

Volume 3 Number 1 (2009): 29-45

<http://www.infactispax.org/journal/>

**ON THE POWER(S) OF WRITING: WHAT WRITING STUDIES CAN
OFFER TO PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATORS**

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For many – if not most – peace and human rights educators, writing is an indispensable part of being a change agent. As an instrument for reflection, communication, and persuasion, writing is a daily site of encounter between one’s loftiest goals and the particulars of one’s own life. The encounter may take many forms: reports, applications, proposals, scholarly articles and books, blogs, e-mails, websites, social network entries – even the daily “to do” list with its hierarchy of values embedded in the order of jotted items. For educators working within formal settings, there are the additional genres that powerfully define the quality of a learning environment: the syllabus, the written assignment, the power point presentation and lecture notes, the comments on students’ written work. Each in its own way, these forms and genres sustain the inquiry and critical thinking needed to transform violent, unjust social orders into cultures of peace, human rights and dignity.

With this perspective in mind, I’d like to suggest a “widening of the conversation” in the fields of peace and human rights education, offering the work of writing scholars and researchers from the past forty years as resources that can enhance our roles as writers, educators, and agents of change. By way of personal disclosure, I’d like to mention that my own history as teacher of

writing and rhetoric has been deeply influenced by the profound developments in the field of writing studies over the past several decades. Ever since I faced my first freshman composition class as a teaching assistant in 1971, I knew I wanted to devote a good part of my career to helping people improve their writing and to find gratification in the difficult, rewarding processes of making meaning in written language. And I was fortunate to enter the profession at a time when new insights were emerging into the nature of the composing process and the broader contexts in which writing occurs.

But I don't wish to burden you with a bibliographic essay on the development of composition studies over the past forty years. Rather, my intent is to highlight certain findings and perspectives that have helped writers become more reflective, resourceful, and imaginative in composing texts. In particular, I'll touch on four areas that may be of greatest interest to fellow peace educators and students: the writing process; the concept of audience; the uses of "mixed" discourse and narrative; and two key concepts in literacy studies – the extracurriculum and literacy sponsorship.

From Writer's Block to "Writing as Becoming"

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, writing researchers began asking a new set of questions: not just "what makes writing good?" or "what makes writing good in this or that context?" but, "how do experienced and novice writers compose texts differently?" or, what kinds of cognitive problem-solving do writers bring to the composing and revising processes?" Other questions dealt with the origins and cures of writer's block, with the relationships between writing and learning, and with the effects of instructors' comments on students' written work.

New research methods were devised or adapted to explore writers' processes as they engaged in the act of composing. And the results of this result poured out in a stream of articles and books with titles like "Writing as a Mode of Learning," "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product," "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," and *Writer's Block: The Cognitive Dimension*. The research led to new classroom practices, not only in composition classes but across the curriculum: assigning papers in multiple drafts, not simply as final versions; encouraging students to talk about their composing processes and to see multi-draft writing as a good thing, not a sign of deficiency; and the use of various kinds of freewriting and journal writing.

These last two items – freewriting and journal writing – may perhaps be the most useful results of the process movement for peace educators, not only for our own work as writers but for our work with students. The technique of freewriting actually grew out of one man's struggle with writer's block. The case was so severe, in fact, that this particular man, Peter Elbow, dropped out of a PhD program in literature at Harvard in the mid-1950's because of it. His frustration and sense of failure led him on a lengthy quest to rediscover himself as a writer, and in the course of his personal journey he eventually became an influential author and teacher in the field of composition studies. One of the practices that Elbow developed, the technique of "freewriting," simply involves writing for a specified period without stopping and without

judging. I have used this technique for many years as a way of “getting going” as a writer, and I introduce it to all my students: in my writing classes, in my nonviolence studies classes, and in other courses I teach. I begin by distributing and reading aloud a brief excerpt from a freewrite that Elbow himself composed as a tool for developing an article for publication, and I include a part of this excerpt below to illustrate three concepts:

I've got to get going. How late can I get? I've got to get going. Where to start. I did have an idea for a structure. First pragmatic reasons and arguments: fw [freewriting] gets you going, gets you the main thing you need – words on the page – the end of a blank sheet – getting going. (It didn't seem to succeed in making me start on time, however.). Second. Second. What was it? Something medium – yes, now I remember, voice. It gets a voice into the language. Makes the language be alive, not dead. Makes it so that readers feel some energy or some life in the language. Careful writing is so often dead and horrible to read. What I like to say: I've never met a piece of freewriting I couldn't understand – and I've met LOTS of careful writing that I couldn't understand. Though understanding is not the same as life. But I care so much about both. But VOICE is the theoretical issue that's closest to my life. There's something so pleasing about reading words on a page where you hear a SOUND come up off the paper; where you sense there's someone HOME inside there – where you knock it and it gives off a solid sound; where you can hear a bit of the drama of the mind at work. (A crucial distinction: the difference between words that are the record of a mind having been at work – the summary of PAST action; vs. words that are the dramatization or enactment of a mind AT WORK [IN THE PRESENT]. Of course there's a trade-off: the reasons for using writing for a record of past activity is that it can be cleaned up and made neat – that the mind at work is not a pretty thing – messy and confusing; yet on the other hand there is an energy and drama that comes

[interruption; household duties for more than an hour].

where was I . . .¹

This selection illustrates well the idea of “letting judgment go:” of allowing oneself to write without concern for form or structure. It also illustrates the “situated” nature of writing: how Elbow's interruption by household chores calls attention to writing as a social practice that takes place in specific times and places. There is always a writer – and there is always a literal body – associated with the act of composing. But most important, the passage underscores a central finding of the process movement: the idea of writing as thinking, as discovery – not simply a process of transcribing pre-formed thought. If we are open to the possibility, writing

¹ Peter Elbow. “Freewriting and the Problem of Wheat and Tares,” in *Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing and Teaching Writing*, ed. Peter Elbow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 89.

even short texts (e-mails to colleagues and friends, letters of recommendation) can lead us to unexpected places – new ways of understanding experience, new ways of understanding ourselves. This is why Donald Murray, one of the most influential teachers in the process movement, declared, “we become what we write.”²

For peace educators, this insight into writing is crucial to the intense and challenging processes of peace education. As Betty Reardon has noted, these processes are *transformative*, not simply *formative*,³ and writing serves can serve as a critical tool on behalf of such change. In addition to assigning various kinds of essays and research papers, I ask my students to generate many kinds of informal writing: reading journals, in-class freewrites, and reflection entries on the formal writing they submit. In-class writing is particularly useful. Since the act of composing texts, unlike speaking, generates a verbal artifact, students have a means of reviewing and analyzing what they’ve written. Informal freewrites can serve as springboards for discussion at the beginning of a class and can help students reflect on their learning at the end of a class session. Sometimes, to stimulate or redirect a discussion midway, I’ll ask students to write (for their eyes only, of course) on such questions as “what do you understand now?” “Is there anything that still perplexes you? What is it, and why?”

This kind of writing supports highly active, critical learning and gives students a space to think through troubling and difficult concepts. When we have discussed the poetry of World War I, for example, freewriting has given a number of my students to grapple with the difficult conflict between the powerful anti-war vision of, say, Wilfred Owen, and the values they grew up as members of military families. And the power of in-class freewriting is that every student is engaged in it; every student is a significant contributor to a learning community.

Audience Addressed and Audience Invoked

As powerful as process pedagogy has been in opening up the generative and epistemic dimensions of writing, its focus has primarily been on the individual writer. Yet since writers operate in complex social environments, many other scholars began examining the relationships between writers and their environments. One of the most important concepts to emerge from this work – a concept with significant implications for peace and human rights education – concerns the question of audience.

Certainly audience has been a principal concern of rhetoricians for centuries. In his treatise *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle devoted extensive space to the kinds of values and emotional

² Donald M. Murray, “All Writing is Autobiography,” *College Composition and Communication* 42 (1991): 71.

