, "to control the speed, which is the rate I think." He said that he thought a computer would "disembody the work from the writer."

Three writers said they use the computer to write. Two started their careers by writing in longhand, but switched to computers. One reason given is that the computer allows for concurrent editing. One writer considered himself a computer user, despite admitting to "scribbling notes and pages, then transcribing them onto the computer." One author said he uses both a computer and a fax machine when he writes.

Three writers felt that editing was "the worse part" of writing. One described it as "editing squeezes the creativity out of writing by narrowing information down." Another noted that "the hardest part (of writing) is editing a plot line I have mothered and played with."

Three writers describe writing their first drafts in full, and editing afterward. One writer said her first draft might be 50 pages a week, because "I don't check things at first." One author said he prefers to edit a completed draft after it has been set aside for a few months. Another writer, when referring to editing, stated "I can't craft and invent at the same time. I invent first, then craft the work."

Three writers describe editing or "rewriting" concurrently with the drafting. One writer said he likes to edit "as I go along" on the computer.

Three writers talked about being able to take their work with them and, that they can write anywhere. One referred to the fact that his computer is portable, and another suggested that this ability is because he writes longhand.

One writer specifically described the difficulty in finding a quiet space to work in. She alluded to the stress she experiences when she can't "submerge myself in my work-- my private life pervades into my consciousness, invades me, and it becomes hard to work."

Another writer referred to needing time, or a "gap" between writing his novels, "I haven't the kind of imagination to go from novel to novel."

Getting Stories and Ideas

Six writers noted that they use real people as prototypes for their characters and stories. Some writers further elaborated that it is their interest in people that inspires them to "examine the breakdowns between generations and men and women." These "everyday foibles" and "human problems" are the source for stories for many of the writers. One writer said she is drawn to people "who live on the edge, that have their own agenda and separate lives from the mainstream," while another focuses on teen issues.

The writers said their characters are created from people they have been exposed to whether in their other careers, such as being a criminal lawyer, a teacher, a social worker, etc., or from interactions in their daily lives.

Three writers admitted to deliberately seeking images to help inspire them for stories and characterization. A common strategy described by all three is to "sit on buses and eavesdrop to see what people are talking about." One writer alluded to the fact that his own life is different and separate from the lives "regular" people lead. Two writers described carrying around a notebook to jot images down in.

Two mystery writers described starting with a framework or general notion of a plot when they start to write. One noted that the plot is the first and easiest part of the process, whereas the characters and the setting are harder to develop. Both described sticking with their overall framework to avoid going too far off the story, although one of

the writers said he doesn't solve the crime before he starts. He described mystery writing as "working a puzzle backwards."

Two authors described waiting for ideas or characters "to emerge and develop" before the writing process begins. One of the writers said he believed patience is crucial in allowing this to happen, that stories shouldn't be forced or hurried.

Two writers described the process of doing research of an topic or idea before beginning to write. By uncovering factual information, a story idea will emerge.

One writer described submitting several drafts of topics to the publisher, and one is chosen for her to fully design and develop into a children's pop-up book.

Suggestions for the Teaching/Learning of Writing

This section differs slightly from the other sections insofar as eight writers were specifically asked the question, "What advice would you have for young writers?" The thematic sub-headings primarily represent their specific answers to this question, rather than from making inferences from comments related to how *they* learned to write, which was described earlier in this chapter.

Despite the directness of the question, many writers did not directly or fully answer it. Some writers did not give any advice or suggestions, but made a statement about their belief that writing couldn't be taught. Others were extraordinarily brief in their answers. The wording of the question implied that the advice was for "young writers", suggesting that the people in question were writers already. Thus the issue of inherent writing talent versus being taught to write surfaces in this discussion.

Advice for "New/Young Writers"

Four writers emphatically stated that to write, one must read "voraciously." Four writers noted that a good writer is always listening, looking, and feeling. One writer said she advises "young writers" to "write what you see—use your eyes as a camera, use your ears as a tape recorder." One writer suggested new writers should "have your eyes wide open to see, we are usually too busy to watch for subtle things." The notion of being sensitive was expressed as important, of being able to "feel," or to "have the heart to be

touched by what is going on in the world around you and what is happening to you." One writer noted that writers must always be "processing mentally" what they see and hear.

Four writers referred to the love of writing and having self-confidence as prerequisites to becoming a good writer. One writer described the need to persevere, to be "passionately committed" to writing in order not to despair about rejections. She noted, "You have to [write] because you love it...in the end, that's all that matters...[If you] take everything else away--if you don't love writing, then there's no point to it."

Confidence was noted as a necessary trait to avoid feeling discouraged with rejections from publishers. One writer said, "The elements that create a writer begin with faith in the fact that you *are* a writer." Another writer noted, "Rejections for publishing is good—it may show that good writers know that they are good and are more determined to try again."

Three writers noted that young writers should have many experiences in life from which to draw from. One suggested young writers should "live intensely and concentrate on life." Being exceptionally alert to the world was often mentioned by the writers. One writer gave advice to new writers by saying, "Turn off the T.V. Find a life in yourself have your own dream have experiences and discover the world."

Three writers advised new writers to keep writing. One suggested that "a young writer has to find their [sic] own voice and stick to it. The best way is to write for yourself in the beginning, so just to get into the habit of writing things that move you, or ideas" The importance of a writer's voice, or the writer's point of view was echoed in the other writers' comments. One writer elaborated on this notion by saying, "Write how you speak--simply and directly Your writing should feel like comfortable shoes."

Two writers suggested carrying a notebook around, "and when something strikes you, you see something or someone says something, just scrawl it down. It might not even look as if it makes sense" These notations could then be used as elements for a story

Two writers emphasized the importance of writers needing to write about what they know and understand One writer suggested, "Write about your life"

Two writers noted the value of a young writer having a more experienced writer as a mentor.

"Patience with yourself, and kindness with yourself," was suggested by one writer as two elements that create a writer. She implied that if young writers are too critical of their work, it will inhibit their development as writers.

One writer advised new writers 'to have to be able to put up with solitude, because writing is a solitary occupation, and it's a long haul. You must spend many hours by yourself at your word processor, or whatever you write on."

One writer, in answering the question about what advice he would give young writers, answered that "successful writing is like playing the lottery—it just happens or not. Beginnings are always tough." He implied that good writers may not be successful, despite the quality of their work.

For the Teaching of Writing

Four of the writers said they had taught writing in either classroom or workshop settings. One of these authors also wrote a book on how to write.

Three writers voiced their opinion that writing can be facilitated but not taught. One clarified this by saying,

> In a sense, the talent can't be taught, but many aspects of writing I do believe can be taught. Our whole education system is predicated on the idea that some sort of writing can be taught, so there is no reason why fiction writing and poetry writing can't be part of the curriculum. You are not going to teach talent, you are not going to do anything with talent except release it, let it be, give it permission, and nourish it. All these things are part of teaching.

One writer stated a stronger position by saying,

> Elements of the craft of writing can be pointed out, for example a critique of voice, or choices a writer makes. But it might not turn them into a writer. Writers will write anyway. Schools say they'll turn out writers—wrong. They can't produce writers

Another writer emphatically stated,

> Writing cannot be taught. If a young person wishes to become a writer, the worse place for them is a creative writing school, where some literary failure [teacher] imposes himself on you

This author said that he "tries to help writers, but not influence them."

One writer said she teaches writing by giving her students an exercise in focusing. "Many people come saying they have had such a great life and could write a book, but haven't got the time and don't know where to start." She described her strategy of having the students describe a picture, "I get them to narrow and narrow it down to look at one thing."

One writer said that she teaches writing by getting her students to write a short autobiographical piece about "something powerful that they remember from when they were very young, such as a very frightening, sad, or embarassing experience—these are three very powerful emotions from early childhood that will link them to themselves."

Data Summary

While there is considerable agreement among these writers about these five main issues in writing, some disagreements are also evident. This suggests that individuals write for different reasons and use a variety of methods, all valid for good writing. The notion of giftedness continues to influence the discussion of whether writing can be taught or not. Despite these differing perspectives on writing, the writers have elucidated some specific themes and key points that may be of interest to educators of writing. These are explored in Chapter Five.

