"THE ROAD TO KNOWLEDGE IS ALWAYS UNDER CONSTRUCTION": A LIFE HISTORY JOURNEY TO CONSTRUCTIVIST TEACHING

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education
in the Department of Curriculum Studies
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

by
Audrey Gray
August, 1995

The author claims copyright. Use shall not be made of the material contained herein without proper acknowledgement.
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the libraries of this university may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other use of material in this thesis, in whole or in part, should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of Curriculum Studies,
College of Education
28 Campus Drive
University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0X1
Abstract

This research explores the life journey of Pat Gray towards a constructivist approach to teaching. It looks at the influences, incidents, and insights that prompted him to make changes in his teaching, focuses on his growth and development of a constructivist approach, and explores the ways he has incorporated constructivist ideas and strategies into his teaching practices.

The research adapts a life history approach in which narratives based on semi-structured and unstructured interviews of Pat and other people who have been a part of Pat's professional life are used to tell Pat's story.

The research shows that, for Pat, change to a constructivist approach to teaching was developmental, occurred over time, and involved a paradigm shift. The research raises questions about teacher change and development that have implications for the way constructivist and transactional curricula are implemented.
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the guidance and support of the following people: my advisor, Dr. Sam Robinson, whose faith in me, and belief in my research, made this thesis possible; Dr. Alan Ryan, and Dr. Frank Van Hesteren for their assistance, support and valued suggestions; and Dr. V.J. Hajnal, who served as my external examiner.

I especially wish to thank my husband, Pat, for his encouragement, support, and patience throughout the process of my graduate studies, and for his collaborative assistance with my thesis.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: The Best Class I Have Not Taught</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: The Constructivist Practitioner</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: Mr. Polyester, Shakespeare's Dwarfish Thief</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: The Classroom Laboratory</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: Teaching Out of Plumb</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX: Welcome to High School English</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN: Reality One: MS</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER EIGHT: Never Ask a Question to Which You Already Know the Answer</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER NINE: Handing over the Reins</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TEN: Conclusion: Constructivism and Change: Questions and Possibilities</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: Ethics Contract</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: Consent Form</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

This research explores Pat Gray's journey as he acquired a constructivist approach to teaching, and from my position as researcher and spouse, I will narrate his story. I have adapted a life history approach (Goodson, 1992), and have based my research on narratives which I obtained through interviews of both Pat and people who have been a part of his professional life. My narrative begins and ends with a description and analysis of my recent observations in Pat's classroom where he employs primarily a constructivist approach to instruction. The ways in which Pat incorporates constructivist ideas and strategies into his teaching practices, and the development of the insights and knowledge that underlie his current practice, represent a process that is marked by a number of critical incidents and influences, and spans a journey of almost twenty years. Following a brief definition and discussion of constructivism as a philosophical base for teaching and learning, this process is explored and analyzed through a series of conversations and journal entries. Because Pat Gray is the focus of my research, it is necessary to introduce him to you.

Pat began his career in 1975 as an energetic and highly
successful direct instruction teacher. Before long, however, doubts about the effectiveness of his instruction caused him to question his methods, although he wasn't aware at this time that alternative teaching methods existed. Critical influences and incidents soon followed, along with the unimagined but much welcomed alternative teaching methods. Critical influences included a colleague, Jim Scott, who, like Pat, was an enthusiastic teacher who was skeptical of the effectiveness of direct instruction methods; the work of James Moffett; and significant encounters with influential others, among them a professor at the university named Dave Wilson. Other readings ensued, providing theory for an experimental and evolving constructivist practice that included negotiated curriculum, reader response, and whole language within the context of a student-centered and democratic classroom. The journey that is Pat's professional life story reveals a process of teacher change and teacher development, but to understand Pat's journey to constructivism, we need to first examine the idea of constructivism. Constructivism is a view of learning based on the belief that knowledge, rather than being an objective entity which can be simply rendered to others, is actually constructed by learners.
through an active and complex cognitive process of development; learners are the builders and creators of meaning and knowledge. Underlying this view is the further belief that ideas are not constant and are transformable. Drawing on the developmental work of Piaget, Fosnot (1989, pp. 19-21) defines constructivism by reference to four principles: knowledge consists of past constructions where our perceptions are interpreted through a logical framework formed by prior experiences; constructions occur as we adapt and alter our old concepts; learning is an organic process of invention rather than a mechanical accumulation of facts and associations; meaningful learning occurs through reflection and resolution of cognitive conflict. An appropriate teaching/learning situation based on this philosophy would consist of learner-centered, active instruction where the learner has experiences with hypothesizing and predicting, manipulating objects, posing questions, researching and investigating, imagining, and inventing while the teacher is a creative mediator in the process (Fosnot, 1989, pp. 20-21).

Employing the tenets of a life history approach established by Goodson (1992), I have taken a somewhat chronological
perspective on my research, and through the process of interviews and narrative, examined people and events in context to understand the professional, and in some cases personal, influences and perceptions that have informed Pat's practice and determined its direction. In this regard, I have described Pat's current teaching practice, and explored how his experiences, knowledge, and beliefs throughout his teaching career have shaped his constructivist practice. And to achieve a more complete perspective, I have included the perceptions of colleagues and students. Thus I embarked on a venture to explore the process of Pat's becoming a constructivist teacher, and to learn the source of his "personal practical knowledge".

Goodson (1992) submits that it is imperative that teachers' voices be sponsored in educational research to produce professional knowledge and that studying teachers' lives will provide valuable insights into new ways of restructuring and reforming schooling as an alternative to prescriptive change (pp.11-12). Butt, Raymond, McCue, and Yamagishi (1992) similarly suggest that a focus on the qualitative nature of teaching, such as in this research, is more likely than
prescriptive and technological methods and models traditionally used to introduce educational change and in teacher inservice. Butt et al. (1992) contend that prescriptive and technological change methods have had a limited effect on curriculum innovations in the classroom in attaining professional knowledge that is useful and appropriate to scholars and practitioners, the nature of whose specific situations "is uniquely personal, instinctive, intuitive, reflective and practical" (p. 52). Favouring the development of research approaches that "allow the teacher's knowledge of classroom realities to emerge" (p. 53), Butt et al. recommend that "we ask the teachers themselves what classroom change means for them, from their own perspective and criteria" (p. 53). This I have done, and in this way, Pat's "knowledge of classroom realities" is brought forth.

Similarly, Olson (1985, p. 229) suggests that rather than reforming through technical and management procedures, more effective change would occur with a greater teacher awareness of dilemmas teachers face in their practice and how they resolve them. Research based on this view of change seeks "to describe the nature of teacher thinking -- the nature of the structure of
their thoughts as it is brought to bear in practice" (Olson, 1985, p. 300). While it is assumed that teachers act rationally and solve problems effectively, they are not always conscious of how they do so. But, Olson (1985) contends, as teachers are asked to subject their practice to critical scrutiny, by, for example, the use of interview techniques such as stimulated recall to reflect on their practice, they become more aware of the methods they use for solving problems along with the consequences of those methods. This awareness would contribute to pedagogical change. While my research provides a means by which one teacher, Pat Gray, is able to reflect on his own practice, it may also prompt other teachers, who read about Pat's experiences, to reflect on their own practice and to make connections through their reading about Pat's experiences to their own teaching. My suggestion is supported by reader response theory which suggests that a text is meaningful to a reader in the way that a reader transacts with a text, that transaction being a function of the text and the reader's own unique experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990), providing a rationale for the use of narrative in educational research, suggest that "education
is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories" (p. 2). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) define narrative as "the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (p. 24). For them, curriculum takes on a narrative quality in that it comprises a person's life experiences, and is determined by a teacher's personal knowledge. In effect, "the kind of teacher we are reflects the kind of life that we lead" (p. 27), and life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations.

A qualitative, narrative approach also may have a significant impact on a reader because of the inherent power of story and our natural tendency towards the narrative. A comment by my advisor concerning the impact Pat's story has had on him exemplifies the power of story:

Your focusing on teacher story has made me look at the young people I worked with last term, like James, who, my guess is, is Pat, 1995. The story is just a different ray of light by which I can look at people with whom I'm in contact. I think I understand James better now because you have forced me to think about story and to think about Pat as a
story, and now I'm going to think about James as a story about to unfold.

For Rosen (no date), the impact of narrative is potentially profound because the disposition to narrative is a natural, perhaps universal, act of the mind: stories are "a product of the predisposition of the human mind to narratize experience and to transform it into findings which as social beings we may share and compare with those of others" (p. 12). Sharing and comparing with others gives narrative experience educative value, for as reader response theory suggests, in reading the stories of one teacher's experiences, we construct a meaning that has application to our own educational lives and teaching practices, which may have an impact on changing our own personal constructs about teaching. Goodman (1995) reports that in hearing another voice, we learn to hear our own, and that in bringing the stories and reflections of teachers into the world of public discourse, pedagogy will be increasingly shaped by theories constructed on the site where teaching-learning is actually happening. Thus the narration of Pat's story, often in Pat's own words, may have some impact on the way others
construct their own teaching stories.

The narrative experiences of a nontraditional teacher are particularly important to educational change since innovation and change feature largely in the daily practice of a nontraditional teacher. In the context of direct instruction historically being the dominant form of instruction, Pat's constructivist practices and classroom experimentation might seem unconventional to many teachers. But as a result of reading the story of a nontraditional teacher like Pat, teachers may develop an affinity towards him that can affect their own teaching practice in that they may be more apt to attempt such nontraditional practices themselves. Many novel and worthwhile ideas are discarded by teachers before they are ever attempted. An understanding of a nontraditional teacher's practice, the decisions upon which that practice is based, and the personal and professional experiences as that practice developed may prompt other teachers to be less reluctant to incorporate innovative ideas into their own practice. Additionally, telling a nontraditional teacher's story may create in the reader empathy for nontraditional teachers that may result in better relations with such nontraditional colleagues.
In this narrative study, I have used triangulated research methods to understand Pat's classroom practices as well as the impact of those practices on the wider school culture of students and colleagues. While I used loosely structured and unstructured interviewing as the predominant research method, other methods included participant observation in Pat's classroom, and document analysis of Pat's journal. In addition to extensive interviewing of Pat himself, I interviewed the following people who were close to Pat's professional life: three of Pat's students, Joe, Melissa, and Steven; three of his colleagues, Jim Scott, John MacIntyre, and Martin Wexler; a teacher intern, Don MacKenzie; one administrator, Thorvald Jacobson; and one professional associate, a university professor, Dave Wilson.

I selected colleagues and professional associates for participation in the study because of their professional association with Pat at a critical time in his career: two of the students were selected because of their verbal ability, and one student by chance opportunity. I have used pseudonyms for all informants, with the exception of Pat, and for most individuals mentioned by informants. Excerpted comments from the
interviews were edited for grammatical and lexical correctness or appropriateness, sentence completion, and brevity. LENGTHY comments were occasionally paraphrased. I have included excerpts from interviews at the beginnings of chapters to introduce the theme and tone of the chapter, and in the text of the thesis as supportive evidence in the analysis and discussion.

A number of researchers (Lather, 1986; Measor and Sikes, 1992; and Reinharz, 1979) discuss the issue of collaboration in research, supporting a higher level of participant involvement in the research process. While one may debate the extent to which the research process should be a collaborative activity, one might ask to what extent people have a right to be involved in decisions regarding information about themselves which they have agreed to provide to a researcher, or, conversely, to what extent researchers have a right to limit that participation.

My research was collaborative with Pat to the extent that he read every draft that I wrote, and provided suggestions for revisions (deletions, changes, additions, selection of journal entries) of information which he supplied in interviews and journals. These suggestions were always discussed by us, after which I considered them, and made the decision whether to
incorporate the suggested revisions into the text.

Goodson (1992) notes that a life history is a collaborative effort that examines a wide range of evidence as it situates a life story in its historical context, embracing both contextual and intercontextual analysis (p. 6). This thesis isn't a true life story in that it is not fully biographical; it focuses primarily on Pat's professional life as a teacher. It is, however, situated in a historical context in that it examines Pat's teaching career over the course of almost twenty years, and it does employ contextual and intercontextual analysis. It is also situated in the cultural context of the classroom, and of the school as a whole, allowing events and people to be examined in the context of this culture. To this end I have described Pat at work in his classroom, presented excerpts from his journal in which he discusses his own experiences in the classroom and in the larger school culture, and presented the comments of others in the school culture who learn and work with him -- students, teachers, and administrators. I have considered the individual contexts of my informants in the analysis, for example, viewing students' comments from their perspective as students and viewing the
comments of the administrator I interviewed from his position of administrator.

While the focus of this research is professional and concentrates on educational experiences, not delving very deeply into pre-teaching or personal experiences, those personal experiences that may have a critical bearing on Pat's professional experiences are included in the research and discussion, the most important being that of his illness. Pat has multiple sclerosis, and while the important emphasis of this research is on his journey to constructivist teaching, his MS may be a confounding factor in this journey, and so the presence of Pat's illness, and its intrusion in his work, is alluded to from time to time in this text. I return to a discussion of the effect that MS has had on his teaching in Chapter Seven.