³ Betty A. Reardon, “Human Rights Learning: Pedagogies and Politics of Peace” (paper presented as the annual “Leccion Magistral,” University of Puerto Rico, April 15, 2009): 3.

appeals that would move audiences, acknowledging that without sufficient knowledge of one's audience, no speaker can succeed in reaching and persuading his or her listeners. In the past few decades, the concept of audience has become more sophisticated, accounting for the complex rhetorical situations posed by *written*, as opposed to *oral*, communications. One of the most useful of these conceptions – and of particular value to peace educators – is the concept of “audience addressed/audience invoked” developed by contemporary rhetoricians Andrea Lunsford and Lise Ede.⁴

The term “audience addressed” refers to the reader one actually knows. An example would be the close friend or colleague to whom the writer sends a text message or e-mail. The communication is “audience-based” insofar as the writer knows this individual's interests and personal qualities – and doesn't really need to imagine this person. On the other hand, the term “audience invoked” refers to the person one doesn't know. Perhaps the writer is composing a text of some kind – a grant proposal, an application, an article – intended for an individual or group she has never met and knows little or nothing about. The task of “invoking” or imaginatively constructing this reader becomes a crucial rhetorical problem to solve, and the writer's skill in accomplishing this task is critical to her success in communicating.

What is of particular significance to peace educators is that Lunsford and Ede describe, then *go beyond*, the critical distinction between audience addressed and audience invoked. They note the complex, fluid, and dynamic relationship between these two elements as a rhetorical situation shifts and changes. To illustrate with a simple example from my own recent experience with the 2009 International Institute for Peace Education, I found that developing workshop materials for a presentation I was to make required my reliance on “audience invoked” insofar as I had never participated in such an international institute before and needed to envision who the possible participants in my workshop might be. I gradually constructed, or invoked, my imagined workshop participant from a variety of sources: communications with the IPE Education Director Janet Gerson and Global Coordinator Tony Jenkins, a careful reading of online participant bios from the preceding year's IPE, and my acquaintance in my home city of Los Angeles with an attorney and human rights activist working in the field of immigration law.

After returning home and beginning to reflect on the article I would write for *In Factis Pax*, I saw the rhetorical situation becoming more complex: more of a mixture of audience invoked and audience addressed. Some of my readers may well be my colleagues in IPE – perhaps some who participated in the writing workshop. The personal knowledge I gained of my colleagues from my workshop and from many other interactions throughout the week informed my writing – made it in many ways a process of *addressing* people I came to know, including Dale Snauwaert, the editor, whom I met at IPE. On the other hand, I found myself engaged in a new process of *invoking* a new and different reader: members of the editorial board for the journal, perhaps IPE participants from prior years, and, of course, the many peace educators around the world.

⁴ Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy,” *College Composition and Communication* 35 (1984).

By positing this shifting, fluid nature of audience, Ede and Lunsford remind us not only of the complexity of written communications in a digital, globalized world – but also the value of being resourceful, supple, and imaginative as our audiences vary and grow. I am reminded of both the nobility and the immensity of the goals associated with the Global Campaign for Peace Education (GCPE):

1. First, to build public awareness and political support for the introduction of peace education into all spheres of education, including non-formal education, in all schools throughout the world.
2. Second, to promote the education of all teachers to teach for peace.⁵

These goals clearly require extensive and complex forms of communication across many spheres of education and civil society – and written communications are very much a part of this process of transformation. Over the coming years and decades, peace educators will continue to *address* readers in discourse communities they are familiar with, and they will increasingly need to *invoke* readers – citizens, educators, officials – whom they have much less knowledge about. The concept of “audience address/audience invoked” can help us be more reflective and intentional in our written communications – and can thereby be empowering to us in many ways.

On the Power of Narrative

Over the past few decades, academic writing – particularly in the United States – has gradually opened up in the humanities and social sciences to incorporate a much wider spectrum of discourses: various genres, personal narratives, different dialects and languages, poetry. A number of factors have driven this transformation: the increasing cultural diversity of students and faculty, the privileging of new approaches in feminist discourse, and changing concepts of subjectivity in such fields as literary studies, writing studies, ethnography, and history. More and more academics have come to value the way that genres like narrative and poetry can illuminate personal experience and subjectivity in ways that abstract analytic prose cannot.