Data Themes	Total No.	WD	IH	CK	MR	BL	GB	PR	MP	RS	CB	RB	JBC	MB	RC	KM	CP	DC
1. How/why did the writers start to write?																		
a Childhood influences:																		
- Always wanted to write and wrote as a child	10	X	X					X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X
- No notion of career as a writer	9	X	X	X				X	X	X	X		X			X		X
- Read early	6		X				X	X			X	X						X
- Storytelling	5		X								X	X			X		X	
- No early desire	4			X	X								X	X				
b Personal Characteristics:																		
- Imagination	6		X	X				X		X		X			X			
- Curious	3			X		X									X			
- Controlling, Obsessive	3		X							X							X	
- Gifted/talented	3		X			X											X	
- Feeling	2					X			X									
- Aware	2								X	X								
- Musical	2		X									X						
- Verbal/love words	2		X						X									
c Reasons:																		
- Tell a story	5		X								X			X		X	X	
- An example	3			X							X		X					
- Do it better	3				X			X								X		
- Stress release/hobby	2	X														X		
- Political	2											X				X		
- Discover the world	2						X		X	X								

Key to author's initials:

WD William Deverell   IH Isabel Huggan   CK Cecilia King   MR Mordecai Richler   BL Barry Lopez
GB Giaconda Bellie   PR Peter Robinson   MP Monique Proulx   RS Rose Scott   CB Carmel Bird
RB Robin Blaser   JBC Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet   MB Maeve Binchy   RC Roch Carrier   KM Kevin Major
CP Caryl Phillips   DC Don Cameron

Table 1: Data Grid

Data Themes	Total No.	WD	HI	CK	MR	BL	GB	PR	MP	RS	CB	RB	JBC	MB	RC	KM	CP	DC
d Early works																		
- Poetry	8		X				X	X	X			X			X	X		X
- Novels	3				X						X							X
- Short stories	2								X							X		
- Children's books	2				X								X					
- Plays	2						X					X						
- Journal	1														X			
2. How did the writers learn to write?																		
a Formal education	1 - 2		X													?X		
b Self-taught	4	X						X		X							X	
c Changed genre	8		X				X	X	X				X	X		X		X
3. Philosophies on Writing																		
a Try life out/discover	7		X			X	X	X		X		X					X	
b Develop reader/writer relationships	6	X				X		X	X	X		X						
c Social/moral responsibility	5					X		X	X	X								X
d For self-esteem/love	4					X				X		X						X
e "Driven"	3							X					X			X		
f Music metaphors	3					X			X			X						
g For pleasure/power	2											X				X		
h To use skills/gift to create for others	2					X										X		

Table 1. Data Grid (cont'd)

Data Themes	Total No.	WD	IH	CK	MR	BL	GB	PR	MP	RS	CR	RB	JBC	MB	RC	KM	CP	DC
4. Process of Writing																		
a Spiritual																		
- Magical shift	10	X	X			X	X	X		X	X	X			X		X	
- No control over direction	4	X	X			X									X		X	
- Control over direction	2	X							X									
- Takes time	5		X						X	X					X		X	
- Conduit	3					X	X					X						
- Writing = creating	3	X						X				X						
- Describes image	3												X			X		
- Voice	2	X	X										X		X			
- Sense of smell	2		X							X								X
b Technical																		
- Disciplined	6	X			X			X							X	X	X	
- Speed: Slow	3		X						X						X		X	
- Speed: Fast	2					X								X	X		X	
- Method: long hand	3			X					X						X		X	
- Method: computer	1								X									
- Longhand and computer	2	X														X	X	
- Edits after	3			X										X		X		
- Edits during	1															X		
- Rewrites over	3			X	X	X										X	X	
- Hates editing	3	X		X											X	X		
- Mobile	3		X				X								X			X
- Quiet space	1		X															

Table 1: Data Grid (cont'd)

<table>
<thead>
<tr><th>Data Themes</th><th>Total No.</th><th>WD</th><th>IH</th><th>CK</th><th>MR</th><th>BL</th><th>GB</th><th>PR</th><th>MP</th><th>RS</th><th>CB</th><th>RB</th><th>JBC</th><th>MB</th><th>RC</th><th>KM</th><th>CP</th><th>DC</th></tr>
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<tr><td>c Getting stories and ideas</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Draws on real people</td><td>6</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Image hunts</td><td>3</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Uses outlines, framework</td><td>2</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Over time</td><td>2</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Research</td><td>2</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- From publisher</td><td>1</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>5. Suggestions for teaching and learning writing</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>a For new/young writers</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Read</td><td>4</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td></tr>
<tr><td>- Watch/see more</td><td>4</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Love writing/be confident</td><td>4</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Hear more</td><td>3</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Feel more</td><td>2</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Be alert/live</td><td>3</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Write to develop own voice</td><td>3</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
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<tr><td>- Write what you know</td><td>2</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Have a mentor</td><td>1</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Have patience</td><td>1</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Like solitude</td><td>1</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Be lucky</td><td>1</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>b Teaching writing</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Writers are teachers</td><td>4</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Writing can't be taught</td><td>3</td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Teach how to focus</td><td>2</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>- Teach to use own experiences</td><td>2</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>X</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
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Table 1: Data Grid (cont'd)

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

This chapter focuses on the issues raised by the writers that may have interest for educators of writing. Some conclusions can be suggested by the data, but due to the broad range of questions and individual responses of the writers, no significant inferences can be made. Implications for educators, based on the comments from the writers, will be briefly addressed in the first section. Concrete strategies for implementing some of the suggested approaches exceed the scope of this paper, but would be relevant for further study. The second section of this chapter provides recommendations for further study and research.

Issues of Interest and Implications for Educators

This section explores and discusses the main themes that emerged from the data collection, and the recommendations and implications for educators of writing based on these themes. It should be noted that the findings are not necessarily in accordance with my own beliefs about education and writing, or of those writers reviewed in Chapter Two. It is not within the scope of this paper to compare, criticize, or refute the comments of these seventeen writers.

Themes arose from the comments made by the writers relating to writing. These were sorted in Chapter Four under the five main headings related to how/why the writers' started writing, how the writers' learned to write; their philosophies on writing, their writing processes, and their suggestions for the teaching/learning of writing. These five headings won't be individually addressed in this chapter, but the specific findings of interest derived from the headings and their sub-headings are reviewed and discussed. A concluding discussion related to the teaching/learning of writing will essentially consolidate much of the data from these headings and incorporate the implications for educators into an overall discussion of whether or not writing can be taught.

Main Themes of Interest

Childhood Influences of Reading, Storytelling, and Writing

Writers' comments.

The writers described a strong correlation between reading, storytelling, and becoming a writer. Inherent in their early exposure to stories, either from reading them, or listening to them, was their love for stories and the discovery of the elements that create a good story. Also, according to the writers, one becomes a good writer by writing. They commented that the more they wrote, the more skilled they became at writing. Many began writing at very early ages.

Recommendations.

This strong correlation between reading, storytelling, and writing corresponds with what is often suggested by the literature as described in Chapter Two. Educators have long been aware of this connection and this research suggests that they continue to expose children to stories, to help them develop a love for the story process, and to stimulate their imaginations. The data also suggests that writing be encouraged to begin early. As Protherough (1983) pointed out, the act of writing can be difficult for young children, but perhaps with support and praise when they do write, a desire to keep writing might be instilled. Educators could also provide regular opportunities for students of all ages to write, as a means of helping them to develop their skill at writing.

Loved to Write, but Never Considered a Career in Writing

Writers' comments

Although most of the writers loved to write as children, only one initially aspired to be a writer or considered a career in writing. The writers suggest that this could be due to the fact that perhaps not aspiring to be a writer was based on what they thought, as children, a "writer" was. They were not exposed to current writers as role models, and could not relate their own writing interest and abilities to that of the famous literary writers normally taught in school. As one author noted, as a child he thought of famous writers as "British and dead," definitely not someone like himself. Mentorships with writers was suggested by the writers as one way to learn the skill of writing. One writer

commented that he thought there are more writers today because more children are being exposed to current writers.

Recommendations

For educators, this data might suggest that children be exposed to positive role models for writing. Current writers could be invited to discuss and describe to them what it's like to be a writer have careers as writers. Browning and McClintic (1995) stressed the importance of having a writer come to their classes to help their sixth grade students identify with a writer. Mentorships with writers might also provide an opportunity to follow the life of someone who writes.

A career in writing could be presented early as an attainable option as much as any other career. School career fairs could also invite contemporary writers to speak to students on the life of someone who writes for a living. Often, school career fairs neglect to include a writers' booth with all the other career booths in the gym (Abbotsford Senior Secondary, 1996).

Personal Characteristics

Writers' comments

Having a heightened awareness of the world around them featured predominantly as a character trait. The writers claimed that they see, hear, and feel things that others may not. They study human nature, and in doing so, can create believable stories that draw upon their observations. They described being intensely curious about things, people, and life. They are thrilled with the discovery of something new. Having a strong imagination and being able to visualize a story was a characteristic most noted by the writers. The writers described these characteristics and attributes as if it were these qualities that made them writers. Despite the writers' consistent identification and belief that these attributes helped them become writers, they did not describe or explain how one might develop these abilities.

Recommendations

The data suggests that educators recognize these features as important to writing. Strategies might then be developed to help children become more observant and aware of their environment. One approach for educators is to continue to inspire the imagination of

children by reading and telling stories in the classroom. Other approaches to develop these qualities in children could be subject for further study.

Reasons for Starting to Write

Writers' comments.

The writers presented a variety of reasons for beginning to write in earnest. Some had very practical beginnings, such as providing an example for students, and others claimed more spiritual reasons, i.e. to discover the world. Clearly, different writers will have their own unique and personal reasons for deciding to write.

It is interesting to note that many writers began their formal careers in writing unintentionally. Two mentioned that their work was submitted to publishers without their knowledge by well-meaning friends. This implies that they wrote primarily for their own pleasure, and that professional recognition was not an actively sought-after goal.

Recommendations

It might be helpful if educators recognized that students will write for a variety of personal reasons. What is important is that students discover the inherent joy or value in intrinsic writing, so that they think of it as a pleasurable activity. The notion that writing should be presented as "fun" to students is a central theme in Berthoff's (1993), and Browning & McClintic's (1995) discussions on the teaching of writing.