The fact that my research subject, Pat, is my spouse was, at times, problematic, yet it also provided an opportunity to present a unique perspective on his life as a teacher. I struggled to keep in check my personal feelings for Pat when the evidence was critical of him, and to overcome my tendency to view the
situation from Pat's perspective. I worked hard to perceive both sides of his life story. Then in struggling to get beyond an involved personal perspective to an impartial research perspective, I became so concerned with avoiding personal bias towards Pat that I biased myself against him, stating my case too strongly for the other side, and I had to be prompted by my advisor to present a truthful research perspective. At the same time, as Pat's spouse, my understanding of him is more complete than it would be were I a researcher without this relationship, and this understanding allowed me to interpret and translate his story more faithfully. The ability to read nuance is very important in presenting a truthful narrative, and my understanding of Pat's nuances enabled me, in seeking a truthful story, to better know when to prompt for more information and when to curtail discussion.

Saskatchewan and other Canadian provinces are moving to transactional and constructivist teaching. This research deals with Pat Gray's development of a constructivist and transactional approach to teaching. Saskatchewan Education, Training, and
Employment, with the implementation of new curricula, is asking Saskatchewan teachers to make significant changes in the way they teach in just about every subject area, including English language arts, and Pat's story of constructivist development and change may have implications for the implementation process of new curricula and the way teachers go about making changes in their own teaching. Pat's narratized journey is a study in teacher change, growth, and development, and highlights aspects of the teacher development process of which Saskatchewan Education perhaps may need to be aware as they implement their new constructivist curricula, such as that teacher change is not so much an implementation as it is a process of development. This research, in its narration of a life history, provides another perspective on teacher development, an alternative to the conventional prescriptive model, one that recognizes the importance of the teacher's voice and the importance of who the teacher is, both of which Goodson (1992, pp. 234-235) cites as being critical in understanding teaching. Miller (1995) reports that teachers "must insert what they know into public discussion of education, and to do that they must begin from their own
histories" (p. 26). And so my research presents Pat's history, and, frequently in his own voice, Pat tells what he knows about teaching as he journeyed to a constructivist pedagogy.

Pat's story is told through the narratives of himself and selected colleagues and students whom I interviewed, and whom I will introduce to you. Jim Scott was a colleague at the first school at which Pat taught. For about seven years, he and Pat collaborated on experimenting with ideas in the classroom, and creating materials for classroom use; Martin Wexler was a colleague who was involved in a series of discussions and reflections with Pat and Jim about how to be a more effective teacher; John Maclntyre, a colleague and friend, was a source of knowledge for Pat in his early years of teaching, and although he is more traditional in his own approach, has supported Pat in whatever direction his teaching has led him. Thorvald Jacobson was an administrator for a time at all three schools at which Pat has worked, and so was able to see Pat's development as a teacher from the beginning to a few years from the present; Dave Wilson, a professor at the university, edited a textbook series
with which Pat was involved as a writer, and has been a mentor for Pat ever since, encouraging him, and providing him with ideas, professional validation, and theory for his practice; Don MacKenzie was a recent intern at the school where Pat currently teaches, and spent a considerable amount of time observing in Pat's classroom, and did some teaching in Pat's class; Melissa was a student in Pat's grade ten class at the time I interviewed her; Joe had just completed a semester in his grade twelve year with Pat when I interviewed him, and had also been a student in Pat's class when he was in grade nine; at the time I interviewed Steven, he had just completed his first year of university, and had been a student in Pat's enriched classes for a semester in each of his grade eleven and twelve years.

As I put the finishing touches on my thesis, I am prompted to think back to the many hours I spent with Pat at the Windows Cafe where we reflected on his career, pondering the changes he has undergone over the years. We had viewed almost four seasons through the expansive window of the restaurant, and had seen the Meewasin Park across the street repeatedly transformed by the
effects of time, images that changed with the season, even as Pat's constructivist approach to teaching evolved over time. I recall a small child I recently saw in the park confidently running ahead of her parents as they strolled across the grass, pleased with her new-found autonomy in her ability to run, and I recognized her as the toddler who, eight months ago when Pat and I had met at the Windows Cafe for our first interview, was unable to right herself on her skates on the Meewasin skating rink. She reminded me of Pat's journey to a constructivist approach to teaching. It was a developmental and constructivist process during which time Pat himself continually became something different, and could never go back to be what he was, no more than the small child could return to an earlier state when she struggled to walk.

I am prompted further to think about the current status of Pat's health and thus of his career. At the present time, his MS is in an exacerbated state, and he is agonizing over the decision of whether or not to return to the classroom this fall, just as English teachers in the province are being presented with a curriculum which intrinsically exemplifies Pat's lived experience
in the classroom. Who better than Pat to teach the new constructivist curriculum?

As I view in my mind the park through the window, it is winter once again, and my thoughts turn to our conversations at the Windows Cafe, and Pat's journey to constructivist teaching. I invite you to look through the window with me.
Chapter One

The Best Class I Have Not Taught

In the fall of 1994 I visited Pat's classroom where he was using constructivist strategies in his literature instruction programme. What follows is a description of what I observed and heard along with a discussion of Pat's constructivist teaching in the context of an enduring tradition of direct instruction.

The following comment by Don MacKenzie, a teacher intern in Pat's classroom, touches upon the essence of Pat as a teacher, and helps to explain the experience of Pat's classroom.

It wasn't a degree of difference. It's not like his class can be put on a continuum with others. It was a paradigm shift in which the basic understandings of the class were different. It was a whole different set of assumptions underlying the process.

Colourfully illustrated children's dictionaries, student-created serial postcards storying imaginary holiday adventures, and visual responses to poetry decorated the hallway leading into the classroom. In the classroom itself, an abundance of student work was displayed throughout the room. Posted on all available
bulletin board space was an uncommon and diverse array of written and visual student productions, sometimes several revised drafts of a written creation being exhibited to demonstrate the process involved in creating the product. In one corner of the ceiling was a compelling mobile, an imaginative and sensitive response to literature, as evidenced by the representation of characters, Laura, Amanda, Tom, and Jim. There they hung, delicately suspended in their own separate worlds, connected only by a thin filament of thread, the infrangible ties of family and past history. And at the back and center of the room was an imposing five foot tall oak tree! With some ordinary construction paper, marking pens, and an interesting and resourceful treatment of various other types of art materials, an inventive group of students had depicted an intriguing and fascinating response to *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The oak tree was, in fact, a museum to house important artifacts from the story.

"Hello, Mr. Gray," greeted a student as she entered the room.

"Hi, Mr. Gray," greeted another.

Mr. Gray was seated at his desk at the front of the room. A small motor scooter was parked beside his desk.

I hadn't been a guest in Pat Gray's classroom for many years,
and I was reminded of my first visit when Pat, a teacher newly transferred to the school where I taught, began teaching in the classroom next door to my own. The same kind of richness of student work and activity had greeted me at that time, and a warm image of an elementary classroom had been brought to mind. I remember the room was filled with red geraniums in terra cotta pots and contained round tables instead of the usual student desks, and although the first class of the day hadn't yet begun, the room already contained many configurations of grade nine students with an obvious sense of ownership of the classroom as they engaged themselves in an assortment of activities. One student busied herself watering the geraniums while two students, contorted faces pressed close to the aquarium glass, tried to engage the goldfish (Oscar and Syd Fishes, I was later informed) in a conversation. At a corner table, a huddled couple intently examined a *Life* magazine while next to them, a lively group of three or four students was occupied in transforming a rather large chunk of white bristol board into a lively looking collage. Mr. Gray himself was surrounded by a small group of laughing students involved in some discussion, and I remember I was impressed by the ease and comfort with which they
interacted with him, and the affection they seemed to have for him, it being only the second week in September and Pat being new in the school. It was obvious to me that people enjoyed living there!

And now, I had the opportunity to revisit Pat Gray in his classroom where he teaches grade ten and grade twelve English. This time, I wasn't the teacher next door. Eleven years had elapsed, and in the intervening time, Pat and I had gotten married, and since local school board policy discourages spouses teaching in the same building, we have worked at different schools ever since. But now, as a graduate student, my research took me back to Pat's classroom where the experience, once again, was memorable.

The first class, grade tens, arranged themselves in the groups in which they had been working the previous day. They were involved in a group translation into contemporary English of Julius Caesar with each of five groups translating a different act. Later the students would enact, in full costume, one scene of their choice from their contemporary constructions, with the remainder of the scenes to be presented in a readers' theatre. While the costumes for the enactment would be contemporary, the students
had to make decisions about the most appropriate costumes for each character based on their own interpretations of, and transactions with, Shakespeare's text. The exercise was, as Pat later told me, an experience from which they would come to an understanding of linguistic evolution and character development.

As I wandered from group to group, I encountered interesting and often entertaining discussions as students in the groups negotiated interpretations of Shakespearean discourse, and debated how particular characters might say their new constructions. In the meantime, Pat was visiting each group, providing assistance where necessary, and probing to elicit personal responses and to encourage depth in their discussions.

"Who's your favourite character in your act?"

"Cassius".

"Tell me about Cassius. Why do you like him?

And so the conversation and the class continued.

The grade twelves in the next class were involved in a study of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. They had earlier been asked to construct a reading log with one entry and response per chapter. This they did, and had turned them in. On this particular day, Pat had requested that the students form pairs and share
their reading logs with their partners. Their task was to help each other select their best entry and best response.

The next day, Pat confessed a flaw in his methodology. He informed me that he and the students had had a conversation about the tremendous amount of work involved in the construction of the reading logs in relation to the value of the marks received, and that after listening very carefully to the students because they had made valid comments, he decided to modify the assignment should he ever do it again.

After the students had made their selections, Pat had planned to initiate discussions based on the selected reading log entries. What happened, however, was altogether different. As he was circulating within groups, talking and listening to each, one student said that it would be really neat to do a debate on some of the major issues in *Huck Finn*. Pat was interested, and became fascinated as he listened to Joe, the fellow who made the suggestion, feeding him information about how the debate could be constructed.

"Why don't you find out how the rest of the class feels about a debate?" Pat suggested to Joe.

In response, Joe advanced to the front of the room, explained
his ideas to the class, and discovered an overwhelming support for a debate.

As I was not present for the ending of Joe's initiative, Pat related to me the events of the next two days' classes:

I thought, well, this is terrific. Let's go with the flow, and see what happens next. And so I made Joe the person in charge of the actual debate. About two days after we had the discussion on the debate, Joe realized that he was going to have to find quite a bit more about the whole concept of debate if he were going to lead it properly. Secondly, he discovered that the resolutions brought up by the class the day before might have to be revised, and so it was rather interesting this morning when Joe, after he had located information on debates, came into class, just wandered to the podium at the front of the room, and began talking to the students about what a debate was and what kind of debate we probably would find most appropriate for our purposes. The next thing he did was answer specific questions from the students about debate. Then he enlisted the help of another student to write each resolution that had been determined by the class the day before on the front board. Joe indicated that these resolutions would have to be revised because they didn't meet the qualities of resolutions which he had found in his research about debates, and so the entire class basically made suggestions, revisions, and edits. By the time the class was over, we had three smoothly worded resolutions, and that's the point at which we left it this morning. At almost the end of the class, Joe explained that the class was going to need the next class period in order to find evidence from the text to support their resolutions, and they probably would be able to debate the next day, probably for no longer than a period.

I was really, really pleased with what the class did
this morning. I think if there is a prime example of constructivism, it was surely that. I've used constructivist tactics with both classes, almost exclusively, since the beginning of the semester, but I don't think I'd found or had seen a better example than the one that I saw today. When the class was over I told them that this has probably been the best class I have not taught.

Research by Cuban (1993), Applebee (1993), Goodlad (1984), and others suggests that classroom practice is still dominated by direct instruction. In this context, Pat's form of instruction must seem unusual to many people, teachers and students alike. It seems that not very much has changed in high school classrooms in almost a century, a conclusion made evident by, for example, Cuban (1993), who, in his investigation into teaching practices from 1880 to 1990, used classroom arrangements, group instruction, classroom talk, student movement, and classroom activities as indicators of dominant instructional patterns. He found that, overall, teacher-centered instruction continues to dominate elementary and secondary classrooms, although some student-centered practices (diverse classroom groupings and more informality in instructional talk, student movement, and organization of space) are occurring but mostly in
elementary classrooms. These observations are virtually unchanged since a previous study by Cuban (1982) where he reports, after examining high schools since the beginning of the twentieth century, that in spite of the fact that teachers are presumably better trained in 1982 than they were in 1900, and that students know more than they did at the turn of the century, the evidence reveals that similar instructional approaches have endured. Cuban writes that "[t]he overall picture is striking in its uniformity: persistence of whole group instruction, teacher talk outdistancing student talk, question/answer format drawn largely from textbooks, and little student movement in academic classes" (p. 116).

Cuban's (1993) explanation for the slow development in teaching practices over the century is related to the "outer context of cultural beliefs about knowledge, teaching, and learning, and the inner context of school and classroom structures that all teachers learn to negotiate when they enter and stay in the classroom" (p. 273). He goes on to argue that as long as the schools' social role in the culture remains unchanged (to bolster the economy, to solve social problems, to select potentially academically successful students), and as long as schools remain
organized as they currently are (age-graded, hierarchical authority structure), teacher-centered instruction will remain pervasive and unchallenged.