What is significant for peace educators is the academic affirmation of the great potential of alternative, or “mixed,” discourse. Narratives, for example, can be used effectively to illustrate and dramatize arguments – and also to re-frame and transform understandings. Let me illustrate the first value – the ability to dramatize an argument – with a brief narrative from Michael Nagler’s *The Search for a Nonviolent Future: A Promise of Peace for Ourselves, Our Families, and Our World*. Nagler concludes his book with an “Action Guide” which offers readers not only practical steps but also an argument that the “war system . . . is weak from its own internal contradictions,” and that “peace has friends everywhere . . .”⁶

⁵ Hague Appeal for Peace: Global Campaign for Peace Education, <http://www.haguepeace.org/index.php?action=pe>

⁶ Michael N. Nagler, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future: A Promise of Peace for Ourselves, Our Families, and Our World* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2004), 286.

A friend of mine was in Washington not long ago to lobby for the proposed Department of Peace (HR 1673). One evening she stepped into a hotel elevator to find four men in military garb, obviously there on a similar but opposite mission. They fell to talking, and the men explained what *they* were lobbying for – a new weapons system; what was she there for? When she told them brightly it was for a Department of Peace, one of the men, who had been silently staring at the floor the whole time, looked up and said, with much emotion, “Please hurry.”⁷

Though only a paragraph long, this narrative has all the elements of a story: a storyteller, a setting, characters, action, and a theme. It also works aesthetically with the element of surprise. But there is also another element that enriches and deepens Nagler’s argument: *identification*. As described by the influential 20th Century rhetorician Kenneth Burke, this element of identification is essential to the power of language in persuading others: “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his.”⁸ For Burke, identification is a crucial element that enables the workings of rhetoric, which he describes as “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.”⁹

Though the brevity of Nagler’s story precludes much development of character, there is still a sufficient brush stroke to evoke a personality, a uniformed man who pleads, “please hurry.” His presence and action in this short narrative speak far more eloquently on behalf of Nagler’s claim – i.e. that “peace has friends everywhere” – than extensive exposition, analysis, or recitation of data. This is one of the great powers that narrative affords us.

The Power to Frame and Re-Frame

But there is another, equally important value of narrative: its power to frame and re-framing our understandings of reality. We live worlds of narrative, from our personal stories to the familial, communal, and cultural narratives that help define our individual and collective identities – and that help to imbue our lives with meaning and purpose. Often it is the work of peace educators to re-interpret or re-frame old stories – or to weave new stories, new patterns of meaning, from unfolding experiences. Our skill in accomplishing these creative tasks – of narratizing and re-narratizing—is one of the most powerful transformative tools available to us, for it helps provide direction and understanding as we seek to find our way to a more just and peaceful world order.

Let me provide another example to illustrate this idea. When Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955, for violating the city’s segregation ordinance by refusing to give up her seat on a city bus, her cause led many African American citizens in the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 55.

⁹ Ibid., 43

city, most of them women, to initiate a bus boycott in protest. From the very beginning, the boycott proved highly effective in reducing ridership, and the organizers quickly came to a crossroads as to whether they would discontinue the boycott – i.e. having demonstrated their power – or continue it with the intention of overthrowing the ordinance altogether. They chose the latter course of action, creating a new organization – the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) – and electing a leader, a young pastor named Martin Luther King, Jr., as their spokesperson. King had been involved with the boycott but hadn't assumed any kind of civil rights leadership in the Montgomery community prior to his election as president of the MIA.

On December 5, 1955, he delivered a speech to the MIA and the broader community at a packed meeting in the Holt Street Church in Montgomery. In his speech, King recounted the story of Rosa Parks's solitary protest and her arrest – as well as the long history of indignities and injustices that African Americans had suffered on the city buses. Then he framed the narrative in the following way:

We are here this evening for serious business. We are here in a general sense because first and foremost we are American citizens and we are determined to apply our citizenship to the fullness of its meaning. We are here also because of our love for democracy, because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is the greatest form of government on earth . . .

You know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over the iron feet of oppression. There comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of humiliation, where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair. There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July, and left standing amid the piercing chill of an alpine November.