Poetry as Early Writing

Writers' comments.

Writing poetry featured prominently among the writers as their first experience in writing, especially as children. The writers did not explore why they chose to write poetry instead of other forms of writing. It is possible that they were drawn to poetry because of their oft-stated notion that the discovery, use, and sound of words were fascinating and pleasing to them as young writers. A rhythm or pattern in writing, mentioned by several writers, might have also influenced them in choosing to write poetry.

Recommendations

Educators might find the relationship of early writing and poetry interesting. Although not discussed by the writers, this connection might suggest that children be exposed early to poetry, and be encouraged to write poetry. Poems, like short stories,

might appeal to children because they can be shorter in length, and a more manageable writing task for children. This early interest in poetry amongst writers and its implications for education would be a relevant issue for further study.

Writer's Philosophies

Writers' comments.

Writing serves two main philosophical purposes for most of the writers in this study: As a means of discovering and exploring the world, and as a means of communicating and interacting with the reader. Other reasons for writing noted by the writers center around the pleasure of it, the boost to one's ego, and the power and satisfaction inherent in creating a piece of written work.

Recommendations.

These philosophies might suggest to educators that, if these are the main reasons that writers write, then they may be the reasons that students may want to write. Perhaps by exploring these philosophies with students, educators might help students understand the value in writing, even as young children. As Protherough (1983) pointed out, even preschoolers enjoy "scribbling" on a paper, as an early attempt at communicating with others. An early understanding of the value in writing could help younger children cope more positively with the factors that might make them resistant to writing as described by Protherough and McCormick (1986) in Chapter Two.

Music and Writing

Writers comments.

A link between music and writing has been described by the writers. Some described writing using music metaphors, of writing a story as creating a pattern, like a musical composition. Others described words, or stories as having rhythm. Perhaps this connects with the writers' earlier comments about loving the sound of words as children. Some writers describe having backgrounds in music and dance, which may influence how they "hear" the rhythm in their work.

Recommendations.

The connection of music and writing might be of interest to educators. The data suggests that children might be able to hear a rhythm in words or in the pattern of a story

ASCD (1988) connected a young child's musical movements to writing: "Young children should understand the movement implications of words and musical sounds and should be able to represent stories, poems, or concepts in movement"(p. 125). Further study in this area might look more closely at the relationship between music and writing. The Waldorf School, has used music as an approach to teaching subjects such as math and language for many years.

The Spiritual Process of Writing

Writers' Comments

The fiction writers and poets commonly described a sense of being immersed and involved with their characters and their stories. This is possibly linked to the active imagination and the empathic abilities the writers describe as their personality traits. They feel that they "live" the story as it unfolds.

Two approaches to how the story develops are described by the writers. Some writers suggested that the story "exists" and that they simply download the story onto paper. Others described the development of the story as an ongoing process that occurs as they write, implying that if they stopped writing, the story would stop.

Recommendations

The data suggests that it is important for educators to be aware that writers enjoy the experience of living their stories as they write them. This knowledge might be useful in helping students develop their stories based on their own experiences, feelings, and understanding of their own life events. It would be interesting for further research to explore the extent of a child's emotional immersion and imagination in a story of his/her own creation.

Longhand Versus Computer

Writers' Comments

Writing longhand versus using the computer appears to depend on the way the story develops for the writer, either in advance of the writing, or concurrently with the writing. Editing, despised by most writers, can be done either during or after the drafting process. Clearly, writers will approach the technical aspects of writing in the way that best fits with their philosophies of writing, the kinds of stories they are telling, and their

own comfort with the method. Computer use appeared to make writing easier for some, in terms of the editing process, but harder for others because of the speed. It might be relevant to note that the majority of the writers interviewed appeared to be middle-aged or older, suggesting that some may not have become familiar and/or comfortable adapting their writing processes to the newer technologies.

Recommendations.

Computers are already in use in many schools. Students could be encouraged to experiment with writing both in longhand and on the computer. It might seem reasonable to expect that younger writers will be more comfortable using computers for writing. Editing is considered an arduous task by most writers, so for students, it might be suggested that editing occur after the work is drafted, so it doesn't inhibit or interrupt the joy of creating the story.

Getting Stories and Ideas

Writers' Comments

The writers describe getting their ideas from their own life experiences and from eavesdropping on the lives of others.

Recommendations

Educators can encourage students to write about something significant in their own lives to help them focus and to find their own voice. It would also seem important that students are directed to use strategies, such as eavesdropping or visiting different places, as a source for ideas and as inspirations for their imaginations.

A Summary Discussion on the Teaching/Learning of Writing

All of the above themes can be integrated into a discussion on the teaching and learning of writing. In essence, this section serves as an overall summary of the implications for educators.

The writers said they learned to write primarily from exposure to reading other authors and from their own trial and errors in writing. Some mentioned being "influenced" by the works of other writers. Many started writing in one form, for example poetry or short stories, and gradually expanded to several other forms such as novels

Their writing improved the more they wrote. Feedback from others, specifically publishers or other writers was mentioned as helpful.

Only one writer mentioned formal education as influencing his ability to write. It would appear that many of these writers felt they had an aptitude to write before they entered school. This lack of acknowledgment of the role of schools in learning to write could be due to the possibility that there was little attention given to "creative" writing in previous curriculums. It may have been a common notion of teachers, as described in the literature, that students either have a "gift" to write, or they don't. Those who were identified as lacking in talent possibly were not encouraged to write.

When writers were specifically asked what advice they would give to new writers, their comments closely reflected those made from writers in Chapter Two. It was not surprising that the writers suggested that new writers should read. Presumably, as described in the literature, it is the development of the love for words, stories, and exposure to different voices. Being exceptionally alert to the sounds, sights, and emotions of the people and world around, is also suggested by several writers as valuable attributes a young writer should seek to have, although none of the writers suggested how this might be achieved.

Writers referred to having a love of writing, of being passionate, and of having confidence as important elements for new writers. These characteristics were suggested by the writers as useful in the persistence of writing despite the possible reality of publisher rejections and professional failures. They are also qualities that will stimulate the writer to keep writing. With more writing, according to the writers, comes a better developed voice.

Writers reviewed in the literature in Chapter Two suggested that the success of a writing program might depend on four main factors: exposing students to literature, teaching students the basic steps in the writing process, helping students to *feel* like writers, and having a teacher who models writing. While these are also ideas supported by the writers in this study, neither group of writers stated that they *learned* to write this way. Perhaps what is being suggested is that the apprenticeship model, used for centuries, should be reconsidered as part of our formalized school curriculums on writing. Malcolm

(in Cowley, 1958), noted that "authors are sometimes like tomcats, they distrust all other toms, but are kind to kittens"(p. 6), suggesting that seasoned writers would help young writers learn.

It is interesting that in answering the question about what people should do to become writers, some of the writers described having taught creative writing. These writers had specific suggestions and techniques for the teaching of writing, such as how to get students to focus and be descriptive. The prevalent feeling from the writers was that their students already had some writing talent before attending the class. The writers believed that the talent or gift of writing could not necessarily be taught, but that the talent could be developed if it existed. Perhaps in part, this is based on their belief that gifted writers possess the requisite personal attributes for writing.

The relevant question for educators is, if the attributes and issues described by the writers could be incorporated into writing curriculums, would it create writers? The answer to this question is a complicated one, and to explore it fully, several influencing perspectives are addressed.

First, the writers interviewed were not taught how to write, or how to develop their attributes. They just did it. If "formal" education played any role in their ability and interest to write, none of them were aware or spoke of it. Most were exposed to reading early. If these writers weren't formally taught, do our students need to be formally taught? The writers suggest that the most driven to write will write regardless of their education. Some even suggest that writing courses might be damaging or harmful for someone who already has aptitude as a writer.

Perhaps what is being suggested by the data from these writers is that our education system might want to target those students who are not acutely aware that they have an aptitude or ability to write. One way that these students could explore their writing potential is to be exposed to the act and the joy of writing in school. Teachers might be more open to helping all students improve their writing ability if they espouse the philosophy that writing is a valuable activity for everyone regardless of any demonstrated talent. Children shouldn't be readily labelled as either a "gifted" writer or one who "can't" write.

Second, according to the writers who teach writing, the attributes described by the writers *can* be taught. The recommendations related to the main themes identified in this chapter could be developed into specific strategies to help students hone their abilities and maintain their interest in writing. The strategies might make students more apt to write or to write better than before.

Third, as educators, do we want to turn everyone into a writer, in the professional sense? Perhaps this is not a realistic or even a desirable goal. Surely, we recognize that the ability to write effectively is of tantamount importance to communicate and express ourselves in our society. But students should not have to write "creatively," or have to become published writers, to be considered good writers. Perhaps the goal for educators should be to provide an opportunity and environment for all students to learn to write, to enjoy the act of writing, and to be effective communicators in writing.

It is not unrealistic to expect students to have effective written communication skills as the measure of success. The Business Council of B.C. (1995) in their survey, "What are B.C. employers looking for?" found that communication skills, including writing, was the number one attribute most sought after when hiring new employees. Communication and writing ability was also cited as the number one employability skill by the B.C. Labour Force Development Board (1995). Clearly, to be able to write well is seen to contribute to career success, regardless of the choice of career.