Goodlad (1984) reported a similar situation after an extensive study of American schools. He observed that the prevailing teaching style was still a traditional one in which student behaviours were specified by teachers whose talk from the front of a room dominated while the students' role was primarily passive.

Meanwhile, in English language arts specifically, Emig (1983) charged that the teacher-centered presentation of composition was "pedagogically, developmentally, and politically an anachronism" (p. 95), and called for the provision of more opportunities for students to engage in reflexive writing, such as diaries and journals. She observed in a 1971 study that the "neurotic" practices of teachers whose reliance on conventional methodologies for teaching writing (topics, specifications, and completion dates determined solely by the teacher, and excessive concern about peripherals such as spelling, punctuation, and length) created essentially meaningless writing experiences for students.
In a more recent study, however, Applebee (1993) reports that "[w]hen teaching writing, teachers are [now] more likely to emphasize the development of students' meaning-making abilities. Even if not fully accepted, process-oriented approaches to writing instruction are at least widely understood" (p. 201). But Applebee informs us that while constructivist traditions have begun to provide a framework for the teaching of writing and reading, some aspects of teaching literature have remained constant. Applebee reports that enduring characteristics of literature instruction consist primarily of whole class discussion focussed on a body of major texts that get reconfigured around themes, genres, or chronology. Applebee submits that in common classroom practice, teachers' focus on students' meaning-making is likely to stop after an initial emphasis on developing motivation and interest. At that point, a focus on the text, with the attendant concern with common interpretations -- the 'right answers' of literary study -- comes to the fore. (p. 201)

It is possible to conclude with some assurance, I thought, that reform movements throughout this past century have had a minimal effect on high school classroom teaching practices: the progressive movement of the 1920's and 1930's; the attempts to improve instruction in the mid 1960's and the 1970's; the
implementation of various innovative instructional methodologies; the promotion of new philosophies and approaches such as student-centered teaching, reader response theory in language arts, and the writing process. In fact, most attempts at instructional change throughout the years have been largely resisted by high schools.

As I pondered Pat's unconventional pedagogy, I realized that against this unswerving compliance with tradition, Pat's nonconformity is a wonderfully puzzling phenomenon. My professional experience with Pat has taught me that throughout most of his teaching career, he has been nontraditional in his approach to teaching high school English language arts, pursuing change within a system that is sometimes slow to relinquish tradition. Continual experimentation with innovative educational methods has resulted in an evolving and progressive practice which, from my observations in Pat's classroom, from my discussions with Pat, and from my professional association with him, I can best describe, at the time of this writing, as postmodern -- constructivist, student-centered, integrated, and response-centered.

I tried to connect the concept of constructivism to my
experiences in Pat's classroom. Pat had said that he'd used constructivism with his classes all semester. But what exactly is constructivism, and how does it relate to classroom learning and to English language arts instruction? And do Pat's classes really exemplify constructivism as he had suggested? To answer these questions, and to understand what exactly Pat is doing and why, it is necessary to provide a theoretical discussion of constructivism.

Piaget (1977) contends that learning occurs through a process of active meaning construction, rather than through passive recipience -- through a process of self-regulating equilibration. Piaget explains that when we, as learners, encounter an experience or a situation that produces cognitive conflict or dissonance, a state of disequilibrium is created whereby we alter our thinking to restore equilibrium. We make sense of the new information by associating it with what we already know, by attempting to assimilate it into our existing knowledge. When we are unable to do this, we accommodate the new information to our old schema by restructuring our present knowledge at a higher conceptual level.

Comparable to Piaget's notion that we work from existing
personal schema is Kelly's theory of personal constructs. Kelly's theory, formulated in the 1950's, postulates that we look at the world through templates or constructs which we create, ways of construing the world. We then attempt to fit these patterns over the realities of which the world is composed, using these constructs to assist us in our efforts to predict, and thus control, the course of events. Further, Kelly posits that constructs embody subordinate and superordinate relationships, and that we seek to improve our constructs "by increasing our repertory, by altering them to provide a better fit, and by subsuming them with superordinate constructs or systems" (Kelly, 1991, p. 7). The point is that we create our own ways of seeing the world in which we live; the world does not create them for us (Kelly, 1991).

Applebee (1993) suggests that constructivists in all fields view knowledge as "an active construction built up by the individual acting within a social context that shapes and constrains that knowledge, but does not determine it in an absolute sense" (p. 199). Similarly, Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1993) inform us that learning in all subject areas, including science, mathematics, language, literacy, social studies, and
anything else, involves inventing and constructing ideas and systems.

And Fosnot (1989), arguing that a constructivist approach be adopted to facilitate the empowerment of both students and teachers, defines empowered learners as autonomous, inquisitive thinkers who question, investigate, and reason, and empowered teachers as reflective decision makers who view "learning as construction and teaching as a facilitating process to enhance and enrich development" (p. xi).

Based on these views, it would seem that classrooms need to be structured so that learners are immersed in experiences within which they may engage in meaning-making inquiry, action, imagination, invention, interaction, hypothesizing and personal reflection, all of which are experiences that are apt to evoke disequilibrium in the students with an attendant opportunity to construct new meanings. It would mean that we as teachers would need to recognize how people use their own experiences, prior knowledge and perceptions, as well as their physical and interpersonal environments to construct knowledge and meaning. Informed by Piaget, Doll (1989) envisions curriculum "as a multifaceted matrix to be explored" (p. 251):
In regard to daily lesson plans, the focus would be not on closure but on flexibility for alternative yet productive pathways. Lesson plans would be designed to provide just enough disequilibrium that students would develop their own alternatives and insights. Disequilibrium and reequilibration would be intentional components of the lesson plan. (p. 251)

I would venture to say that the students I observed in Pat's classroom during the visit I described earlier were actively engaged in imaginative and inventive meaning-making, in hypothesizing, and in personal reflections and constructions. Interactively involved, the grade ten's shared, discussed, and negotiated their own interpretations of Julius Caesar with assistance when requested but without imposition from their teacher of his own knowledge. Their process of understanding, of personal meaning-making, was further facilitated by Pat in the personal response exchanges he initiated with them ("Who's your favourite character in your act? Why do you like him?").

A quality that became more obvious to me when I reflected on the class after it was over than when I was immersed in it was the holism of the class, with all aspects of the language arts integrated as the students engaged in activities in preparation for their imaginative re-creation of Julius Caesar. Theory in
English education suggests that an integrated and holistic language arts programme creates favourable conditions for constructivist learning.

An integrated literature and language programme such as that explicated in seminal works by Moffett (1968a), Britton (1970), and Dixon (1975) provides a conducive environment for constructivist learning in language arts because it allows students, in their constructions of meanings, to draw on personal resources, skills, and knowledge from among interconnected language variables, and to transfer both prior and newly constructed skills and knowledge from one language medium to another, thereby aiding them in their meaning-making process. An integrated programme is meaning-centered rather than skills-based, and so processes of understanding and meaning-making are not impeded by an artificial segmentation of language variables. As DeLawter (1992) notes, because reading and writing are processes and not sets of skills, techniques which keep language whole and purposeful must be employed.

The central position of the student in a constructivist process was equally evident in the grade twelve class I visited and described earlier where students shared their personal
responses to the novel they read, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In this class Pat allowed the students to shape the direction of their study of the novel according to their own interests, relinquishing his own plans for the class to accommodate their interest in a debate of some major issues in the novel. By doing so, he empowered the students with his faith in their ability to be autonomous exemplifying Fosnot's definition of empowered learners and empowered teachers. As Doll (1989), would view Pat's class, the lesson was flexible, and allowed for an alternative and productive pathway.

This view of learning presents an alternative view of what is accepted as knowledge suggesting the notion of multiple constructions of reality rather than objective facts and absolutes (Applebee, 1993). In accord with Applebee, Fosnot (1989) asserts that we can never know the world in a "true", objective sense, separate from ourselves and our experiences. We can only know it through our logical framework, which transforms, organizes, and interprets our perceptions. Furthermore, this logic itself is constructed and evolves through development as we interact with our environment and try to make sense of our experiences. (p. 19)
Knowing the world "in a 'true', objective sense" is evocative of the way students are often expected to engage in the world of literature in secondary schools, and typifies the way Pat taught literature when he first began teaching. Focussing on the author's craft, the teacher provides students with a set of techniques to aid them in identifying the author's intention. Then, with concentration on the text, students are administered a series of comprehension questions to assist them in identifying the author's hidden meaning, as determined by the teacher or a literary critic, suggesting that there is only one truth rather than multiple constructions of the text, multiple interpretations, multiple realities. The teacher is perceived as an expert, who knows the answers to the questions she or he has constructed, while the students are asked to identify their teacher's constructions rather than to construct their own.

In contrast to this traditional view of literature instruction, I observed in Pat's classroom a personal response approach to literature, an approach first articulated by Rosenblatt (1938), and expounded by many others including Purves, Rogers, and Soter (1990) and Langer (1992).

Rosenblatt (1978) argues for a personal and constructive
response to literature whereby students own experiences and perceptions are brought to the reading task so that in transacting with that text, the realities and interpretations which the students construct are their own. In Rosenblatt's theory of personal response, each reader, bringing to the reading task a personal and unique set of perspectives, attitudes, and, in general, different life experiences, "transacts" with a work of literature creating a new and unique "text' with each reading.

From a constructivist perspective, where the student is perceived as meaning-maker, teacher-centered, text-centered and skills-oriented approaches to literature instruction are replaced by more student-centered approaches where processes of understanding are emphasized. In a discussion of language arts instruction based on constructivist theories of language use and language development, Applebee (1993) suggests that

...[r]ather than treating the subject of English as subject matter to be memorized, a constructivist approach treats it as a body of knowledge, skills, and strategies that must be constructed by the learner out of experiences and interactions within the social context of the classroom. In such a tradition, understanding a work of literature does not mean memorizing someone else's interpretations, but constructing and elaborating upon ones' own within the constraints of the text and the conventions of the classroom discourse community. (p. 200)
I believe this kind of personal construction of meaning was, in fact, occurring in Pat's classroom where the students shared their own interpretations of the *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and constructed, in small group communities, their own interpretations of *Julius Caesar*. Having reconstructed and having reflected upon my experiences of Pat's classes in an attempt to find both disconfirming and confirming evidence, I would say that Pat's approach to instruction was, as he had suggested, constructivist.

I tried to place into perspective what I had observed and thought about with respect to my visit to Pat's classroom, his constructivist teaching, and the predominance of more traditional forms of instruction in most other classrooms. If high schools are as resistant to change as the work of Cuban, Emig, and Applebee suggests, then the constructivist strategies Pat uses are quite unconventional, and in the context of instructional constancy, it is intriguing to consider what motivates and sustains Pat to teach in an unconventional manner. Equally interesting is the question of what it is like for Pat to be a nontraditional, constructivist teacher in a cultural environment
dominated by direct instruction. What, in effect, is the story of Pat Gray's development as a constructivist teacher?

While Pat's constructivist strategies are supported by a theory of learning highly respected in educational research, developed by eminent researchers, Piaget and Kelly, and articulated in curriculum and genre research by Doll (1989), Fosnot (1989), Applebee (1993), and others, Pat had been working for many years towards the practice of constructivist teaching without any awareness of a theory to support what he was doing. The following chapters tell the story of Pat's professional journey.
Chapter Two

The Constructivist Practitioner

Pat explained that his constructivist methodology has evolved from two starting points: personal experience in the classroom, and reading the publications of recognized theorists and practitioners. Inevitably they intertwined and became the same thing -- a knowledge and understanding of how students learn, and how to facilitate that learning, both of which are, for Pat, constructivist activities. Thinking about how students learn was the catalyst that opened the way for Pat into a constructivist view of curriculum and learning, and authenticates Boomer's (1992) contention that learning and curriculum theory should be inseparable. How does constructivism function in a real context? While this question has been addressed in Chapter One from an observer perspective, the following series of journal entries provide Pat's description of constructivism in practice. In his own words, he discusses how he currently structures his lessons and the classroom environment to create a situation that is conducive to constructivist teaching and learning, and explains the advantages for him and his students of this approach.
From Pat's Journal

November 28, 1994

Successful school experiences for me were all hands on activities, like experiments in biology, chemistry and physics. And I can remember playing and really enjoying the political game 'Caucus' in history which required that each person role play a politician.

And now my daughter, who is nine, likes to be actively involved in hands on activities, as well. Since she was old enough to do things, she and I have oftentimes worked together making crafts and producing objects, and one thing I've noticed that I do is I don't tell her the easy way out. I like to let her experiment and to try a variety of possibilities in response to a difficulty that she may have, and I've known for a long time that I didn't want to tell her the answer because her exploration of something new would be much more meaningful to her. And because she's had to explore things herself, she's come to some marvellous understandings from which I've learned, and, consequently, she has transferable knowledge from the experience.