And we are not wrong. We are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to earth. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I want to say that in all of our actions we must stick together. Unity is the great need of the hour, and if we are united we can get many of the things that we not only desire but which we justly deserve. And don't let anybody frighten you. We are not afraid of what we are doing, because we are doing it within the law. There is never a time in our American democracy that we must ever think we're wrong when we protest. We reserve that right.

We, the disinherited of this land, we who have been oppressed so long, are tired of going through the long night of captivity. And now we are reaching out for the daybreak of freedom and justice and equality. May I say to you, my friends, as I come to a close . . . that we must keep . . . God in the forefront. Let us be Christian in all of our actions. But I want to tell you this evening that it is not enough for us to talk about love. Love is one of the pivotal points of the Christian faith. There is another side called justice.

Standing beside love is always justice and we are only using the tools of justice. Not only are we using the tools of persuasion but we've come to see that we've got to use the tools of coercion. Not only is this thing a process of education but it is also a process of legislation.

As we stand and sit here this evening and as we prepare ourselves for what lies ahead, let us go out with a grim and bold determination that we are going to stick together. We are going to work together. Right here in Montgomery, when the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say, "There lived a race of people, a black people, 'fleecy locks and black complexion,' a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. And thereby they injected a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization."¹⁰

A close look at this speech reveals the precise way in which King widens the scope of the narrative, enlarging the participants' sense of their role and purpose – and transforming the situation by imbuing it with new meaning. He identifies in physical terms with his audience: "*as we stand and sit here.*" But he also enlarges the identification to address the issue of fear head on. He speaks to a people against whom lynching and other forms of terrorism had been used for decades as a way of "keeping them in line." Now he reminds his listeners of deep affiliations that empower them from within: *we* are Americans, *we* are Christians, *we* are the disinherited claiming our dignity and rights as human beings.

King widens the perspective on the boycott itself, describing it as one of two primary instruments – i.e. coercion and persuasion – needed to effect change. And he redefines the nature of the change itself. He tells his listeners that the boycott is not only a matter of achieving justice; it is a necessary step in redeeming all of American society. The present moments – the mass meeting, the boycott itself – are now understood in relation to the promises of American history and biblical narrative – the prophecies of Amos, the teachings of Jesus. And, like a skillful cinematographer, King concludes his speech by scanning forward to the image of another generation: writers of a history that will acknowledge the historical, political, and moral significance of a moment in 1955. The sweeping, redemptive vision now provides meaning and direction to a new movement and a newly empowered people.

¹⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2001), 60-61.

Counter-Narrative and the Power of Fiction

But peace educators may not simply be needed to write new narratives for new movements. We may also find ourselves writing and interpreting the *counter-narratives* that help to lessen the grip of the powerful cultural stories that legitimate violence and injustice. These dominant stories, in many ways, constitute one of the greatest impediments to peace precisely because – *as stories* – they capture the imagination and vividly define reality for millions of people. The use of atomic weapons against Japan in 1945 is a case in point.

When President Harry S. Truman published a press release announcing the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, he didn't simply describe the nature of the bomb and his rationale for using an atomic weapon against a Japanese city. He also offered what historian Paul Dower has called a "heroic narrative."¹¹ This narrative celebrated a unique triumph of scientific collaboration:

But the greatest marvel is not the size of the enterprise, its secrecy, nor its cost, but the achievement of scientific brains in putting together infinitely complex pieces of knowledge held by many men in different fields of science into a workable plan. And hardly less marvelous has been the capacity of industry to design, and of labor to operate, the machines and methods to do things never done before so that the brain child of many minds came forth in physical shape and performed as it was supposed to do. Both science and industry worked under the direction of the United States Army, which achieved a unique success in managing so diverse a problem in the advancement of knowledge in an amazingly short time. It is doubtful if such another combination could be got together in the world. What has been done is the greatest achievement of organized science in history. It was done under high pressure and without failure.¹²

The narrative was a story of redemption. Truman told of triumph over perilous foes and of great restraint in the use of deadly force: "It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam."¹³ And it was a story of discovery and promise: the discovery of the "basic power of the universe" and of the promise to

¹¹ John W. Dower, "Three Narratives of Our Humanity," in *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, ed. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), 63-96.