To address all these issues, curriculums might include courses on all forms of writing to expose the students to a variety of writers and a range of writing styles. Mentorships with writers could be developed with students. If writing was presented by educators as an enjoyable activity, and students were helped to understand the value of writing in our society, then perhaps students would develop a life-long interest in writing. If during this educational process on writing, students become more alert to their world, more passionate about issues, more adept at the use of language, then as educators, we have succeeded. If, by implementing these suggestions drawn from the data of the writers, students also become career writers, then we should consider it a bonus.

Recommendations for Further Research

The data for this study was reviewed to respond to the question, What do writers say about writing that may have implications for educators? This study identified issues of interest for educators derived from the comments of seventeen writers on writing. Further study is warranted for issues related to this study. First, the existing transcripted data from this study might be of value for three additional analyses:

1. Data could be reviewed to investigate themes related to what the writers said based on their specific genre of writing. For example, did the poets describe issues related to writing differently from the novelists? Do mystery writers have differing philosophies compared to the writers of teen novels?

2. Data could be reanalyzed based on gender, demography, race, or age. What did the female writers say compared to the male writers? How do seasoned writers view the writing process compared to novices?

3. One writer's comments could be fully analyzed in the context of his/her work and his/her life.

Second, additional questions are raised from this study that would warrant further study:

1. Identify and/or develop the teaching strategies that might be useful in implementing the suggested implications for educators.

2. Investigate what current school curriculums are doing to address the identified implications for educators

3. Look at what other groups of current writers say about writing, and compare their comments with the findings of this study. In such a study, perhaps some of the limitations related to the number of interviewers and variation of questions found in this study, could be reduced by having one interviewer ask the same questions to all the writers.

4. Present the identified list of implications for educators from this study to other writers and/or educators for their specific comment and reflection.

5. Through a longitudinal study, determine if students actually become writers after having a curriculum that fully implemented this study's recommendations

for educators. The findings from such a study might shed more light of whether the ability to write is inherent or learned.

Conclusion

This study has examined what seventeen contemporary writers say about writing that may have implications for educators. Their comments have been analyzed under five main thematic headings related to writing: How they started to write; how they learned to write; their philosophies on writing; their processes for writing; and their suggestions for the teaching/learning of writing.

Perhaps the most significant finding from this study is that there were differing beliefs among the writers on whether the ability to write is inherent or learned. From this, the best approach for educators might be to assume that in the general population, the talent in writing *is inherent in some and learned by others*; and, with some guidance, all students could develop as people who enjoy writing, and who write to express themselves in more creative and effective ways.

The other significant finding from the writers is that they began their experiences in writing for many different reasons, and they developed their abilities to write in their own unique and individual ways. For educators, the implication is to use a broad range of approaches and strategies in the teaching of writing in order to meet the needs of a variety of students. Also, educators should encourage individual and idiosyncratic expression and development in writing.

Primarily, this study serves to reinforce that, as educators of writing, it is our role to guide and encourage students to discover and develop their own voices in writing, and to experience the joy of writing in the process.

APPENDICES

DATA TRANSCRIPTION

William Deverell (thriller, mystery novels); video 26 min.

-Started writing novels to get away from the stress of the practice of law.
-Was a journalist and a lawyer before he started writing.

WD: All I ever wanted to do was write. (It was) a dream I had to be a writer. I stopped writing to develop my career as a lawyer to support my young family. I kick myself for not having written books earlier...but I would not have all those plots, all those characters.

I used "how-to" books to learn how to write a mystery...and what language to use. Now, I am breaking all the rules.

You cannot write a complex mystery, a who-done-it, without knowing what will happen in the end...you can go off in directions.

I've never really have had a writer's block. I scribble notes, pages and pages, (then write) on the computer. I do have a framework, a skeleton, with which to hang flesh. I start with a title, then characters...like in *Kill all the Lawyers*. I pull characters out of real life. To use characters drawn from people you know in real life is "writer's revenge."

I: Re: The Narrator and Voice: Is it you or a selected part of you? How do you arrive at it?

WD: It changes from third person, first person, and someone dictating into a tape recorder.

I have always found bad people fascinating and interesting. When I write, I like my bad characters.

I: Do you think of the potential to be a movie when you write?

WD: No, I think "book"--I think "reader" when I write. Although I visualize the setting, and see where the characters come from, so I can put it on the printed page.

I: What do you dislike about writing? What is the hardest?

WD: Editing, cutting stuff away...a plot line I have mothered and played with. I enjoy creating characters, setting a scene, working a puzzle backwards.

Isabel Huggan (novels) 32 mins.

- When writers are together (like at the Writer's Festival), they talk about time management, and making/managing money. There is a strong feeling of support amongst writers.

IH: Successful writing is a combination of age, wisdom, and "God-given" talent--a gift for taking reality and reworking it. You need experience and skill in writing. Writing skills progress, and evolve, to combine several stories together.

I work my difficult personal life into my writing. On paper, writers have a chance to try life out.

Writers are control freaks. There is a certain amount of fear in writing the second book.

I'm a very slow writer--as I'm working the stories through, I go through draft after draft after draft, finding exactly the right components to put together, so stories start out looking one way, and then be rewritten and go another. I'd like to be swifter, but aren't given my technique and how I actually physically write.

I haven't been in one place, or had a life that has allowed me to do that.

Writing is the main thing I've been doing. It takes me a very long time until I find a quiet space to be imaginative.

Some writers can avoid stress by submerging themselves in their work. My private *real* life pervades into my consciousness, invades me, and it becomes hard to work.

I Silence, you haven't written for a long while?

IH Yes, I'm waiting for the second book. I tried to explain why I've haven't written for a while in a public essay. An excuse was that I was familiar with white, middle-class, Canadian perspective, and wrote about relationships. But this seemed shallow and meaningless when I was living in Nairobi, in the context around me. It took me time to realize that my voice, and what I had to say, was valuable. I needed to be down to come up. What I have come to understand is that, to write about what I write about is what I've been given.

- Taught writing.

IH I didn't know where stories were going until after I started. For example, I felt tension between characters and suspected an affair. There is spooky, magic in writing. I need a private space in which that magic takes place.

I have a keen sense of smell. I write about it all the time. Smell is very important to me

I Did you always know you'd be a writer?

IH I didn't know it would be my full career. I didn't dare dream exactly that. It was a secret ambition. I explained in an essay, *"How I got started and why I can't stop,"* my love for books as my love for objects. As a kid, I collected rocks, and thought that they all had stories to tell. I loved the idea, myself, of making something that told a story.

From a very early age, I was verbal. Words mattered. I love the sounds of them.

I came to the act of writing from all different points of view. The visual, I love to draw. That was the part of the story-telling me that I had. I love music. I love the sounds of words. I started out by writing poetry more than stories. I was encouraged in high school. There were two or three teachers who influenced my life, who said I was good at it. In university, I studied English and Philosophy--intellectual pretensions. As my life worked out, I was not meant to be an academic. But it did clear my brain, and during those years, I wrote wrenching poetry, wore black, and suffered immensely.

It was not until my late 20's, early 30's, that I had the *instinct* to tell full stories, not fragmented poetry. I like stories with more meaning to them.

I· Why write a story in the first person?

IH I believe a story if told as if I was there. You can believe it more. It gives it authenticity, from inside the character, to get the language right, to listen to the voice of the character. There is a danger in doing this. When I leave my computer and desk, I feel like I'm the character I've been writing for hours

I like to try new voices for myself

Cecilia King (Artist, children's books), 28 mins.

- Grew up on a farm and had an "ideal" childhood in Quebec. Went to school in Vancouver, and obtained a degree in fine arts from Emily Carr. Her specialty is in "paper engineering," making pop-up books

 She taught book-binding art courses, and wanted to make a book to show her students the finished product. Her first was *"Ancient Wonders"* in 1990, but she had no expectations to be published. A friend took her book to a publisher. She makes one book a year

CK I think in three dimensions. I wanted to try a 3-D book, using a paper medium. I started without a text to go with them

I'm by nature very curious, and love research, and reading about history, and finding little known facts

I: Do you write first, or create the pop-up? How do you approach a book?

CK: I send lists of ideas to the publisher. I do initial research of the subject, imagine how the pop-up will look, make a prototype, and decide how much information to include in the book.

I didn't think/dream of myself as a writer, but more as an artist, painter, sculpturer. I did essay writing as a teenager. I enjoy it, but writing is more difficult than visuals, more serious. It squeezes the creativity out, by editing and narrowing information down. It's an exercise in focus. The format of the books limits the writing to 300-350 words, so I have to select the most meaningful words.

I do dozens and dozens of drawings for each page of the book. It's called *paper engineering*, where you need an engineering understanding of fold points and lines. I taught myself how to do it. It needs a lot of planning and drafting.

I work at home in a studio with plenty of table surfaces. I'm a night owl, I work all night long. I do not use a computer. I paint a lot. I research at the library.

I: How do you get into a creative mode?

CK: I lie down, sleep, daydream. I imagine using paper with my eyes closed. I think in 3-D. I am a curious person by nature, and I want to discover things.

Mordecai Richler (fiction/non-fiction novels), 28 mins.