November 30, 1994

I'd never really thought much about how students learn until about ten or eleven years ago when I was doing graduate studies in exceptional education. I'd always thought about what we could teach, and how we could teach it, and how we could evaluate it and so on, the classroom stuff. Then in my exceptional education
studies, I came upon a learning disability that was described as sociolinguistic
dysfunction, and I was fascinated with this, in fact, so fascinated I did a paper on it.
I researched it fairly well, and as I was reading about it, I realized that you could
use sociolinguistic competence or pragmatic competence as a goal, and you could set
up a marvellous speaking and listening programme in the classroom. And so I tried
it, and, in fact, it worked really well, and then to my surprise, about five or six years
ago, I read somewhere that sociolinguistic response is sort of the response of
preference to form a speaking and listening programme. But it works very well, and
you can always get kids in imaginative re-creation situations so that one is playing a
character from a piece of literature and the other is himself or herself or another
character, and they're involved in some sort of purposeful communication. I think
that the thing I always found difficult about speaking programmes was that they
lacked context and purpose. What was I supposed to do, have kids do a thank you
speech? Or have kids talk as I did on the Harlem Globe Trotters, or on Hitler, or
something like that? So I devised a programme that gave more of a purpose to
speaking and listening, and thus I included that, and continue to use it.

But before this, I'd never really thought about how students learn, which is
obviously the first place that any teacher should begin because if a kid learns best in
one way and not in another, then you have to tailor your teaching to meet the needs of
students.

Most recently, I've been thinking a lot about constructivism and the notion of
the student as meaning-maker, and it just seems to make sense that that, in fact, is the way learners learn. Based on a constructivist philosophy or belief, teaching, I think, really begins to make a lot more sense, and, indeed, you can tailor the classroom experience to meet the needs of self-learners. And so what I try to provide now is a series of loosely related literature based linguistic pods [Moffett, 1992, p. 25], each of which requires students to respond to the literature using a variety of discursive modes, written, spoken and visual. In this way, the environment which I provide students is linguistically conducive.

I know that constructivism informs or drives each course that I teach now. It seems to me that constructivism is a far superior way to teach than the front presentation, the 'chalk and talk' style. What tends to happen in that particular style is that the teacher's prior interpretation informs a class interpretation, and then everything that occurs in the classroom from there on, including any discussion, questioning and even visual aids, has to lead students to meet that understanding, that is the one true understanding of the piece of literature, or whatever. But if we acknowledge that kids do have a right to offer a variant interpretation, and if we allow the kids the time to speak of all these variant interpretations in class and to share ideas, and then to, from this bunch of rough wood, new meaning, then maybe they can come to a mutually agreeable meaning that probably has been student initiated and in which students can believe. I think learning is a far more successful matter in this way, and I really think that it attests to the professionalism of us.
December 5, 1994

I think if a person wants to construct a constructivist oriented classroom, the first thing that she or he will have to do is to establish an educational objective. For example, it could be as simple as to have students read and appreciate The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer, and so you've got the objective to which you wish to work, but then you have to reexamine the mechanics of how to run a class. First of all, I think, what you have to do is think of an activity, an activity which will, at the same time, help kids to reach the objective and to explore and construct knowledge based on what they're reading and what they already bring to the activity. And there are a variety of ways you can do it. If you're not doing 'sage on the stage', you're going to have to entrust a lot to the kids, and make sure that they have activities that they can do, that will be good for them to do, and that will achieve that educational objective. With Chaucer, what I first decided on was to have kids have a bit of linguistic appreciation. That is, we've looked at the linguistic evolution of the English language, we've looked at tapes about it, we've looked at Shakespeare's work, contemporary work, and now we go back to Geoffrey Chaucer who writes, of course, in Middle English. So I wanted the kids to have a bit of appreciation for our linguistic and our literary heritage, and the first thing that I asked them to do after assigning each small group one character from Chaucer's Prologue, was to become experts on the particular character which they were given, so, for example, if kids were in the Squire's group, they had to become an
expert on the Squire. That took a little while, and once they had translated, and once they had an understanding of a character, I asked them to pronounce that aspect of the Prologue in Middle English. I gave them an example, and a handout on pronunciation, and they all managed to do it. First of all, they managed to translate so they knew what they were saying, and that helped them to say it more dramatically. The next step was to go to the library to take out materials to research further their character, and to place that character into a social, cultural, and historical context. Then we began the activity, ‘Table Talk at the Tabard’. It’s an activity which required the preexisting character groups to split up and each student to find a new group of three or four, none of whom could be the same character, and then their task was to create and script a conversation, or a little play, amongst the three or four characters, the purpose of which was to bring to life each of the characters. And so I gave the kids a little chart on which they could record various aspects about each of the elements of condition for each character, that is the equipment, skills, appearance, behaviour, and everything else that makes a person a person. So that’s what they did first, and now they’re beginning to script out their conversation. Probably we’ll work on this all week, and on Monday, we’ll have the table talk presentations, each of which will begin with a recitation in Middle English of each character’s introduction in the Prologue. And while at the beginning, the kids were only really familiar with a little introduction to the Prologue which we did together, and then became more familiar with one character, and from there, went on
and became familiar with three or four more characters, what I'm hoping for is that by the time the kids see everybody else's presentation, they will have at least a passing knowledge of, and an appreciation of, all of Chaucer's characters along with the language of Chaucer's time.

I found it exceptionally interesting today. I heard kids laughing about characters, and actually pointing out particulars about Chaucer's description, and either laughing about the character or detesting a character because of her or his qualities, or expressing some other emotional reaction. They also began talking about costuming, and in order for them to talk about costuming, they pretty much had to have an understanding of the character. For example, one student asked, 'How do you show this guy, the doctor, in contemporary English?' And I asked what the doctor was dressed like, to which the student said, 'Well, he's wearing blue and red clothes of taffeta and silk because he's rich.' And I said, 'Yeah, well, that's how he looks. That's how you're going have to look because that's an aspect of that character's condition.' They're asking smart questions.

There were spots to the characters of Chaucer where they've really achieved a reader response. As I listen to each group, I'm impressed with the way that students ask other students, 'Would your character do this?' or 'What kind of coat would your character wear?' And often times, they have to go back to the text, but many times, they can just extrapolate, and can answer the questions as if they were the character, so it's rather interesting. They appear to be getting inside and responding
personally to the various characters from Chaucer. And that's what I'd hoped they'd do. I'm really excited to see the final presentations.

I guess what I really like to see are these kids talking to each other and making sense of and understanding the materials that until that time they didn't understand, or if they did understand them, at least not very well. It's interesting to watch all the kids construct their own meaning.

It's a really exciting way to teach because you get to have much, much more student contact, and kids can basically call on you at any time, you can call on kids at any time, and you get to find out first hand what's actually happening. You get to see kids working, you get to listen to their group conversations, and you can tell immediately if things are going well. The thing that I really like about small group work is that it extends your impact as a teacher. No more are there two or three way conversations with certain students that are masked as class discussion.

January 10, 1995

A couple of wonderfully constructivist activities happened this morning.

Often the way grammar is taught to our students, too much time is spent pointing out what's wrong rather than constructing what's right. I prefer to use the time others use for grammar instruction for writing instruction because I think kids just need a lot of practice in putting assignments or language together. I do feel, however, that there is a need for students to have a language that they and I could use to talk.
about writing without having to go into the minutiae of scholarly traditional grammar. In order to establish a beginning vocabulary with students about grammar, it's probably a fairly safe bet that you can teach a mini lesson, perhaps for one period, maybe even ten minutes, in the basic vocabulary of grammar. My good friend, Dr. Rob Scott, who is a linguist and a semanticist and has published a number of books on transformational grammar, says what really needs to be taught is the kernel sentence, SVOQ [Scott, R, 1972]. I think the SVOQ kernel sentence is a superior structure, but what it also does is it provides the students and me with a vocabulary. Once a vocabulary is established reasonably well, it's easy to use it to show kids, for example, when we're reading a sentence in literature, how this sentence really does a good job, how it could be said in a different way, and why the writer probably chose to write it in this way. In students' writing, it's fairly easy to say, 'Well, the problem with this sentence is you need to answer the question who or what, that is, you need a subject.'

So this morning I began with a structural or transformational grammar with a basic kernel sentence, SVOQ, subject, verb, object, qualifier, and I explained for about a minute and a half what each of those was. Actually, I asked the class, and they pointed out examples. And then I started at one end of the room and got the kids to label themselves, in turn, S, the next one V, the next one O, and the next one Q, and then S again and so on. So everybody had a job and their task, as I instructed them, was to think up a word for their category, so, for example, if they were an S,
they had to come up with a subject. If they were a V, they’d have to come up with an action word or a state of being, if they were an O, they’d have to produce an object, and if they were a Q, a qualifier. I asked them four at a time to come to the front of the room and to say their sentence using the words they’d thought of, and they were marvellous sentences. They were funny, and they were full of whimsy, and it was language that was really fun for students to use, and at each production I had them changing their configurations. Another student was appointed by the performing student to act as a conductor to shout out variations on the SVOQ construction, such as QSOV, and we would see, using the new construction, whether the sentences made sense or not, and some constructions did, and sounded better, and we talked about which sounded better, the traditional or conventional configuration or the new one. And mostly they thought the newer ones, for example, QSVO or SVQO or whatever it was, sounded better. And so each group had a turn. And then I asked two groups to go together, and I said what you need is a word to join the two clauses, and, of course, there was a question on what a clause was, and so we examined each group of students and they came to the conclusion very quickly that a clause was a little sentence within a sentence, which is, in fact, what a clause is. And so what I told kids to do was to make up their own constructions, and to find other people whom they could add on to their constructions, but you had to have a conjunction or a joining word, so kids could be appointed to do that. In one case, there were three clauses joined obviously by two conjunctions, and it was a marvellous construction,
very funny, whimsical, as I’ve said before, and very instructive. I think we’ve gone over it enough now, but I’ll remind them again tomorrow and a few more times after that, but we’ll use that vocabulary to talk about student writing: "Well, maybe your sentence needs another Q, a qualifier, or maybe what you need is a V. You don’t have a verb there so your sentence doesn’t answer the question ‘does what’".

Anyway, it was a lot of fun. What I saw kids doing was getting really excited about grammar, and running around and saying, ‘Okay, you be a Q, and you be an S, and you be a V, and you be a conjunction’, and getting very excited and anxious to perform for the class. I used an applause/boo mechanism, and if they liked the new construction, they would applaud, and if they didn’t like the new construction, because it was either nonsense or boring, they’d boo it. And so it was a lot of fun to listen to kids really getting their own hands on grammar, and making it make sense, so we’ll continue that throughout the semester.

I enjoy teaching grammar and punctuation and spelling but only within the context of a student’s work because it means something there. They’re better seen as necessary parts of a whole. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, and handwriting are all subsets of a larger whole, writing.

Grammar is important. I think each English teacher should teach grammar. The only criticism I have is with the amount of time spent teaching grammar. Many teachers regard the teaching of grammar as a discrete unit of study and don’t provide a place for it to exist. It’s interesting that students say when making
reference to another person who teaches a discrete grammar unit, 'We did grammar', not 'We did writing', which is, in fact, how it should be described, but 'We did grammar', as a discrete unit, not necessarily connected to anything else. I prefer to provide a context for the teaching of grammar in readings that we're looking at, writings that students do, and so on. I think grammar should be taught every day, all periods for the entire semester, not as a discrete subject but as a meaningful aspect of their written and spoken work. And if that's done, then kids see that, in fact, it is a meaningful part of language, and want to learn more.

February 13, 1995

I'm trying to use conferences more wisely. I gave back the nine enriched class a story they'd written and I'd marked. What I did with the story was use yellow highlighter to point out wherever there was a mechanical error - spelling, punctuation, grammar - , and their task, at first, was to get together with their partner and fix all the yellow marks. I said if their papers looked like a chihuahua with a bladder infection had walked over them, that was all right but they had to fix the yellow stains. Their first job was to fix every yellow mark that they had. I advised students that the highlighted portion is not an indicator of how poor their writing is, but rather a bit of advice to help them recognize and remedy their problems. It's just another form of teaching. And I had been thinking about how I could direct student interviews so that I listen more and talk less so they talk more,
and I decided I was going to use two questions: What do you like about your paper? and What don't you like about your paper? And I found this morning by asking those two questions, kids responded quite nicely. They pointed out what they believed were the strengths of their paper, and then we talked about that, and then they pointed out what they needed to improve on. A surprising number suggested that they should do a little more work on mechanics. And so the interviews went quite nicely, and what I ended up doing was piecing together problem areas that kids seemed to have in common. Everybody seemed to want to use dialogue in their assignments, and almost to a student, none of them could punctuate dialogue to any degree of accuracy, so the first thing that we did this morning was put four different patterns of punctuating dialogue on the board. (I had a student put the examples on the board). I went over those by just pointing them out, and made sure that kids understood where the marks of punctuation went, and then they had to repair them on their own papers. It seemed to go over quite well. Kids talked a lot about their writing. We both reflected on their writing, and some of the choices they had made in their writing, and they seemed to find those questions about their writing helpful, and I found the questions suitable to extract from a student what I needed to extract. I think the big thing was the better use of the time. It's also easy to look at the whole class and find a commonality, and so you can start on a micro lesson or a mini lesson on one possible error that they all seem to share. I spent no more than two to three minutes with each student. They were coming in pairs this morning, and we got
through the entire class.

I much prefer to talk to students and ask questions about the content, organization, or style of their writing as opposed to writing lengthy comments in response to their assignments. Kids like to get some sort of written response, though. I don't know whether they think it's a prescription, or a memento, or whatever, but I've always found that being able to talk to students and get responses at that time was more profitable, although I do respond to them in writing, as well.