¹² Harry S. Truman. "Statement of the President of the United States." Press Release by the White House, August 6, 1945. Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.
<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/index.php>

¹³ Ibid.

make the atomic energy “a powerful and forceful influence towards the maintenance of world peace.”¹⁴

The story embedded in the White House press release of August 6, 1945 has been the dominant narrative in American culture for almost sixty-five years. When the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum planned an exhibit marking the fiftieth anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, fierce opposition from veterans’ groups forced the museum to revise the exhibit substantially, deleting exhibits that showed the devastation wrought by the bomb. But most important – and most dangerous – this narrative has enabled a continuing discourse about the need for continued development of nuclear weapons and about the potential use of nuclear weapons as part of national strategic and military policy.

When, in my “War and Peace in Literature” class, I have my students read fiction about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I also introduce them to the work of historians who have challenged this dominant narrative. We examine evidence used by these historians: accounts showing that U.S. officials knew of the Japanese willingness to surrender prior to the dropping of the bomb – and other accounts lending weight to the argument that the Soviet entry into the war, not the dropping of the atomic bombs, proved to be the decisive factor in leading to the Japanese surrender. There is also the evidence pointing to President Truman’s determination to use the bombs as a way of ending the war prior to the Soviet entry. And we consider other perspectives, like President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s view that dropping the bomb “was completely unnecessary” and was not “mandatory as a measure to save American lives.”¹⁵

But it is the fiction, the stories of individual human beings, which helps students engage most critically and multi-dimensionally with counter-narratives. Using Kenzaburo Oe’s collection, *The Crazy Iris and Other Stories of the Atomic Aftermath*,¹⁶ I provide my students with opportunity of reading historical documents like Truman’s alongside works of fiction, many of them written by survivors of the atomic bomb explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One such survivor, Yoko Ota, was born in 1906 and lived through the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. After the war she continued writing about that experience until her death in 1963. One of her most powerful stories, “Fireflies,” recounts the experiences of a writer who survived the bombing and returns to Hiroshima seven years later.¹⁷ The writer describes a series of encounters. There is her half-sister, struggling to cope with the physical hardships of a city recovering from the bomb. There is a doctor who treats victims of the bomb. And there are two severely disfigured individuals, an older man and a young girl, who cope with their disfigurements and the social isolation it imposes upon them. The story alternates between the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change: 1953-1956: A Personal Account* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), 312-313.

¹⁶ Kenzaburo Oe, ed. *The Crazy Iris and Other Stories of the Atomic Aftermath* (New York: Grove Press, 1985).

¹⁷ Yoko Ota, “Fireflies,” *ibid.*, 85-111.

writer's accounts of these encounters and her own reflections about them. The story deals with injustice, with grief, and with the burden of bearing witness in the face of catastrophic destruction and loss.

When they read a story like "Fireflies," many of my students begin to see in personal terms the power of language to cover up or reveal, to dehumanize or rehumanize. Michael Nagler has observed that "the all-important issue in violence is dehumanization,"¹⁸ and in reading a story like Yoko Ota's, many of these students begin to consider the "heroic" narrative in Truman's press release as a narrative of erasure. They note the invisibility – in the official language – of the thousands of civilians who died instantly in the blast. And they begin to consider invisibility as an ultimate form of dehumanization. It is only through story – through the counter-narratives of creative writers – that they can see the face, hear the thoughts, and begin to understand the life of the Other. It is only through story that we can begin to assume responsibility for the enormous destructive powers we have unleashed upon the world.

What might these perspectives mean to us as peace as peace educators? Certainly, at one level, we can see writers like Yoko Ota as doing the work of peace education, seeking truth about the past and present, offering insights into our own potentials and capacities. But for those of us who don't write fiction, there are still ways of drawing on the power of imaginative literature. If we teach courses in any kinds of formal or informal settings, we can use works of imaginative literature alongside of, and in relation to, texts in philosophy, history, anthropology, political science, or economics. Our students will only benefit from the connections that can deepen their experience and their understanding. And whether we teach such courses or not, there is still value in seeking out such works and reading them ourselves: renewing our imaginative capacities to see, to understand, and to feel. Our own writing, after all, can become – if we let it – an unfolding reflection and expression of everything we experience and read.