-As a teenager, he was deeply involved in labour Zionist movements, then drifted away and went to college and Paris. Larger worlds opened for him and he was exposed to the "greats," i.e. Yeats, etc.

- One grandfather was a writer, scholar, rabbi, and was widely published. The other grandfather was uneducated and physically abusive.

I: Was writing something you were interested in all along?

MR: Not seriously until college, when I began reading Fitzgerald, Hemmingway, and Yeats, and I thought, "I'd really like to do that."

Fortunately, when you are young, you are cocksure to some extent, and don't think how difficult it is or how many casualties there'd be...just that you get a typewriter and get to work at it

Eventually, in my case, someone was foolish enough to publish my first novel. It was a very bad novel, but there's nothing quite as exhilarating to go by a bookshop--nobody realizes what a fraud you are, that your book is in there with "real" books. I was only 21, and I've suppressed that novel ever since. (Laughter)

It is easiest to write about a country, landscape, that you were a child in

I Any difference in writing nonfiction versus fiction?

MR: I put as much care into my nonfiction and I do fiction, in that it is all writing, and I rewrite as much and take as much trouble and care with nonfiction

I Was your family disappointed when you wanted to be a writer?

MR No, not really. My parents weren't terribly literate, or were readers. It was a huge shock when my novels started to appear.

I Three of your children are writers...?

MR I didn't encourage my children to be writers, but told them to find something they liked

I Are you their teacher?

MR No. I try to help them, but not influence them. They have their own style. They went into the "family business."

I Creative writing schools are popping out all over. Can writing be taught?

MR No, it can't be taught. I think if a young person wishes to become a writer, the worse place for them is a creative writing school. It is much more useful to study engineering or plumbing, or car manufacturing or bartending, or what have you. If you want to be a writer, read voraciously. But to have some "literary failure" [teacher] imposing himself on you in university is not a very good idea

I Do your books/novels have to gestate?

MR I haven't the kind of imagination to go from novel to novel. I prefer writing novels, but I obviously need a gap between them

Barry Lopez (novels), 36 mins

I: There are two kinds of ways of writing fables: the author already knows everything and gives us a lesson, or as the story unfolds?

BL: I have never written a story where I've wanted to make a point, and I've never known where a story is going to go when I begin it. That's not to say that as a writer you are entirely passive to the process of writing the story. An image might be accreted with words, emotion, textures, and a sentence will come to me and a second sentence, and it's like pulling a thread, and eventually, way down the thread, the image will be there from my memory. It's a pulling of the thread out of memory, and what's at the end of the thread, I don't know.

Writing is not an act of intellection. I don't sit down and say, "Now I will write about volume and duration," but I am following characters, whatever it is they are doing, I am just in their service in some sense.

I'm not interested in writing as if an authority. I tend to be the reader's companion, and I bring the characters outside. The writer is learning alongside the reader. The mystery of life is so profound, the writer's primary obligation is to create a pattern in which the mysteries of life be discerned and the writer is learning right along with the reader.

What is exciting to me about literature, is the communal dimension of it. I write out of a love of people and I have a sense of social responsibility, not in a political sense, but the certain knowledge that men and women struggle with the big issues. I try to create a story where people come away from reading it feeling hopeful.

I find the world wondrous. As a child, I spent a lot of time by myself. I was enthralled with landscape and elements. Landscape triggers emotions.

I use specific terminology for words, but general for emotions. I see human and non-human life as continuous integrated nature.

The voice of the narrator is the desire for an honest relationship with the reader. A crucial thing for me is literature is incomplete without the reader's imagination. For me, I speak as one writer (other writers may not think as I do, and if they did, we would have such a narrow world), but for me, because of my background, my mentors, my tutor, the question of the reader's place in the story is very important, and I want the story to work in such a way, that the reader feels not just welcome as an observer, but welcome as an imaginator.

The range of human imagination is so extraordinary that it is unattainable, and if the writer creates a pattern, like a composer does .then listens to the individual come to life in the pattern you have two different imaginations and realities. A reader brings the emotional, spiritual, chronology.

I The reader is the creator and the writer receives the story?

BL. Not quite. It is too falsely humble to call yourself a passive entity. The mere act of being a writer in our culture is an enormous act of ego--an act of assertion of self. Because I'm so in the abstract, that what I remind myself to pay attention to the fact that you've got something and that you bring your skills, language, storytelling, and then you give it to the reader and then, it is a social impulse.

People are generous to me as a writer, and my obligation to those people is to recognize that as a gift to say as well as I can what I saw. If you offer a pattern, the reader will see in the pattern more than what you knew. As a writer, I do create the pattern, but there isn't any point to it without a reader.

I Re: Process?

BL. In an unconscious way, much of the story is completed in my subconscious. So, when I sit down, I find the line of the story and follow it. I rework and rewrite word-by-word, but I don't change the story. In fiction, where I am going is less intentional.

When writing, I'm careful not to build a character on someone I know.

Fiction doesn't mean "didn't happen, not true." It means arriving at the authentic along a different path, an emotional truth. In nonfiction, the path is factual truth.

Giaconda Belli (poetry, novels), 42 mins.
(This transcription has been primarily paraphrased due to the writer's awkward use of English, and her style of speech)

- She started formally writing at 20, as a political tool against Somosa regime.

- As a child, she was encouraged to read. Her grandfather would bring her books that she loved. She had hepatitis as a child, and spent two months in bed reading. By 14, she had read all the works of Shakespeare.

- Her early works were erotic poetry, and when they were published, they created a huge scandal. She showed her poems to a poet, who took them to a publisher just one week after she had started writing them.

- She had been supported by significant Nicaraguan poets

- She wrote as her rebellion, against her reputation as a "sex symbol." Her work was about women as subject, not object, and women loved it. She wrote about what men have always been writing about. Her poetry talks about her body as a true metaphor.

-She is currently writing her third novel. She moved from poetry to novels because poetry couldn't express everything she wanted to say. She uses poetic metaphors in her writing.

-She enjoys the process of writing. She sits at the computer and sees, "like a theatre in my head," the story. "It is like typing dictation in my head."

- As a writer, she sees life from many different perspectives. She researches for novels. She takes her work with her for the ease of mobility.

- She doesn't use support groups for writers. She feels quite isolated, but travels to Nicaragua for her source of inspiration. She enjoys the tradition of poetry readings.

I Do you have any advice for young writers?

GB Live intensely, concentrate on life. Read a lot, it's the best thing a writer can do. Read the classics, to get a feel of literature. Have your eyes wide open to see, we are usually too busy to watch for subtle things. You need to be able to *feel*.

- She wants to write a collection of poetry about the maturity of women. It takes longer to "brew," and "I won't push myself." She wants to do this "as a message for women."

Peter Robinson (poetry, novels) 35 mins.

- As a child, he daydreamed and "goofed-off." He worked in an office as an apprentice, then took a course in business studies.

PR I was always interested in writing as long as I can remember, although I've gone through a number of different forms. At 16, I wrote poetry. In the last 10 years, more fiction.

I What interested you in writing? Was it what you read?

PR Most writers get stimulated by what they read. I was a very early reader, e.g. Sherlock Holmes, boys' adventures. Poetry came later when I was about 15-16 years old. I discovered the "Beats," so I read everything and imitated that style for the first couple of years. My first published book was a volume of poetry.

I Why switch from poetry to mystery writing, a whole other genre?

PR: It wasn't such a jump. I was tired of contemporary poetry; it seemed like chopped-up prose. My own poetry was more narrative with descriptive elements and story-telling. There wasn't a conscious intention to switch from poetry to crime fiction, but when I did, most of my poetic impulse went into the prose.

I: How did you get started on your first novel?

PR: I read allot. All the greats. Dozens and dozens of crime novels. I felt the challenge of writing as good a book as this, or probably could write a better book than this. Ultimately, the only way to test it was to try it.

Plot and puzzle are essential elements of detective fiction of course, but are the least interesting to me. The plot is mostly based on your writing style and characters, and who you are and what you do. The characters are the most interesting focus.

Plots are easy, characters and setting are hard and much more demanding. Readers are getting more demanding and setting higher standards. They don't fall for formula novels.

I: The process of writing: Are you disciplined? Do you sit down with a daily quota?

PR: I try to be disciplined. I don't go as far as to count my words everyday, but I think you have to. You need to get the momentum going. I don't want to be away from it. Somedays it doesn't go well. I'll try to put my 4-5 hours in and if I can't do that, I'm still thinking about it in some way.

I: Are there periods when it doesn't work at all? When you just can't find it?

PR: Even though I don't do an outline, I don't have a great sense of where it is going until I sit down and start writing.

I: You don't solve the crime before you start?

PR: No I just know who the victim is and the setting, but I don't always know who the killer is. I let that work out from the characters. I'd be bored. Writing for me is the process of exploration and discovery...the best ideas happen when I'm writing, not going away and thinking about it

- He teaches writing.

PR: I start with a victim and a very distinct setting. A sense of place comes with the victim. The victim is the most important character in the novel, from which everything stems. It's more interesting then who did it.

I: Do you read psychology to get inside characters minds?