February 17, 1995

Something interesting happened on Thursday. Jessica, new to the class, asked when we were going to start the hard stuff, like past participles. I told her that this was as hard as it gets. I discussed the major strands in an English programme, and asked her if we had done them. She answered 'yes', and said that in her old school, English was harder. How can I explain that each student sets her or his own ceiling by undertaking more difficult responses?

March 6, 1995

Although this method is quite time consuming, I find the end result much more gratifying than any other method. I've never regarded a curriculum as a timed event, so what we get done, we'll try to do well. It seems to me that curriculum is an
What is essentially involved in the constructivist strategies and activities for writing, literature, and grammar which Pat has described in his journal is a process approach to learning. Applebee (1993) remarks that "rather than emphasizing characteristics of the final products, process-oriented instruction focuses on the language and problem-solving strategies that students need to learn in order to generate those products" (p. 5), which is what Pat appears to be doing. And as students interact with their teacher and with each other as part of either whole class activities, small group activities, or individual activities, they practise using language in a variety of contexts, developing and honing many different skills as they do so.

A process approach to learning, however, isn't always perceived, even by liberal and progressive students, as valid and authentic work. In Pat's March 6, 1995 journal entry, he explains that he's "never regarded a curriculum as a timed event, so what we get done, we'll try to do well." But a comment made by Steven,
a student in Pat's senior enriched English class, addresses this point from a different perspective:

At times it seemed like the class wasn't moving right along, like there was a lot of wastage of time, and the work load was too little. He would certainly spend a lot more time on something, and the level of analysis would be better. I mean there would be small interpretive hand-ins, larger essays, reworked essays. A lot of his class was writing, and a lot of re-writing. It was process-oriented, but process in an organic free-forming sense.

Steven's comment is a legitimate one. An emphasis on process would certainly be part of a constructivist practice, but understandably might be viewed as wastage of time by students and teachers more accustomed to a pace that would ensure the completion of a set amount of materials by a particular day. It's the old argument of content versus process, and Pat seems to have left behind him the traditional anxiety concerning 'covering the content', the ritual of everyone being on page forty by October tenth. From a constructivist perspective, this ritual pushes students through without assurance of understanding or development of competencies.

Having observed these practices in Pat's classroom, and having read in his journal his thoughts about his current
constructivist practices, I was interested to learn by what process Pat had come to see the value of these practices. As Pat was equally interested in discussing it, we arranged to meet over coffee where Pat would talk about his early teaching experiences and about what got him started on this course of constructivism. We turn now to the story of Pat's beginning years in the profession.
Chapter Three

Mr. Polyester, Shakespeare's Dwarfish Thief

In the following conversation, Pat focuses on his first teaching experiences, first as an intern and then as a first year teacher. I learned in this conversation that in these early years, he was highly successful as a direct instruction teacher, the only teaching style which he knew, and enjoyed the experience immensely, but he began to be disturbed by doubts about his effectiveness with all students. This point was critical in his career, and in his subsequent development of a constructivist philosophy. The questions he was asking himself at this time were significant for at least two reasons. First, they were the key that opened up a 'mind-set' making him receptive to other ways of teaching, so that even though he was unaware of other ways, he was willing to try new possibilities. Second, these questions prompted him to focus on the students' learning rather than on his own teaching 'performance'.

A comment by Pat's friend and colleague, John MacIntyre, on his perceptions of Pat when he first began teaching describes the intensity and dedication with which Pat plunged into his career:
I'd never met anybody who cared so damn much, and it was a bit inspiring. It was kind of wonderful and touching to meet someone with such idealism, and such bloody determination to do his absolute best.

"I felt like a fraud, Shakespeare's dwarfish thief in a giant's robes. In essence, that's the perception I have of my first experiences as a teacher," Pat began, as I rapidly and awkwardly fumbled to ready my tape recorder. My preparations complete, Pat continued:

Always the line that separated teacher and student had been clearly visible, and from a student's perspective, which was the only perspective I had to that point, it kind of looked like on the teacher's side, the air was more rarified, food tasted better, everything was somehow better, whereas on the student's side, it was quite safe, and quite enjoyable. All you had to do was float along in the water, just drift along and respond appropriately as the teacher made currents and tides, and every once in a while you'd bounce up and bounce down or get shifted from side to side, but it was pretty safe. You really didn't have to do very much. I guess from a student's perspective, I looked at being a teacher as something pretty important, an important role in society, and so to actually be a teacher was frightening.

"As I said, I felt like a fraud," he repeated. "I didn't feel that I had enough knowledge to stand in front of a group of kids and tell them what to think."

I puzzled momentarily over what Pat had just said -- "stand
in front of a group of kids and tell them what to think". To my knowledge, Pat wasn't, and had never been, to use an expression I'd heard from him, a sage on the stage.

It was mid afternoon in the Windows Cafe as we reflected on our careers. An appropriate location, I thought, as I watched Pat continually stir his coffee, as if he were viewing the past in the ripples of the creamy liquid.

Ceasing the stirring of his coffee, Pat continued:

My first preparation was sort of dressing the dummy. I had to look like a teacher, so I went out and bought a mid seventies polyester ensemble. I purchased a chocolate brown polyester sports coat, and accented that by wearing tan polyester pants, and to further along the image, I bought sort of an offwhite shirt with a huge seventies' disco style collar, and then, finally, the piece de resistance, that icon of authority, a tie. I really didn't know how to tie a tie, but I bought one anyway, and it was lovely. It, too, was brown, and had little embossed butterflies on it in a slightly different colour. And once I had the whole outfit on, I kind of looked older, and I felt older. I didn't really feel like a teacher, but I certainly felt as if I were a reasonable excuse for an adult, and so having dressed, I thought I was ready.

Pat leaned back against the seat, quiet for a moment, then, addressing the window, said:

I was an intern, and the first lesson that I was told to teach was on the uses of the comma, and I thought that this was
sort of a grandeloquent entrance to the world of teaching, so I researched thoroughly in *Learning to Write*, and wrote down everything in my notes, literally everything.

"I wrote down every word that I was going to say," Pat emphasized leaning forward, and I anticipated further disclosures:

Every single last word that I would say to a class was on a piece of paper. Lest I forget and slip up for even a millisecond, I'd be able to fall back on my notes. In fact, I really didn't want to stray too far from my notes because my notes told me where I should be going, what I should be doing all the time, and that was rather safe. Anyway, in researching the comma in *Learning to Write*, I found that there were twelve or fourteen rules of the comma, so I wrote them out. I planned to write each one out on the board and provide an example of each, and then, having finished that, I would get students to complete an exercise sheet, take it up, and we could just leave the comma well enough alone. And that's how I wanted to teach it, so that's, in fact, how I taught it.

What I had just heard were my own first teaching experiences; they described to me precisely how I had prepared and taught lessons when I first started teaching, and the way most teachers I know had initially taught. But I thought Pat Gray was different. I thought he had always been different. But it is not all that surprising when you think about it. Most people teach
the way they have been taught, at least in the beginning, and Pat's next revelations established that in this respect he was no different from most people:

My only experience with teachers was a person who stood up in front of a class, lectured and directed, occasionally wrote on the board, asked us some questions, and then told us to write something and explain it. That's all I knew so that's what I thought a teacher did. I didn't know that you could teach in any other way. I suspect that what most teachers know about teaching is what they've experienced in high school and elementary school, and also in university, mostly the stand and deliver personal address kind of style. That's the only model of teaching that they've ever known, and, therefore, that's the correct way to teach, and the only way to teach.

This supposition that teachers teach as they had been taught is, in fact, supported by research. Reviewing current research, Fosnot (1989), for example, reports that "in spite of the efforts of teacher-education programs, teachers are much more likely to teach as they have been taught throughout their schooling than as they have been taught in teacher-education programs" (p. 9). This includes instructional models provided in university level courses where, according to Howey (1983), "the lecture/discussion format is still far and away the dominant
teaching modality employed" (p. 13).

Fosnot (1989) suggests that, like students in our school classrooms, prospective teachers need to be taught by constructivist models and methods where they are actively involved, are given opportunities to reflect on their learning and to make inferences, and to experience cognitive conflict. Fosnot endorses, and incorporates into her own practice, Duckworth's (1986) notion of teaching as research, specifically her (1987) proposal that prospective teachers question and research children's understanding of concepts followed by a reflection on the logic used in reaching that understanding. Fosnot also supports Duckworth's (1987) proposal that preservice and inservice teachers pursue their own inquiries in content areas rather than having this information delivered to them by their university instructors via lecture, thus developing an understanding of how to encourage such inquiry in children (Fosnot, 1989). Fosnot contends that this process engages prospective teachers in "experiences that are meaningful and confront[s] their traditional schemes of teaching with new techniques and methods" (Fosnot, 1989, p.16). She explains
further that "[t]his type of experience serves as a constructive experience for the teacher candidates and involves them in critical thinking about pedagogy. Since they are actively questioning and investigating techniques of instruction, they become empowered, 'thinking teachers'" (Fosnot, 1989, p. 16)

I began to think about how this would break the cycle of teachers teaching as they had been taught. Pat, as he continued in his career, did critically think about pedagogy and actively questioned and investigated techniques of instruction, and he did, in fact, become a thinking, empowered teacher who changed his instruction from whole class direct instruction with a skills focus to a holistic view with a focus on small groups and individuals.

I listened as Pat continued to explore his first teaching experiences:

When I learned that there were other ways to teach, I was really intrigued because I wasn't aware that there were other ways to teach, but I was, nevertheless, quite impressed with teaching. I thought it was terrific that the kids were both listening to me and following along. In recollection, I don't know why they were doing that. Either they wanted to make life easier for me because they'd realized I'd never done this before, which is, I guess, the reason of preference, something that I'd choose, or, secondly, they were watching just in case
I slipped up so they could laugh, or, thirdly, they actually cared. They were actually listening to what I was saying, and were impassioned by the uses of the comma. Now, in retrospect, I doubt very much whether anybody but I was impassioned by the uses of the comma. But I found teaching very interesting. And using a presentational style, I could control a class's atmosphere and temperament just by how interested I sounded in the material we were studying, and how often I could play the entertainer and make kids laugh and work up the crowd. I knew that the kids weren't learning a lot using that style, but I didn't see any alternatives, and I guess I liked the response of being the guy in the spotlight that controlled the show. I found that the more animated I became, the better reaction I'd get from the class. If I said something in a very animated manner, and it was vaguely funny, kids would laugh, and I found that just by adjusting my style, or increasing the volume, or dealing with certain aspects repeatedly, kids would respond. I thought it was terrific, and so I'd try to be more animated, and I tried to alter my voice appropriately. I suspect at times I was shrieking like Hitler. If they responded hard enough, then I would respond back to them. Anyway, that was the lesson on the comma. It was marvellous to be up front, and say, 'and the third use is . . .' after an introductory adjectival or adverbial phrase or clause, really expecting that these kids would understand it just because I'd put an example on the board. In the last twenty years, I've recognized that there are various other ways that you can teach punctuation and grammar more successfully. However, that's what I did, and I came away from the experience feeling pretty pleased. I hadn't fallen on my face, the kids hadn't laughed me out, and they hadn't made too much noise. I was really, really worried about control. I think all interns are. Anyway, I was happy with the lesson, and I was ready for the next day when I would be teaching the uses of the question mark or something like that.
I found Pat's discussion of control very interesting but perplexing. He seemed, at this early point in his career, to be fascinated by the effects of his own power in the classroom, yet he became a teacher who relinquishes control to empower his students.

He related a further instance of his curious interest in control:

Another experience I remember occurred while I was still at university. I was taking a class where we had to do a number of micro teaching assignments and videotape them, and I taught a poem that I really enjoyed by Cummings called 'Since Feeling Is First', and the whole notion of control intrigued me. I was fascinated when the people in the class would respond with a knowing nod or a shake of the head or a laugh, and it was always neat to get people to laugh and to sort of encourage them to believe what I was saying, and so my experiences in microteaching were successful and, consequently, I thought if teaching is like this, I think I'm in the right neighbourhood. I think I can do this for a living. But it wasn't until I'd interned for about a day that I thought, my gosh, I love this, and they're actually going pay me to do it, and, as a consequence, I became a teacher and still love it, and want to keep doing it for a long time.

My mindless gaze was fastened on a small, plump child, encased completely in purple and pink and barely able to toddle, repeatedly attempt to right herself on white, twin-bladed skates
on the Meewasin skating rink across the street, and I realized that I had stopped listening for a moment. I was thinking about what Pat had just told me. I knew that Pat's teaching had changed over the years. I'd been in his classroom, I'd talked to him and to a lot of other people, and, obviously, his teaching wasn't in any way like he had just described. But why, then, had he changed if, as he had just told me, everything was working so terrifically and he enjoyed it so much? He responded enthusiastically to my question, eager, as always, to discuss methodology.

I think any of us who teaches realizes that after a while we become our own best students, and that we're talking almost into the air, and that students don't really walk away any better prepared or understanding anything if you don't do something different which enables you to make an impact on the kids. The way I teach today is diametrically opposed to what I was doing back then. Back then I was sort of doing a surface job of teaching things and sort of assuming that the kids would understand what I was talking about. And, like every new teacher, I realized quite quickly that teaching was very hard work. After the first year, I asked the principal I worked for, Jack Johnson, if the job of teaching gets any easier. He told me that in the first year, you're just interested in survival, in the second year, you're interested in content, and in the third year you're interested in students. And I think it was true because about the third year I really wanted to make students connect with whatever it was I was teaching, and, therefore, I had to start searching around for
ways to manipulate the variables in order to make things more meaningful.