New Directions: The Extracurriculum and Literacy Sponsorship

Up to this point I have focused on what might be called the *instrumental* and *transactional* functions of writing and reading in peace education. I have looked at ways in which knowledge of research on the composing process, on audience, and on mixed discourse and narrative can enhance one's effectiveness as a writer and peace educator. But there is another way of looking at literacy learning as itself a form of peace education.

To illustrate this alternative perspective, I turn again to a narrative – this time to a brief biographical sketch of a contemporary poet named Jimmy Santiago Baca. Born in 1952 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Baca was abandoned by his parents at the age of seven. Raised for a while by a grandmother and then in a series of detention centers, he worked at a variety of jobs before becoming a drug dealer – and getting arrested, and sentenced to a five-to-ten year prison sentence at the age of 21. In prison Baca began receiving correspondence from a man who wrote to inmates without families as part of a church program. The correspondence awakened a

¹⁸ Michael N. Nagler, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future: A Promise of Peace for Ourselves, Our Families, and Our World* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2004), 214.

hunger for literacy in Baca. He slowly taught himself to read and write and in the process discovered a gift for poetic expression. Writing and publishing poems in prison, he saw his own first collection, *Immigrants in Our Own Land*, published the year of his release. Baca went on to publish several more poetry collections, an award-winning autobiography (*A Place to Stand*), a book of short stories, and screenplay for the 1993 film, *Blood in, Blood Out*. Along the way, he discovered a talent for helping others develop their own gifts as writers.

Baca's experiences point to ways that transformative literacy is itself a form of peace education. As Baca explained in the prologue to his autobiography, "language gave me a way to keep the chaos of prison at bay and prevented it from devouring me. It was a resource that allowed me to confront and understand my past . . . and it opened a way toward the future that was based not on fear or bitterness or apathy but on compassionate involvement."¹⁹ Describing his own writing workshops, Baca explains that "my job is simply to keep the light inside [my students] burning. That's it. My job is to make sure they do not fall into despair. And I guess that's the answer to why I work with unwed mothers. I go to prisons. I work with homeless and gang kids, because their light's starting to go off, to dim, and I have to come in there and fire it up, and I do that with poetry, and I do that with commitment, and I do that with compassion."²⁰ Baca's work underscores Paulo Freire's arguments for pedagogies that help give people greater control over their own lives: "resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, over which men feel themselves to be in control."²¹

Baca's experiences are also significant for peace educators because they exemplify two crucial concepts in literacy learning: the idea of the extracurriculum and the concept of literacy sponsorship. In describing the former, writing studies scholar Anne Ruggles Gere explains that it refers to far more than "the extra-curricular activities" normally associated with schools and colleges: athletics, student government, literary magazines and student newspapers, and student clubs. Instead, the extracurriculum "extends beyond the academy to encompass the multiple contexts in which persons seek to improve their own writing; it includes more diversity in gender, race, and class among writers, and it avoids, as much as possible, a reenactment of professionalization in its narrative."²²

Baca's literacy learning in prison and the workshops he now conducts are examples – and by no means aberrant ones – of the extracurriculum at work. There are countless other examples: thousands of informal writing workshops taking place all over the United States and in other countries: workshops and gatherings not connected to any schools and colleges and existing entirely to support the writing of their participants. In her groundbreaking article,

¹⁹ Jimmy Santiago Baca, *A Place to Stand* (New York: Grove Press, 2002).

²⁰ Rob Baker, "Jimmy Santiago Baca: Poetry as Lifesaver," *The Council Chronicle*, National Council of Teachers of English, September, 2008, 24.

²¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1970), 73.

²² Anne Ruggles Gere, "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition," *College Composition and Communication* 45 (1994): 80.

“Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition,” Gere described the enormous variety of informal writing groups and workshops, from the Tenderloin Women’s Writing Workshop in an impoverished area of San Francisco to a writers’ group in a rural part of Iowa. In the United States, such groups have had long history of supporting and reaffirming people as writers and contributing members of their communities. Such groups have also played a significant, if heretofore unacknowledged, role in promoting human rights: women’s writing clubs, African American writing groups in Northern states working for abolition, and secret schools in the antebellum south in which slaves taught literacy to one another.