PR: Some, for the purposes of research and jargon to use. Mostly from just watching and listening to people. For descriptions of landscape, I steal shamelessly certain techniques of other writers i.e. visually exciting descriptions. It allows me nostalgia. It is important for the readers to be given a strong sense of place.

I: You write about violent murders...?

PR: The results are violent. The reader comes in and sees the results. It is important to show that murder is not romantic, it's ugly and disturbing. It's not sanitized like Agatha Christie.

I: What happens after character and setting? What's next?

PR: The victim starts the book off--a dead body. Next is procedural forensic stuff, I need to get it right.

Readers like a series of books to be able to develop the main character. It's a new moral challenge with each book, (the main character) has learned something. It sometimes takes me by surprise. I wouldn't subscribe to the school that says that the character dictates everything he says and does, but I think a character had told me on occasion that he wouldn't do something. If I tried to make a character do something for the plot, they [sic] have turned to me and said they wouldn't do it, "You've got it wrong." You really have to listen.

I: For your next novel?

PR: I spend a couple of months waiting for ideas to come, or working them out.

Time is strange, your characters either don't age, or not at the same rate as you do

As a writer, I like to do different things. You need to take risks.

Monique Proulx (novels, translated into English from French), 38 mins.

(Has a very strong French accent and broken English, therefore transcription is awkward at times)

I: Did you always want to be a writer?

MP: Yes. I felt the power of words very young, when I just started to know how to put the letters after the other. I absolutely felt that it was maybe to put your hand on the world to be able to name things and make new associations. I felt it very, very young. But it is impossible to live by writing, and maybe it is, but actually I'm doing writing as my only job.

I: Did you start writing, as a discovery, as a creative joy -- did that send you into writing?

MP: Yes, but like everybody, I wrote poetry then small beginnings of novels that I never finished. Then I tried to work in a job that was absolutely boring--a writing job, an information agent, writing official things for institutions which is very far from real writing and I thought I was doomed to do that all my life. I stayed 3 years then, and that was the only job I ever had. After, I just began to write, but began for TV and film, and it worked.

I: So, that was closer to the kind of writing you really wanted to do? How did you get your first book published?

MP: In 1983, short stories worked pretty well. It was a long, long time working--it was building like a novel in a way. I've been told that sometimes. I write novels as if they were short stories--every part is complete with separate chapters. All are related in some way.

I: You've only published 3 books since 1983?

MP: I don't believe every writer carries 15 wonderful books inside him. I'm just trying to write only the good ones. I'm not that kind of writer who *has* to write anything or else he's going to die. I'm building books as if they were like houses, and it takes time, and time to go far from the other one because each one must represent where you are at the point when you're writing. It takes time--we're so in a hurry all the time. It takes time to write a book.

Novelists have to *feel* things, they don't have to live them. You don't need to die to write about death.

I work with a computer.

I: Re: Quebec politics. Literature comes out of political unsettledness. It's good for writers. Are you glad your books have been translated into English?

MP: Yes. I feel close to Canadian people. I feel respected as a writer in Toronto and Vancouver. We share the non- American way of life in North America. We share the same space.

I: When do we get your next book?

MP: The last one I wrote before this one will be translated next fall. I'm writing a short story now, but be patient.

I: Do you get the sense that writing in Quebec and in French restricts you to issues that are particular to Quebec?

MP: I hope not. That is absolutely not the point of writing. The only restriction is the distribution of the books and to be translated. When you write something, of course the language is the instrument, playing the instrument that builds the music, and building a world that has to do with the human condition, first of all. If a book is only because you talk about Quebec, it would be a very narrow book. The place does influence you, but someone could just say the characters are metaphors for Quebec people (some people want to see metaphors everywhere), but I didn't write it that way. For writing to be influenced by politics is to be lost when creating.

I like images when I write.

I: Did you always work at a computer?

MP: No, I was afraid, and I'm still afraid of machines. I don't really understand how it works. I know a few things. It goes too fast for me. Sometimes I'm just sitting and reflecting and looking for my words, and the screen just goes blank, to save power, and I think I'm going too slow. It's like it's saying, "Come on, come on, Monique." I hate it. It's always telling me I'm too slow.

I: Did you have any problem getting your first book published?

MP: I should have, Quebecers aren't fond of short stories. But I won a prize for the manuscript therefore the first publisher I approached was interested.

I: Have you stopped writing short stories?

MP: I still write short stories. I really love them. I think they are difficult to write even though people think a novel is the big thing for a writer. But to write a good short story, to write many short stories that you put together in the same book where you're building a structure, is very hard.

It's hard because you have to go straight to the point and at the same time, you have to have that music, and you don't have much time. You can't lose your time, or can't lose your way, or can't lose your path. You have to be so precise, so acute. It's a very good exercise for a writer.

Sometimes, I see if writers are very good by their short stories. Sometimes writers really don't want to write short stories, but short stories are so powerful.

Rose Scott; 39 mins

I: What do you get out of a writers' festival?

RS: The two really wonderful things are meeting other writers and I have met and made lifelong friends with many writers I've met at festivals. The second thing is meeting your readers and having an opportunity to see who likes your work and to find out why. It's an interesting exercise.

I: When you're writing, how much are you thinking about the reader? Is it for them or you?

RS: It's a complicated thing. One favourite writer told me you write to find out what you know, and in lots of ways, it's a dialogue, and in lots of ways it's an attempt to express something that is unclear to you. I've done it all my life in journals.

But it's also often, I write for one person in my life who I'm trying to explain things to. I used to write to my sister, to explain things to her. But quite apart from obviously trying to be as accurate, and interesting, and expressive as possible, I don't have an audience in mind at all.

It's a strange process. It sounds like I'm disregarding my audience, but I'm not. But the actual creative process has nothing to do with the people en masse "out there" for me. I write exactly how I want to. I'm very willful.

Every writer says that they write something that they'd be terrified to show their mother and I'm probably no exception.

Angela Carter says that mostly women writers write to be loved. And that's true too. It's to do with laying out the deepest treasures of your soul, of yourself, and saying, "Here they are"--and if people love them, then it's the most wonderful thing that you could do.

I: You write beautiful, sensual, lush things and then you write horrible things. I don't know when Rosie Scott knows about life in the city and junkies and I wonder how it comes about, to know about such things?

RS: It's a strange thing to me. My first book was like a manifestation, *"Glory Days,"* when I would often spend a day writing, then I'd say to my husband, "My God, I can't believe what's happening here." It was like things were coming from me that I didn't know, didn't realize I knew about. I had been described by critics as a method actor/writer, and I think that's true--that I became totally immersed in her life and in her mind. And as a character, I loved her. I love all my characters no matter how ghastly. I followed her and went with her. I used to be in social work, and traveled, and have been interested in people who live on the edge. They've inspired me the most. They have their own agenda and separate lives from the mainstream.

In the end, it's an active imagination. It's an act of intense empathy where you become so immersed you become like an act of immersion. I've had very funny comments. *Glory Days* is about a very big woman, and people who read it came up to me and said, "I

thought you'd be bigger," or "Are you a junkie?" Actually, I'm a very boring housewife…but I find the life fascinating that taking drugs forces you to lead.

I: Does anything in your life obsess you?

RS: No, I'm not an addictive person, although I'm pretty obsessed about writing but it's not the same thing. I have a whole period of darkness in my life when I was a young child and spent a lot of time in hospital for years off and on. I was in a lot of pain and off on my own, and I suspect a lot comes from that period in my life. I can't remember any of it, but I suspect I became super aware of other people and very aware of processes. I do think that has something to do with it.

I: Re. Cultural appropriation in writing.

RS: I think a writer can write about anything or anyone, and I have. I've written through a 17 year old boy, and a Maori street kid. I believe if you do it with total accuracy and compassion, if you do it in a really pure and direct way, I think it's okay. But you have to be careful, you're on a real borderline there. So when you take it on you have to be aware of that.

I often have an image of something when I write. I don't think about writing metaphorically. I'm never interested in writing politically correctly, e.g. I like to write about fat women. I love the look of big women and my characters use their size in a positive powerful way.

I: Do you find it hard or confounding to translate the sensations and smells of a place into your writing?

RS: Yes, of course it does. It takes a long time to write when I have it all in my head. I want to really exactly have it. I want to convey that. My books are full of smells. Smells are very important to me. It's a very sensual thing, the way people smell. Certain people smell the way the landscape smells, i.e. tropical, the way the trees and flowers and warm earth smells.

I: How did you become a writer?

RS: I never saw it as a career move, but I always wanted to write, always, always. I never thought I'd be published. I never thought of myself in those terms at all. I just wrote from a very early age, and my first novel, I wrote when I was 10. I was very independent, but I wrote and wrote.

For young writers I talk to, I suggest, "you must write." That's all. In my case, I wrote in a journal for the past 40 years, since I was 7. The journal taught me how to express myself for myself. It made sense of my world for me through writing.

I also learned to develop my own voice. Every young writer has to do that too--it's a matter of finding your own voice and sticking to it. The best way to do it is to write for yourself in the beginning, so just to get into the habit of writing things that move you, or ideas. And also, a simple matter and most writers I know do this, is to carry a little notebook around, and when something strikes you -- you see something or someone says something, just scrawl it down. It might not even look as if it makes sense. But all of these I've used over and over again in my writing -- even just two lines.