There is only a certain number of variables. If you want to be egocentric, you can say variable number one is the teacher and her personality, or his behaviour, perhaps his haircut, or whatever. The second variable is methodology employed, and there is a large number of those. Presentation style, or sage on the stage, is certainly the traditional methodology. Individualization leans a little more to the left. Small group instruction is another methodology. There are a lot of constellations and methodologies that you could employ. Another variable is the content, and often times it seems like you really don't have a lot of choice about the content although, as I found out later, you actually do have a lot of choice. You just have to make it appear worthwhile, mostly to yourself, so you can convince yourself that what you're doing is meaningful. Then you can provide content kids really react to and that they understand and want to hear about, or learn about, or see about, or whatever. Students, of course, are a variable. There are a variety of variables, and you have to shift the variables.

I found that after having done the presentation style for three or four years, I was anxious to switch over to something else, and I was lucky enough to work with a fellow in the same school, Jim Scott, who shared my interest in individualized instruction, and so that's the direction in which we went, and we went wholesale into individualized instruction. We arranged for each kid to prepare an individualized timetable, and somehow we played the ringmasters and directed all the performances. From there it was perhaps a matter of shifting to a little better understanding of how kids learn, and from there it was getting into things such as reader response, and constructivism, imaginative recreation, and a variety of new approaches to teaching, perhaps the most important of which was constructivism, the student as meaning-maker.
"But what made you realize that students weren't connecting, that what you were really doing was teaching yourself, prompting you to make some changes?" I asked.

One of the first ways was that I looked at my students, my audience, and I realized that I was connecting with only a small percentage of students. The other ones had this incredible glaze of psychic numbness about them, as if they were tolerating what was happening, but were really thinking about what they'd rather be doing which probably wasn't anything that I was thinking about. Everybody in the classroom has a different agenda. Everybody. You, as a teacher, have an agenda, and all the kids out there have an agenda, and a large number of them are just so wholly disinterested that you're not connecting with them at all. I guess what encouraged me to change was that I saw too many kids that just weren't connecting, and it was showing in their work. If I was teaching about the uses of the comma, the next writing assignment would come in even a day later containing a myriad of problems with the use of the comma. The question you have to ask is, if you've just taught them how to use the comma, why don't they know how to use the comma? So you manipulate the variables to find a better way to teach the content, and if you enjoy some success with it, then you continue doing it. When I learned that there were other ways to teach, I was really intrigued because I wasn't aware that there were other ways to teach.

As Pat adjusted his tortoise shell coloured wire framed glasses, emptied the last of his coffee, and we prepared to leave, I continued to think about how Pat had, in fact, found a better way, and how the combination of new influences, new knowledge,
and Pat's own insights, described in the next chapter, continue to play themselves out in an ever unfolding constructivist pedagogical field.

For example, Pat's insights, which developed as a result of his conscientious observing, listening, and reflecting on activities and experiences in his classroom, resulted in his coming to some understandings about individualized learning which prompted him to initiate changes in the individualization process that created a more social context for individual activities.

Pat has described how, as a new teacher, he had written down every word that he would say to his class so that he could safely fall back on his notes should it be necessary to do so. The distance he has journeyed from that teacher-focussed pedagogy, represented by the insecurity of those tightly defined parameters, is illustrated by comparison to the way he is presently able to comfortably construct his lessons with individuals and small groups of students out of the ongoing experience in the classroom, a process approach to learning discussed in Chapter Four.
In a process approach, Langer and Applebee (1987) explain, a context is created within which students are able to explore new ideas and experiences. Within this context, a teacher's role in providing information decreases, and is replaced by a "strengthened role in eliciting and supporting students' own thinking" (p. 77) and meaning-making abilities. In a process approach to learning,

ideas are allowed to develop in the learner's own mind through a series of related, supportive activities; where taking risks and generating hypotheses are encouraged by postponing evaluation; and where new skills are learned in supportive instructional contexts. (Langer and Applebee, 1987, p. 69)

Langer and Applebee argue that in such contexts "students have the best chance to focus on the ideas they are writing about and to develop more complex thinking and reasoning skills as they defend their ideas for themselves" (p. 69). It is this kind of process approach into which Pat's teaching evolves, as Chapter Four shows.

That "we become our own best students", repeatedly teaching ourselves what we believe we are teaching our students, is a result of the automatic expectation we have that students will
understand what we're talking about simply because we understand it and have provided examples on the chalk board. It is a common assumption associated with direct instruction, and is evident in the "back to the basics" push for prescribed curriculum and texts, departmental examinations, and standardized testing, but is a fallacy from a constructivist perspective. That students are making connections through direct instruction cannot be assumed, and reproducing on written exams what teachers have verbally explained and illustrated by example is no assurance that meaning attainment and understanding have occurred. Pat's recognition of this is indicative of his progression towards a more constructivist and process orientation. Recognition that learning has occurred, however, may not be immediately evident with constructivist teaching either. This is a possible implication of constructivist teaching that is discussed in a later chapter, and about which several students to whom I spoke commented, along with a teacher intern in Pat's class, Don Mackenzie, who, lending professional credence to the students' perception, comments that "[y]ou wouldn't expect to be aware that you're learning at the time with this kind of
teaching. It's only in reflection that you realize that you're learning."

Pat has specified in his journal a variety of methodologies that teachers might employ that might give them a better indication than direct instruction alone that growth and understanding are occurring. And in Chapter Four, we learn about his discovery, through experimentation and collaboration with others, of student-centered teaching. With its greater student involvement, verbal interaction, and emphasis on process, student-centered teaching provided Pat with options for creating an environment within which students could manipulate, invent, create, re-create, construct, and reconstruct knowledge and ideas in order to produce meaning. One wonders, however, how much his own personality was a factor in his moving towards constructivism since even as a direct instruction teacher he was able through his personality to interest and involve the students in a whole class process. But at the same time, he was questioning how to more effectively involve students in more meaningful learning. It is possible that his own personality provided him with a framework for making changes in the
direction of constructivism. Yet in his recognition that his direct instruction was insufficiently effective, he was developing a new concept of teaching and learning, and in the questions he was asking himself about how to be more effective, he had to consider the purposes that the activities served for the students. His focus was already student-centered. Langer and Applebee (1987) inform us that

[we] are unlikely to make fundamental changes in instruction simply by changing curricula and activities without attention to the purposes the activities serve for the teacher as well as for the student. It may be much more important to give teachers new frameworks to understand what to count as learning than it is to give them new activities or curricula. (p. 87)

Perhaps it was Pat's focus on students that created an awareness of learning that led to changes in his instruction and eventually to a constructivist philosophy. The role of personal understanding is explored further in this thesis. No solid answers emerge, but my research does pose an important question: did Pat learn to be a constructivist teacher, or did he integrate constructivist teaching strategies into a preexisting personal construct?
Chapter 4

The Classroom Laboratory

The role of teachers is to help students expand their cognitive and verbal repertory as far as possible, starting with their initial limits. The goal is for the student to be able to become capable of producing and receiving an increasingly broad range of kinds of discourse, compositional forms, points of view, ways of thinking, styles, vocabulary, and sentence structures.

The only way, short of tutorial, to provide individual students enough language experience and feedback is to develop small-group interaction into a sensitive learning method. The teacher's role must be to teach students to teach each other.

Moffett (1968a, p. 12)

The above quotations from Moffett's *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers* had a major impact on Pat early in his career because they redefined his role and purpose. We look now at the early years in Pat's teaching where we explore the influence of Moffett and other major influences in Pat's career that helped to propel him on his journey towards constructivism.

Very early in his career, he began a close, collaborative association with a colleague, Jim Scott. Assisted by another
colleague, Martin Wexler, whose comments, support, and advice made classroom risk-taking and experimentation possible and acceptable, Pat and Jim engaged in classroom research activities to explore many ideas and strategies that are only now becoming common practice. Pat's reading of Moffett's and Moffett and Wagner's work on student-centered teaching had a major impact on him, validating much of what he and Jim had been experimenting with, providing many new ideas to try, and presenting a theory for his practice. His association with Dave Wilson, a professor at the university, was important, and like his experience with Moffett's work, continually provided him with new ideas, validation, and theory, along with ongoing support for his continued experimentation and development of constructivist practices.

Comments by Dave Wilson, a friend and a mentor to Pat, and Jim Scott, Pat's collaborative teaching partner for many years, illustrate the evolutionary process of Pat's practice.

During the time that I've known Pat, I think his ideas have evolved, probably because he became more aware of what he was doing, realized that he was not alone, and probably did those things that he wanted to do with more confidence.

Dave Wilson, professor
I've always admired Pat for the transition that he was able to make in terms of becoming more of a facilitator rather than a teacher as performer type of role.

Jim Scott, colleague

There appears to be some connection between Pat's present interests and practices in the classroom and his childhood interests and activities. If it is true, as Pat's colleague and friend, John MacIntyre, contends, that what you are as a teacher is a function of your basic character, then it's not surprising that Pat is what he is in his classroom, and different from most teachers, for even as a child, he was attracted to the unusual, as indicated in this recollection of his childhood:

I remember as a kid being really fascinated with carnivals, and circuses, specifically, sideshows, where you were sort of seduced by an attractive illustration or a painted canvas or whatever it was. And it was seductive to the point where my poor old dog, Lassie, got captured and put inside of a tent-like structure to be billed as the wild dog from some place or another at the cost of about one cent. It wasn't a great money-maker.

But I've always had a love for the quirky, and I guess by quirky I mean the ironic, and I don't know when it started, but I've had it for as long as I can remember being me, and when I read for selections to use in class, I tend to really be enthusiastic about the quirky stories, and so things like "The Crawlers", "Caught in the Organ Draft", "Jeffty is Five", "Born of Man and Woman", anything that's a little odd, and something that's a little unusual, I tend to be drawn towards. And maybe that's just normal, the phenomenon of people stopping to look
at an accident scene, I don't know, but because of the habit I have of choosing ironic or quirky things, it's served me well as a teacher because I find that kids get enthusiastic about quirky and unusual things too.

I also remember playing sports a lot. And all through my childhood, and even into adolescence, I played on a lot of teams, for example, hockey, baseball, and fastball, but I remember every time I was on a team, it appeared that I'd want more than that. I wasn't just a hockey player; I was a goal tender. I wasn't just a baseball player; I was a pitcher.

We were back at the Windows Cafe, and as I looked out across the street at the pool of water that used to be the skating rink, and reflected momentarily on what Pat was saying, it seemed to make sense that as a child, he was interested in things that were different. I thought about a comment that Dave Wilson, a long time professional associate of Pat, had recently made: "Perhaps one shouldn't be terribly surprised that Pat has taken up the transaction/response process perspective on teaching. I think it was intuitive. In fact, it probably just simply reinforced something he was naturally."

Reflecting on my readings, I recalled Goodson's (1992) proposal that studying teachers' lives through the narration of a teacher's life history provides a new way to sponsor a teacher's voice. A life history recognizes that personal experiences impact
on educational experiences, and places a teacher's practice over a range of time in this broader context of both educational experiences and personal experiences. While this research concentrates on Pat's professional experiences, occasionally the importance of personal experiences in one's professional life becomes evident, as indicated by the way Pat's interests and tendencies as a child carried on into his interests and tendencies as a teacher. His early fascination with the unusual is a precursor to his later selection of literature and activities for the classroom.

A teacher's personal practical knowledge evolves over time; it is shaped not only by teaching experiences, but also by non-teaching experiences that occur prior to and during a teacher's career. Pinar, (1988) submitting that in education we often assume that explanations for the present reside solely in the present, advances the idea that individual life history is a major source of present thought and conduct in teaching activity. He alleges that the past is usually "rich with hidden images of pedagogy and curriculum . . . [which are] born in past experiences but which function . . . to prefigure present thought" (p. 272), and suggests that educational experience might be critically explored through autobiographical or biographical methods in which the teacher actively participates in
"both the processes of self-excavation and self-architecture, the process of discovering who I am and the process of actively constructing who I choose to be" (p. 273).

Thus inquiring into who Pat is and who he chooses to be, we find that from the time he was a child, he was drawn to unusual or different things, and chose activities and positions that set him apart somewhat from others -- a goaltender, a pitcher. And as a young teacher experimenting in the classroom with teaching practices that were unfamiliar to many others, he continued to set himself apart, and to establish a reputation as an innovative and nontraditional teacher, ultimately evolving into his present constructivist practice.

What Pat was naturally, however, may have been brought out and furthered along by a number of critical influences in his career, with Dave Wilson himself being one of those influences. Through this association and friendship, Pat found permission to be himself, a permission which made the development of new insights possible, and brought out significant changes in his teaching.

Sikes, Measor, and Woods (1985) discuss the importance of "critical incidents" in revealing "major choices and change times in a person's life" (p. 57). They speak of critical incidents as "key
events in an individual's life, and around which pivotal decisions revolve" which provoke the individual into "selecting particular kinds of actions which lead in particular directions" (p. 57).