The second concept, that of literacy sponsorship, has been defined by writing scholar Deborah Brandt as referring to “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way.”²³ The man who corresponded with Jimmy Santiago Baca while the latter was in prison became a literacy sponsor to the young man, just as Baca, in turn, became a sponsor to the many individuals he helped in his writing workshops. In both cases the sponsorship enabled profound growth and transformation. In her influential article, “Sponsors of Literacy,” Brandt describes the many different kinds of sponsors that can play significant roles in people’s lives. These can include employers, family members, labor unions, and religious institutions, to name only a few. One can now also include the many kinds of groups and networks associated with the internet as literacy sponsors.

What is important about the extracurriculum and literacy sponsorship is the way that both remind us of the enormous personal, political, and economic powers of literacy – its potential for transforming human lives. In a world in which more than 800 million people are non-literate (over 60% of them women), it is critical for peace educators to recognize not only this transformative potential but also the way that literacy learning can be viewed in exclusive or inclusive terms – as a form of gate-keeping or as an avenue to self-determination and freedom. The work of scholars like Gere and Brandt has been important to writing specialists not only as research – helping them acknowledging heretofore “under-the-radar” phenomena – but also for encouraging literacy teachers to go “outside the walls” of formal learning, to valorize different approaches to literacy learning, and to form new and creative kinds of partnerships and initiatives.

In Closing: A Personal Note

At the outset of this article, I invoked the metaphor of conversation to suggest ways in which scholarship on writing, rhetoric, and composition can enrich the field of peace education. Certainly new publications on peace curricula, such as the seventh edition of *Peace, Justice, and*

²³ Deborah Brandt, “Sponsors of Literacy,” *College Composition and Communication* 49 (1998): 166.

Security Studies,²⁴ point to the growing number of disciplines adding to the fields of peace studies and peace education. Incorporating the research findings, theoretical perspectives, and other insights from writing studies will only extend this outward, inclusive trend in peace education.

But the powerful metaphor of conversation suggests the need for at least a two-way exchange – the notion that research, ideas, perspectives, and attitudes can flow in different directions. When I began teaching writing in 1971, the Vietnam War was still raging, and many undergraduate and graduate students – myself included – were actively involved in anti-war protests on our campuses. At the time, however, I had never heard of peace studies – there was no such program at my university – and I didn’t become familiar with such programs for at least another fifteen years. And it took another twenty years for peace education to become a significant part of my own professional life: as a teacher, as an advisor, and as a colleague involved in curriculum and program development.

Yet throughout this time, a conversation of sorts never ceased for me: sometimes with sympathetic colleagues in writing and literary studies, sometimes within my own heart. As I became more regularly and systematically involved in the work of peace education, I began considering not only how my professional background in writing and literature would be of use in this field – but also how the discoveries and insights of peace education might begin permeating the other work I do at my university. Slowly the fragmented view of education in which I had been socialized (my “peace studies work” over here, my “other teaching and committee work” over there) began to dissolve and be replaced by a more holistic vision of learning and teaching. As I continued to deepen my understandings of nonviolence, human dignity, positive peace, and inner peace, I saw more clearly how peace education occurs everywhere – not simply within classroom walls or within the temporal window of an office hour. The values underlying this holistic vision imbue every perception, every understanding, every judgment and decision, every human encounter. I came to understand that the great project of the GCPE – to introduce peace education “into all spheres of education” and to “promote the education of all teachers to teach for peace” – must begin within the self of every peace educator (or every potential educator).

Writing is a most powerful tool for carrying out this work: for promoting the reflection, the inner conversation, and the communication necessary to bring about change. Understanding writing – what it is, how it works, what its potentials are – can only serve to clarify the needed change and help empower the change agents striving to actualize it.

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²⁴ Timothy A. McElwee et al. *Peace, Justice, and Security Studies: A Curriculum Guide*, Seventh Edition (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009).

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