An example is being very aware all the time, of listening and watching. A writer is often very voyeuristic. I listen to people sitting on buses (I shouldn't really admit to this).

Second thing, once you start sending your work off, not to despair about rejections, because every writer has a story of rejections and it's to do with: You have to persevere, be passionately committed, you have to do it because you love it. In the end, that's all that matters. Take everything else away, if you don't love writing, then there's no point to it. It has to be a really magical, important thing for you.

I. What books should a young writer read? What moved you as an adolescent?

RS: Anne Frank's Diary moved me immensely. Catherine Mansfield-- I learned the importance of absolute accuracy and purity of style.

The other thing you have to do as a writer is read and read and read.

I. What do you do when you are writing about something that you don't have knowledge of?

RS: I become so single-minded when I write, I follow a narrow area of expertise and I *feel* like I know it. Smell is a very jarring detail and you have to be absolutely accurate. You can't afford to make any basic mistakes.

Carmel Bird (novels, short stories), 41 mins.

- She uses poetic phrasing of verbal/oral speech; she likes to read aloud.

- When she was 6, she was taken to ballet dancing, but the teacher recommended elocution lessons because she enjoyed speaking poetry.

CB: So I took elocution lessons, and opened up something very wonderful for me. It taught me how to walk into a room, and how to breathe, to stand, and speak, and project. I had to read *Alice in Wonderland* aloud to the teacher once a week. I think from there, I've never not wanted to have lovely things to read to people aloud. In a modern world, one way is to fashion your own words, your own stories, and present them to people out loud.

I   When reading your book, I was compelled to read it aloud, the words are so delightful and delicious. When did you begin writing?

CB: As a child, I was always reading and writing. It was cold and dark in Tasmania, and there was no TV. I began to write seriously 15 years ago.

I was always conscious that I was going to be a writer, and then I got into the middle of my life, after being to university, being married and divorced, and I was a school teacher. I suddenly, and I can't tell you why this came to me, I thought, "Hey, I am meant to be a writer, and what I am doing about it?" So, I gave everything else up, like husbands and dogs.

I: You published your own first book?

CB: How that came about was that I was teaching writing to some adults and they were all busily writing their stories and I was busily writing mine. I hadn't had very much published at that time, and I was forever photocopying stuff (we didn't have computers in those days) and handing copies of my stories out, and I thought, "I'd really like to have these bound up in a volume." It was as simple as that. I asked a friend with a printing press to do 1000 copies, and then gave them all away, and now I buy them back from people. (Laughter)

I: You've written books about how to write and how to approach writing. *Dear Writer* is great because it's written in letter form so, as a teacher, it seems like you are speaking with the person reading the book and teaching different approaches to writing. What do you think are the elements that create a writer?

CB: Faith in the fact that you *are* a writer. Patience with yourself. Kindness to yourself. A great alertness to the world around you. If you are going to be a fiction writer, which is what I am, you must be always listening, and looking, and processing mentally, or some writers take it down in a notebook, the world that is coming to you. You also have to be able to put up with solitude, because writing is a solitary occupation and it's a long haul. You must spend many hours by yourself at your word processor, or whatever you write on.

Often people say to me, "I don't think writing can be taught." In a sense, the *talent* can't be taught, but many aspects of writing I do believe, can be taught. Our whole education system is predicated on the idea that some sort of writing can be taught, so there is no reason why fiction writing, and poetry writing can't be part of a curriculum. You are not going to teach talent, you are not going to do anything with talent except release it, let it be, give it permission, and nourish it. All these things are part of teaching.

I   And also how to hear and listen to something striking your heart...?

CB. Yes.

I: Things that touched your heart as a child that you wrote about years later moved you so deeply...

CB: Heart as a writer must be the first thing. First of all, you must have the heart to be touched by what is going on in the world around you and what is happening to you.

I: You've talked about reading, and the "shift"--what happens when you're writing and then something magical happens...?

CB: ...And you move into a different dimension. Now that sounds grand and religious, and in a sense it is, but it's also a very small thing that happens when you've had this heart and this attention to the world, and to your own life, and your won responses, you've had the courage to start writing it down. And then you write and write, and then there is a moment when this reality disappears and you are in the reality of the fiction--a moment of shift. It's like the magic eye pictures. You stare at the blob in the pictures until one moment when everything starts to shift and a new dimension is there for as long as you like until you look away.

In writing fiction, you can hang in that dimension for hours and hours and hours and it is so exciting. I write in metaphors for boundaries of separate realities by using windows and doors and the doorstep as the place you cross over.

I: An imagination comes out the of shift?

CB: Human beings have that "door" in the head. A very complex business, but a great gift to human beings.

I: When you teach, what is the first thing you tell someone who comes to you wanting to write?

CB: Depends on how they come to me. Some want me to be a mentor for them, and work will be sent to me--I only want to read fiction. When they're really young, they usually want to write poetry. What happens next, depends on what is sent.

If I have a new class, I firstly give the class an exercise in focusing. Many people come saying they have had such a great life and could write a book, but haven't got the time and don't know where to start. Those two statements have got a lot of meaning in them. So I say, "You're in this room and want to write, so you've go this half hour -- that's time to write, and now we have to find what you're going to write about. Of all the experiences you've ever had, how on earth are you going to choose one?" So instead of wasting time trying to decide, I will make it easy and I pick out a picture and get them to describe it in words. I get them to narrow and narrow it down to look at one thing. I don't want them to be "inspired" by the picture. I'm not interested in reading what they write.

I next get them to remember something powerful that they remember from when they were very young, such as a very frightening, sad, or embarrassing experience--these are three very powerful emotions from early childhood that will link them to themselves. I try to get them to touch themselves and write a very short autobiographical piece and can go from there.

I Why are you so fascinated with death in your writing?

CB I don't know. Maybe everyone is, but some are less afraid to express it. Any ending of any story is a description of death -- all the characters, plot, etc. are dead.

I You use icons in your writing. Is there a reason?

CB I'm very visual and very physical and I love collecting objects and jewelry. I love decoration and it comes out in my writing. I sometimes have to be careful not to overwork an icon so that it becomes too easy.

As a writer, I'm very interested at where things "break down" in life. I want to examine these especially because a writer is interested in people. When people ask me what I write about, I never know what to say, so I answer, "sex and death," and it shuts them up. But it is the breakdown between generations and men and women. We usually tell stories to keep death and darkness out, i.e. "Fairytelling."

If every writer has a gimmick, I don't know what mine is.

Robin Blaser (poetry), 85 mins

- As a child, he felt like a "guest" and was thought of as "odd" by his family. He was told and read stories and took music lessons. His mother and grandmother protected him from the cruelty of others. He had always liked to write things as a child, and his poems were published in the local paper. In high school, he wrote plays and acted and danced.

- He was driven to leave his small town to get to the sea. He had read sea stories and had dreamed about the sea. He read Hawthorne and wanted to go to the same college.

- In university, he read 20th century poetry with groups of other poets, because such modern poetry wasn't yet allowed in courses at university. He wanted to write about current issues central to people which was somewhat "counter-culture" at that time.

- He worked as a librarian at Harvard.

I: What is a poem? How do you write one?

RB: In my own sense, as I learned to read early, is that it is "thinking," a thinking, desire for permanence. It's an ongoing process, like imagery. I go "image hunting" on the street. I walk around the city and listen. I'm a terrible eavesdropper.

Oral rhythm has a vitality, and I hear it. The body hears it, the beat that draws before any meaning. I see an image, then hear a rhythm. Voices may or may not come and go.

Authors are like friends--they are around me all the time.

Poetry is a creative process, you bring your own rhythm. It is not a receptive process. You have responsibility for beautiful, careful and skillful dissonance.

I: What is the difference between a good versus mediocre poem?

RB: A good poem has particularity, including voices. It has specificity and is accountable for the rhythmic working of the language. It takes responsibility for an extraordinary and rhythmic draw. The reader/writer is taken somewhere. It is honest--the writer has to show himself.

Poems change when you read them over and over. I want to join in companionship with the readers. Poems trace a move and a discovery. Writers work with change, and we don't know where we are going to go, except that we are going someplace new. People can read and enjoy my poems without understanding the deeper meaning.

I: Is the enjoyment of reading harmed by people paraphrasing works?

RB: Poetry cannot be paraphrased; it is not thematic--the "clothesline approach" to courses about poetry. The reader should read the first time for the sheer pleasure and open up a range of energy, then take the energy to relook at the content.

I: What is your process for writing a poem? You get an image, then rhythm, then what?

RB: Then another voice comes in, one of my "friends"--someone else I've read. Another rhythm comes in, and I sit still, and let the energy start working. It's a very physical thing which uses a tremendous amount of physical energy in the way in which the words are actually pulling the "gut" out. The poem always has a "gut" to it; the play of sounds needs to work. I revise very carefully, but not always, sometimes the work just pours out. Re: editing, if I'm dissatisfied, I reattach in the rhythm. I take other thoughts and works. The act of the writing is part of the poem. You can't edit too much.

I keep notes in a notebook and something will set me off writing.

I spend a lot of time with music. I'm fascinated by the structure, not to words to settle the meaning, but the structure in process -- like my poems, I want to be passionate.