My conversations with Pat told me that there were a number of critical influences in his career, along with some particular critical incidents. One significant influence was a teaching partner named Jim Scott. Another was Pat's discovery of Moffett's and Wagner's work, and a third was his professional association with a number of individuals whose influence made a significant impact on his philosophy and teaching, and led to further readings and further influences. These influences were not separate or isolated influences; they were often interconnected. Probably, however, the biggest influences on Pat's teaching were his own observations, insights, reflections, and innate abilities. And possibly the development and progression of his illness, as well, may have had some effect on his teaching, although what effect exactly is difficult to say. Reviewing important experiences in his career, Pat speculated on their genesis:

I think a lot of things in my teaching career have been by accident, not by necessity. For example, I stumbled on, by accident, a diagram on Jim Scott's board. It intrigued me. I became interested, by accident, in Martin Wexler's ever evolving philosophy of education. But I stumbled on that. I
stumbled on constructivism. I stumbled on response to literature. Everything that seems worthwhile that I do right now I've just stumbled upon. Maybe there's a great design, and I was intended to find all this stuff out, but it seems rather haphazard if that were the case. But I didn't really have a desperate need to change my teaching style, or if I had a desperate need, I didn't recognize it as such. I really wasn't looking for things, but when I found things and tried them, and they worked as well as what I was doing or oftentimes better, then I embraced and promoted and sponsored those methods, and tried to find others who were interested in talking about the same sort of things I was.

I remember going by Jim's room on the way to the office, and just having a quick look inside; the room was open. I saw an illustration on the front board which looked like a pattern by which students could teach themselves how to write a paragraph. It showed how a paragraph was structured, almost a fill in the blanks, but not quite, and I was fascinated with this. And while, in retrospect, it appears to be a very mechanistic and behaviouristic activity, at the time, it appeared what Jim was doing, and this is what fascinated me, was providing his general level students with a method whereby they could generate their own paragraphs, and do so successfully. I thought, 'Isn't it interesting that this guy, Jim, is encouraging his students to do things for themselves, and showing them ways to take matters into their own hands.' I guess that appealed to me because I thought, 'Yeah, that's exactly how kids should be taught - to do things themselves,' and it was from there on that Jim and I talked a lot and wrote a lot.

Jim Scott, like Pat, is a creative, innovative, experimental teacher whose approach to classroom instruction is nontraditional, and for seven years he and Pat worked together in a close
collaboration that could be considered a form of action research. They planned, experimented, taught, reflected, discussed, developed ideas, developed materials, continually revised their ideas and materials, and continued this praxis until the physical separation of working in different schools made it impractical. Pat explains further what attracted his attention to Jim:

When Jim and I were working together, I didn't know the term or the concept 'postmodernism', but, in retrospect, probably one of the things that really attracted me to Jim's way of teaching was his postmodern sensibility. He approached a lot of things in life as does a postmodernist. He was interested in a variety of things from playing the bagpipes to drawing sketches of nature to finding interesting pieces of literature. He had this marvelous sensibility which did not have sharp corners, and wasn't really packageable, and he was quite liberal and quite naturally sensible about things. And those things appealed to me. I saw in Jim somebody who was very, very intelligent and could make sense of a lot of things in life, and someone from whom I would like to learn.

There were others who were important influences in Pat's career development, and while he never again experienced the kind of close working relationship with anyone else that he had with Jim, a number of people were a rich source of information, theory, encouragement, and support, as he explains:

There was another fellow in the department named Martin who was almost reclusive. He was fairly introspective, fairly serious. He didn't really disclose very much. He'd occasionally
say something at department meetings, and when he did, it was pithy. It had a real truth to it, a real meaning, and so I was fascinated with Martin, and I wondered if he might be willing to talk with Jim and me about some of the things he did. I wanted to pursue that, and so I tried to set up situations in which Martin could be the tutor, and Jim and I would sit and ask questions, and Martin would provide his best answers. What I didn't know at the time, but subsequently realized, was that Martin, like every teacher, goes through phases, and so he was almost proselytizing about his methodology because at that moment in time, he had found some success with something, but it was highly possible, in fact, probable, that in a week or two, he might find something else to make his methodology more successful. As I think back to the tutorial sessions with Martin, I think what appealed to me was that Martin, at that point, felt that the skills which we teach in English, reading, writing, speaking, and listening, were all segmentable, and because they were segmentable, they were teachable, and, most importantly, learnable. I'm sure Martin looks at things as a whole now, but at that time, he didn't. When I got involved with Martin, that was exactly what I was looking for because after two or three years of teaching English, I'd learned that English, was really, really messy, and could make a person desperate for some sort of package that was teachable, and when Martin was teaching reading skills, and was talking about things like reading for details, and reading for the main idea, I latched on to it as a way that I could control my subject area and, most importantly, a way that I could teach the things in my subject, and I could feel good about it. I could say, 'Yeah, this is what I plan to teach, and I've done that now and it's done.' Now, I realize that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

This was an important realization for Pat in moving towards constructivist teaching because integration and holism in the
language arts, as discussed in Chapter One, facilitates constructivist learning, while isolating and segmenting skills impedes the constructivist process.

When I talked with Jim about his and Pat's involvement with teaching segmented skills, he explained that in the beginning, he and Pat were constantly looking for models and formats that they could transfer into their own teaching contexts, and Martin, dissatisfied with traditional, teacher-directed, lecture presentation, and having experimented with nontraditional methods of teaching reading, was a source of information about reading theory and an individual with whom they could discuss ideas and endeavors. Jim Scott remembers:

> Very early in our collaboration, we had decided that both reading and writing were processes that could be broken down and looked at in parts. At that time, we believed that kids simply needed to be shown how to analyze, or look at reading in ways that were understandable to them. Martin was probably a person who had the theory that we wanted at the time, and that was a good starting place for us.

Jim went on to say that they went beyond Martin, referring also to a number of reading and literature texts, using them as models for their creation of appropriate exercises and activities. For example, they used a *Focus* textbook and then said, "Wouldn't it be better to do it this way?"
Focus, a text in the Galaxy series (Scott, Foresman, 1969), was really exemplary of the way educators were thinking at that time. For example, reading activities in this series were broken down and isolated into word recognition tactics, literal interpretation skills, inferential skills, and critical skills. The series was built on the rationale that reading, writing, listening, and speaking were segmentable, and were teachable and learnable in this segmented way.

As Pat continued his recollections of his experiences with Martin, he related what was probably the most crucial contribution that any one person has made to his development as a constructivist teacher:

I think that the most important thing Martin said was, and I remember him saying this quite clearly, to regard our classrooms as a laboratory, that if we had an idea and if we experimented with it, the only bad thing that would happen is that the kids might not get the idea, but we could always reteach. And so it became a great game to experiment in the classroom, and Jim and I were heavily into experimentation. We would meet over lunch, and we'd talk about things that we did. We'd try to create new things that would interest and inform students, and it was just a lot of fun. It was exciting to be on our own, and to be sort of adventurers and pioneers, we thought, searching into a new way. It was tremendous.

It was interesting to get Jim's perspective on this period in
his and Pat's life, as well as Pat's. Jim explained that working with Pat had been a time of great learning in his life:

I enjoyed learning, investigating, asking questions, and looking at other possibilities, and being slightly a renegade with ideas. I think I still do that. It is something that is continuously happening. But before I met Pat and worked with Pat, it was almost as if it wasn't allowed, and I felt confined. That belief that if I wanted to be successful, whatever that meant, wanted to retain this job, I would have to form myself into the mold of what was expected, and I had better be perceptive enough to look around and see what was the right way to be, the right way to think, the right way to be a teacher. And I didn't like that.

The existence of an expectation by the staff with respect to a "right way to teach" is confirmed by Thorvald Jacobson, an administrator in the school at this time, who comments that Pat and Jim were perhaps to a certain extent viewed by some of the staff as, "Well, they're young. They'll come around eventually."

The expectation of new teachers is that they will "sow their wild oats", and then conform to conventional practice. Interestingly, neither Pat nor Jim ever did "come around" or conform, with both of them continuing to be unconventional and experimental.

Like his experiments with segmented skills, Pat's foray into individualized instruction with Jim led him to important
realizations that moved him closer towards a constructivist view of learning. Pat explains:

Individualization was a very grand experiment that we conducted in our classroom laboratories. Individualization seemed to be a real push in the Saskatoon system at the time. And although we were told to individualize instruction, we weren't exactly told what it meant and how it worked, so there was a lot of experimentation that resulted. And maybe that's the best way. Maybe the way people learn is just to develop a mind set that there is another way. The mind set says that here's how you can do it, and then you try it. Some of it works, so you keep some of it, some of it doesn't work, so you throw that out, and, hopefully, not throw the baby out with the bathwater, which is, in fact, what Jim Scott and I did. We were so enthralled about individualization that we hadn't realized the horrible paradox of individualized instruction which is that individualized instruction is instruction that's individualized, and what it does, if you follow it to the letter, is cut out entirely the social aspect of a classroom which is very necessary. Education is social. Kids need to be able to talk to each other, whether it's discussing a piece of literature and their different view points, whether it's finding a solution to a problem, whether it's advising each other on how a writing assignment could be done, whether it's getting support during a writing assignment, bouncing ideas off other people, or trying speaking activities. There are so many parts of a classroom that need to involve the social aspects of education. You have to get kids not staying in the same place for the whole period, not just listening to the teacher for the whole hour, but getting more involved and responding to whatever is happening in the English class, and individualized instruction discards this.

This was a critical realization for Pat at this time: the
elaborate individualized instruction programme he and Jim had established in their classrooms was flawed because it ignored much of the social aspect of learning. Constructed largely on a behaviouristic model, their individualized instruction programme was incompatible with the student-centered orientation towards which Pat's philosophy and his instruction were evolving. The dissonance this created within him was constructivist in itself as it impelled him to pursue a better way, not to discard individualized instruction completely, but to incorporate into his instruction those aspects that were compatible with his evolving philosophy, as he indicates in the following explanation:

Individualized instruction contains many, many aspects or elements that are really good, and I've included them in my current practices because they're too good to throw away. For example, individualized learning makes you a better listener. You can place a few well crafted sentences, and then listen to what students tell you, and from what they tell you, and your responses maybe, a good dialogue is set up, and a lot of learning can take place. Secondly, it teaches you how to listen to find out the student's modus operandi. How does this kid go about learning, how does this kid go about writing, how does this kid feel when a punctuation error is made, how does this kid whatever? But you have to listen for it, and you have to ask the question broadly enough so that the kid will help you. Next, I think what individualized instruction does, or at least the conferencing part, is it teaches you how to synthesize. For example, if four or five kids are demonstrating the same problem, you could make a small group of individual activities
to teach that very small group how to do something, maybe to punctuate dialogue, or you notice that five or ten kids are having difficulty, so that becomes a mini lesson, and you can deliver that whenever you feel fit. Another really good thing is it helps you to plan interesting activities when you want to plan individualized instruction activities that work with a few kids. Now maybe you know something that two kids in your classroom really like to do, and so you can devise an individual assignment. A few other things that individualized instruction did for Jim and me, I think, was it forced us to look at learning, not from our point of view, but from the students' point of view. It also showed us how to task analyze, or how we could help kids task analyze. And perhaps the most important thing was that it made me feel far more comfortable in the classroom where I wasn't standing up and lecturing, and where everybody in the classroom wasn't doing the same thing at the same time. It was sometimes hectic, but, nonetheless, it was exhilarating to see the kinds of things that were happening.

Time management is really important when you're individualizing because you're trying to juggle perhaps thirty balls and keep them all up in the air, keep them all working, and in order to do that, you have to manage your time very wisely. If you've got two kids with you, or one kid with you, then you have to make sure that the other kids are occupied meaningfully, and that they're doing things that they should be doing, and learning from things.

I use all of these things in my teaching now, but I've tried to individualize instruction in a slightly different way. Everybody deals with 'the literature', and we don't disregard the social aspect, but we use a lot of personal reader response. We talk about the literature, we argue about the literature, we discuss the literature, often in small groups, and then we respond to the literature, usually following a selection by doing an extended response assignment which is usually a student design.
I asked Pat to comment on the importance of the collaborative teaching relationship he had with Jim. He explained:

Jim and I were each other's support system, so when we wouldn't enjoy success with something, we could talk about it, and then the other person would reflect on the ideas that were being presented, and there may be an attempt to mutually construct an alternative. But primarily, it was a good support system. If other people looked at us as if we were hyper-radical, and I'm not really sure how they looked at us then or even if they did look at us, that didn't matter because each of us felt comfortable in doing what he was doing because there was somebody else doing the same thing. So it wasn't quite working without a net. There was a net there, and it sort of encouraged us to be more innovative.

Pat's thoughts reflect the ideas that Jim shared in his interview with me. Jim mentioned that the support of a collaborator makes personal professional growth more possible in the sense that it's necessary to reflect, and to have someone else to share and develop ideas and practices with. You develop differently if you have this outside input.