I wander the city. I love listening to people. I take buses and eavesdrop to what people talk about--things I'll never know from my life. I sit and watch children being happy and I envy the childhood of present day children.

AUTHORS USED FOR PILOT STUDY:
Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet (Children's Picture Books) 29 mins.

I: How/why did you start writing?

JBC: I was from the city and went to live on a prairie farm. I looked for books on farm life but couldn't find any. I made up a scrapbook using pictures cut out from farming magazines for my sons about farming. Eventually, I got the idea of doing a prairie alphabet using the work of a prairie artist.

In school, no one said we could grow up to write. In university, I was exposed to Canadian authors. I wasn't a great reader as a child, not until Grade 10 when I became a Leon Uris fan. I became a nurse, and I am still nursing.

The hard part is finding the right publisher. My writing has changed since 1980. I am a member of a writer's group.

I write from a picture in my mind. My writing takes place in my mind. The ideas won't leave me alone. I feel I have to do this.

I: What advice would you have for young writers?

JBC: Write about what you know and understand. Write about their life and use their point of view.

Maeve Binchy (fiction novels) 44 mins.

I: How do you get your ideas for your stories?

MB: I eavesdrop on others' conversation. I like to sit on the bus and listen to what people are talking about. I use everyday foibles in my writing -- human problems. I write the way I speak--no punctuation, fast. I run at it like a bullet. My first draft might be 50 pages a week. I don't check things at first.

I: How did you start your career in writing?

MB: When I was a young teacher, I left Ireland to teach in Israel. I wrote my friends long descriptive letters while I was away. They sent copies to the local newspaper which were published. When I returned from Israel, I was encouraged to write professionally. I didn't have any creative urge. I wrote a piece of fancy prose, and tried to impress people by using large words. It didn't get published.

Then I was told to write about young girls which was something I could understand better. It was well-received, so I quit teaching and began to write full-time, mostly about ordinary lives. I met a writer who became my husband, and we talked allot about writing and expressing ourselves. Currently, I am also a columnist and journalist.

I: What advice do you have for new writers?

Young writers should start with self-confidence. They need to use their own words and their own experiences. Their own voice is important. They need to speak simply and directly. Your writing should feel like "comfortable shoes."

When I give lectures or workshops to young writers, I give them the following advice

> Write about what you know.
> Write how you speak.
> Write what you see--use your eyes as a camera.
> Use your ears as a taperecorder. Listen to others.
> Don't get it right--get it written. Finish the book.

Roch Carrier (French-Canadian novels) 27 mins.

I: When did you learn to tell stories?

RC: I grew up in a small town with no TV and bad radio reception. Talking was important. My father was a storyteller who read and travelled and then told his stories to the village group at the general store. I learned more from my father's stories about literature then I learned from university. My father had a strong sense of drama

I: How did you start writing?

RC: I started at age 11. I wrote plays trying to imitate little drama companies. I read a few short stories for kids, but not many. I was a regular kid, but I had something more—a lot of imagination. I could spend hours watching a grasshopper. I was always curious

I wrote a lot of poetry. My first published work was a book of poetry when I was 16 or 17, but it was such a thick manuscript, that I had to edit it down to 32 pages

My first stories were about my own small town

I: What techniques do you use when you are writing?

RC. I write like I've taken a snapshot. I write in long-hand. It takes time and time is part of the work. I touch the work as I write it. The computer is too fast.

I'm always a beginner when I write. With every new page I don't know what will happen. It is challenging and fascinating. I don't learn anything about writing. It is very mysterious. I don't use any tricks. It is a new adventure for me each time.

I don't really have a system. I can write anywhere. I can discipline myself to use my spare time.

I What advice do you have for young writers?

RC. Turn off the TV. Find a life in yourself. Have your own dream. Make up your own life. Have experiences and discover the world.

Successful writing is like playing the lottery--it just happens or not. Beginnings are always tough. Don't be discouraged. Rejections for publishing is good. It may show that good writers know that they are good and are more determined to try again. Mentorships are good.

I was a teacher and never worked with young writers except at workshops. I learned from them, maybe they didn't from me.

Kevin Major (Young adult fiction) 44 mins

I When did you think about being a writer?

KM In school I was exposed to writers. I did like to write, and in Grade 10 I was told that one day I'd write a book. I considered journalism at first. I went to university and studied pre-med. I left and travelled and then found myself in education and became a teacher.

I wrote on the side, then it took over. I no longer teach full time.

I Did what you read as a teenager influence your writing?

I went from reading children's books to adult books. I read the classics in school. It didn't really influence my writing although I enjoyed the classics.

I What did you write?

KM: I started with short stories and poetry. Some were published. My first novel was a boy's adventure novel. I wanted to write about young people for young people (as a teacher none of the books for kids were relevant). The story was rejected and I was told to write about real people in real situations. I based my next book, "Hold Fast," on characters in my local community and on what I knew which was more realistic. It was published and well-received, and 4 books later...

I: How should a writer write for teens?

KM: Remember what it feels like to be that age. Think of teens as people. I got involved in youth groups. Write about today's issues.

I use my imagination for slang words. I listen to kids, to get the teenage psyche.

I: How do you get your ideas for stories?

KM: I begin with an idea about a character or concept, and then develop the tension or problem. My writing style has changed to more contemporary work. I've always felt comfortable with what I've written.

I moved into historical fiction recently, away from realism, i.e. Indians in Newfoundland. I wrote the comic fantasy, "Eating Between the Lines" as an attempt to deal with censorship. I don't think in terms of a book's *marketplace*.

I: How do you craft your writing?

KM: I wrote in longhand in the beginning. Now I use the computer. It works for me. I like to edit as I go along

Books come about in different ways. Some I revise after the first draft is complete. Others I edit page by page or even paragraph by paragraph.

I discipline myself to sit down and write. I get irritable if I'm away from writing. Writing and creating fulfills some need. I have an urge to produce something. It is a pleasure to sit and create and bring people to life, to know what happens next.

The most satisfying part of writing is the conception of the whole book, of what to achieve. The hard part is making it work, in the literary sense. The worse part is the editing. I try to set a completed draft aside and come back to edit it in a couple of months. Obviously, this is a luxury without deadlines.

Caryl Phillips (Historical novels) 45 mins.

I: How did you start writing?

CP: I went back to the Caribbean as an adult and sought out members of my family that I had heard about. The stories I had been told by my parents were not the stories these people told. I felt it was fertile ground for a book.

I: How do you get your ideas?

CP: I get a germ of an idea, like the history of slavery. Then I research the historical and factual material.

I write in the first person. It is the voice of the main character that drives the story, although another character's voice can take over and alter the story.

You write to discover something, although you don't know what you're writing to discover. It's a tactile journey--you write and discover as you go. I have a loyalty to intuition, not to a plan. The voices determine the structure of the story. It is harder work to allow the book to go in different directions. It's like giving birth--I don't try to control it. I don't judge characters, I just try to understand them.

I: What writing skills do you use?

CP: I rely on patience. I get an idea, but I wait for the character to emerge and develop before I write.

It is questionable if writers have something to say everyday. If I haven't anything to say, I don't write. If I do have something to say, I become very disciplined and write so many pages per day. But I can't do this for too long--it gets boring. If the juices are flowing and I'm on the tail of a character or line of a plot, I do discipline myself to write and to take breaks.

Writers are obsessive. It's a strange process.

I like to scribble and write the first draft in longhand. It's the way I've always done it. I can control the speed which is at the rate I think. The computer screen disembodies the work from the writer, but a future novel may include transfer onto a disc.

After I have found the shape of a story in longhand (I write quite quickly), I prefer to rewrite something. I can't craft and invent at the same time. I invent first, then craft the work.

I: Can writing be taught?

CP: Elements of the craft can be pointed out, for example a critique of voice, choices. But it might not turn them into a writer. Writers will write anyway. Schools say they'll turn out writers--wrong. They can't produce writers.

I: How consciously do you set yourself as a technical writer?

CP: It's about competence and form. I am constantly trying new narrative strokes to get my stories across with more clarity.

Don Cameron (Journalist, technical books) 30 mins.

I: How did you start writing?

DC: I come from a story-telling community. I told stories and paid attention.

I wrote as a kid and always liked writing for English assignments. I wrote "bad" limericks about school, wrote a school newspaper, wrote the high-school annual, then articles, then novels, then radio dramas.

I never thought I'd be a writer. Writers were British and dead which was what we were exposed to in old colonial B.C. when I was growing up.

There are more writers now because people are meeting current writers.

I: What advice do you have for new writers?

DC: In school, expose students to current writers. As a kid, I read a lot--adventures, novels. My family were academics and supported reading and were committed to education. I got into the habit of reading.

I: What writing do you have planned for the future?

DC: There is an appetite of human beings for stories--"tell me a story." Writers are pushed along by the market for stories. I'm moving to video and computer presentations. Currently, my focus is less on print. There is a small minority interest in print, it's not mainstream.

I: How do you write?

DC: I use the computer and fax machine. It is easy to work anywhere.

When I write, I intersperse writing with doing something physical, like working on the boat. Writing and manual labour go well together. They energize each other.

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June 26, 1997

Lynn Kirkland-Harvey
Deliverd in-person

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Best regards,

Lynda Brown
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