It's interesting that in the course of their daily classroom activities, Pat and Jim were engaged in a practice that didn't become recognized and encouraged until many years later, after Schon (1983), and Carr and Kemmis (1986) had articulated and popularized "action research" and "reflective practice". Introduced
by Corey (1949) as a means for practitioners to investigate "their own practice in order to address issues and problems germain to that practice" (Hannay, 1992), and redefined by Carr and Kemmis (1983) as "the study of practical problems by practitioners directly involved," it appears that Pat and Jim were, indeed, collaboratively involved in some form of action research activities, and while the practice had been labeled and expounded prior to their use of it (Corey, 1949; Argyris & Schon, 1974), neither Pat nor Jim had been aware of it; their practice preceded their theory.

But they were conscientious enough, and cared enough, to make the effort, and thinking back to Jim's response when I asked him how the rest of the staff regarded what they were doing, I'm left with the impression that not too many teachers would be interested in making this kind of effort. Jim recollects:

I don't know if the rest of the staff thought what we were doing was all that important. I don't think that really bothered us though. In our professional lives, this work became almost a passion. It was the most important thing we could be doing at the time. There were hours and days when we spent writing, talking, and researching when there wasn't any real reason for it other than we were interested in learning, and wanted to do the best job we could. And often while people were out having holidays, we were generating, refining, and polishing ideas and materials. I don't think that other staff appreciated our intensity.
To be fair, not too many teachers have the time or the energy, even if they have the interest, to commit themselves to this kind of intense effort, and some might say their effort was obsessive.

"Is it important?" I asked Pat.

Yes, it's terrifically important because when you're beginning anything new, you're sort of putting everything on the line, and it's nice to have a person to support you when you're doing that. If you're all by yourself, it can be a little intimidating because nobody else is there to share your ideas and to support what it is you're doing and just to work with, just so you wouldn't feel so isolated.

"Were you atypical?" I inquired.

Well, I think teachers talk with teachers. I mean, there's no question that teachers talk about classroom experiences with other teachers. Oftentimes, though, it's not so much about methodology; it's more about clientele. One teacher will say, "I've got a real so and so in my classroom, Sammy X, and he said this, and he didn't do this, and he skipped out, and he did this and this and this." And the other teacher will say, "Yes, I taught that kid last year, and he was always getting into trouble because he did this, and that, and the other thing," and so the two teachers can commiserate on the student. I really don't know how many teachers exchange methodologies.

Jim had indicated to me in my conversation with him earlier that there seemed to be a norm of privacy among many of their peers that dictated how teachers professionally interacted with their colleagues:

Rarely did teachers visit colleagues' classes or engage in
serious conversations about curriculum and pedagogy. Our collaboration engaged us in important collegial interaction. I think you're probably going to be more impressed with someone who is willing to share and develop ideas, I guess someone who is basically saying they have respect for what you are thinking, and probably the way you are evolving as a person, as a teacher. And there wasn't a great deal of that around. There were formal, professional kinds of things, discussions, and meetings, but I think we had our own kind of situation. We were support systems for each other. Our discussions evolved direction regarding the designing of curriculum and activities, but more importantly, presented us both with opportunities for researching, reflection, and refinement of our own understandings. Looking back, I now see that we were involved in a form of action research, using our research as a basis for our own development and our teaching.

Jim's perceptions of his staff and his own situation, along with the importance of Pat's and Jim's collaboration, are reflected in the work of Giroux (1986) who informs us that at the present time, teachers are "generally isolated in cellular structures" with "few opportunities to teach with others," and labour "under organizational constraints and ideological conditions that leave them little room for collective work and critical pursuits" (p. 11). Giroux explains that "[t]eachers need to operate within conditions that will allow them to reflect, read, share their work with others, produce curriculum materials, and publish their achievements
within and outside of their local schools" (p. 11).

Although Pat had been involved in discussion, reflection, classroom experimentation, and production of materials, until he started reading professional literature, he had no theoretical knowledge upon which to base his work, but once he began reading, the validation and the new ideas the reading provided started him on a constructivist course from which there was no turning back. He was moving into a new paradigm, and Moffett was his mentor.

Probably the biggest influence in my teaching was reading Moffett and Wagner's *Student-centered language arts and reading, K -13: A handbook for teachers* [1976]. There were a number of copies at the school board office, and a couple of people suggested that all English teachers, or all teachers, perhaps, should read this book, and I really hadn't given it too much thought, but I took one home. I was addicted after I'd read about three pages, and just kept reading and reading and reading, and thinking, "This is so obvious, it's no natural, it's so reasonable both for students and for teachers". And so I read on anxiously, and by the end of about the twenty-first page, I was a student-centerest, and was anxious to get into the classroom to try out some of these ideas. And when they actually worked, I was interested in learning more, and then sort of taking another person's ideas, like Moffett's, and providing a personal spin to them, and being ready to talk about them with Jim. I realized that this was so sensible that I couldn't see any other way of doing anything. It just made sense.

For example, in *Student-centered language arts and reading, K -13* [Moffett and Wagner, 1976], the authors wrote that all marks of punctuation were just symbols to the
reader as to how the writer wanted something read. The authors explained that when we read writing aloud, there are some inflectional changes that happen when a mark of punctuation is used. For example, I remember this one quite clearly, when a sentence stops, as indicated by a period, the voice experiences a falling inflection and a pause. I remember thinking about this, and thinking, "Of course, it does. That's exactly what the voice does when you come to a period". And I remember listening to sentences in my head as I was reading, and realizing that every time I came upon a period, I would have a falling inflection and a pause. And so I began working with students who were having serious problems with end punctuation, and pointing out to them that a sentence ended with a falling inflection and a pause, and it also occurred to me that oftentimes students would create comma splices because they would hear their voice as they were proofing, and they would mix up commas and periods. They thought that there had to be a mark of punctuation because there was a change in the way they were reading something, but they mistook, repeatedly, the comma for the period, of course, creating a comma splice. It took a while to explain this to classes, and mostly I worked with individuals, but I'd say to them, "You know, this is probably the smartest error you're ever going to make. You know that there's some mark of punctuation. You're just not sure which one it is. Why don't you read this aloud to me?" And they would, and they wouldn't differentiate. The inflection wouldn't fall very greatly where they'd placed a comma, and they'd be confused. I found a fair amount of success getting kids to read aloud when they were proofreading their assignments, and they found it quite a bit easier and a lot more helpful, so it wasn't that difficult to get kids to punctuate properly. It just seemed to work. The great error, the scourge of every English teacher's existence, is, of course, the comma splice. But it is possible to provide a sensible and working methodology for students to help themselves to get over the problem.

Until I began reading Moffett's work, I didn't know that
you could teach in any other way, so when I found out that there was a different way to teach and tried it, and realized that it was probably much more successful than the traditional method of instruction, I was intrigued. I just wanted to keep doing it to see what kind of results I'd get. So I did, and I was very happy with the results.

And while there wasn't a Jim anymore because I had changed schools, there was an Audrey, and a couple of other people in the department, and Audrey was a person with whom I could talk about things and she, too, would like to experiment with things, and she did, and we'd talk about it. And there was Dave Wilson.

Dave Wilson was and is a major influence on my teaching. Dave seemed to be on top of current methodology, and because he was, and because he believed in it so well, and because he explained it so well, and because when I tried it, it actually worked, it wasn't Moffett anymore; it was the gospel according to Wilson. And I read what he gave me to read, and tried out the ideas, and found a great deal of success with them.

Dave was really involved with the school system because he was a professor in the College of Education. He would be in the schools because of his involvement with interns, but I'm sure he was also looking and watching, investigating teaching styles, and things like that. I really don't know what he was doing, but I'd seen him many times and had been introduced to him, and became more involved with him when he called at the school and asked if I could make a little time to go to Toronto in the summer to get involved in writing a book, and I think my voice must have changed when I said "Sure". From then on, Dave and I always worked quite closely, and we'd discuss a number of things.

While Pat wasn't necessarily dissatisfied with his teaching, and wasn't desperately looking for a better way as there wasn't a
great necessity for him to find a better way, still he seemed aware that kids weren't learning as much as they could, was intrigued when he learned that there were, in fact, other ways to teach, and welcomed alternatives that seemed to enhance student learning. Interestingly, these alternatives seemed to present themselves serendipitously. The most significant aspects of his professional growth and development did not occur as a result of externally implemented innovative strategies, but as part of a conscientious, ongoing professional experience. Jim's comment to me, "We developed some fundamental principles, and I'm not really sure where those came from; they didn't come from my university classes," presents a question about the effectiveness and significance of traditional professional development practices and the presentation of theory in preservice university classes.

Not surprisingly, Pat's classroom teaching practices are often existential experiences for both himself and his students as, at times, he constructs his lessons on an ongoing basis out of the experiences that occur in the classroom in order to accommodate the needs of students in the context of the classroom. What he is doing on these occasions is supported by Lester and Onore (1990) who report that "[t]eaching is a response to learners and to the learning
situation, rather than a separate act". Lester and Onore's (1990) perceptions of a democratic and constructivist classroom include an acknowledgement that "each human being brings a whole range of experiences, feelings, beliefs, knowledge, and assumptions to bear in every learning situation that influences what, how, and why they learn" (p. 23).

Dave Wilson relates his recollections of a visit with Pat at the school where Pat was teaching which is illustrative of Pat's ability to do this:

I can always remember being in awe of the easy relationship he had with kids, and I recall one time meeting Pat in the staffroom. He was still coaching basketball, and we walked through this back hall with all these young fellows there, and Pat met everyone of them with a smile and a comment about playing basketball the previous night all the way from the staffroom to his classroom. He didn't just move through the halls; he lived through the halls. And the kids were part of that life. And then he went into his classroom, and he had the same kind of reaction with kids in the classroom where he was doing what ten years later Judith Langer was able to enunciate in her awareness of what good English teachers were doing, and that is going in and rather than predetermining what was going to happen, you lived with these kids, and you had to be skillful enough to work with, to shape, to manage all the experiences that the kids would throw at you. I'm sure that at that time Pat didn't know response theory, he didn't know Louise Rosenblatt, he didn't know transmission or transaction teaching. He was just Pat.

One class I visited was a grade eleven English class. They had been assigned a short story, and Pat discovered one
young woman who was making a statement about something that earlier a student in the school had done or said to her. And I remember just how skillfully Pat went from the conversation with the student to involving a group, to involving the class, to moving it into a discussion of the story. It was really just masterful.

Pat explained to me that at the time that Dave observed this class, his instruction was still primarily whole class, punctuated by small group and individual instruction, and that his instruction now is almost exclusively small group and individual, and, infrequently, whole class. For example, construction of a lesson might begin with Pat drawing attention to a particular article of clothing a student is wearing, such as an unusual-looking sweater, and asking a student or a small group of students to explain why they think a particular character from the story they are reading would or would not wear this kind of sweater, and construction of the lesson would emerge from that discussion and grow from there. Or the construction of a lesson might emerge from the shared experiences of a student, such as in the example Dave provided, but the lesson would be constructed on an individual or small group basis rather than with the whole class.

Disenchanted with individualized instruction because it discarded the social aspects of learning, Pat for a time, reverted to
whole class instruction as a way of involving the whole class in interactive activities, but after re-reading Moffett and Wagner (1976), reading other works by Moffett (1968a; 1968b) and reading, for the first time, Britton (1970; 1982), he incorporated the best aspects of individualized instruction into a social context of small group learning.

Pat's ability to construct or restructure lessons based on the experiences in the classroom, as illustrated in this example, clearly demonstrates a development in his teaching from the constrained direct instruction with which he began as a first year teacher. The ability to do this, however, may require special qualities that may be "a function of your basic character", something that you possess naturally, as both students and teachers to whom I spoke repeatedly commented. Perhaps such a unique combination of qualities might include, among other things, a lot of intuition, tremendous flexibility, a high tolerance for ambiguity, incredible listening and observation skills, creativity and imagination, an ability to instantly generate hypotheses, superior people skills, disinterest in power and control, and an existential mentality that allows you to "go with the flow". This is an incredible blend of qualities that perhaps few people possess, and I am haunted by Pat's words:
"Welcome to high school English."

While a teacher's personal practical knowledge evolves over time, and is shaped by many experiences, it is reasonable to assume that teachers' knowledge, interests, concerns, competencies and style change throughout their careers. And so an understanding of the development of Pat's personal and professional knowledge over the course of his career makes sense. Butt, Raymond, McCue, and Yamagisha (1992) observe that "[h]ow teachers' thoughts, actions, knowledge have evolved and changed throughout their personal and professional lives will help us to understand how classrooms have come to be the way they are and how they might become otherwise" (p. 57). Thus, a phenomenological perspective of this nature would reveal the teacher as a learner and classroom change as a process, which is, in fact, what Pat's story is telling us. In his classroom laboratory, Pat is a learner, and change is, indeed, a process. In this process, we see Pat evolving from a direct instruction teacher to a constructivist teacher who is able to flexibly and creatively incorporate ongoing experiences in the classroom into the negotiation and construction of lessons with small groups and individuals.

Indeed, negotiation has become a very important aspect of
Pat's classes, where he negotiates with his students the activities they do, and sometimes, within a prescribed range, the literature they use. I was interested to learn that Pat also negotiates, at the beginning of the term, the manner of instruction he uses in the classroom. Pat explained that he doesn't use terms like constructivism or direct instruction, but describes to the students different ways that they could learn in the classroom, and asks them for their preferences. Students almost always choose the constructivist way, but on occasion, some students may choose a more traditional form of instruction for a particular selection of literature or unit of study.

Boomer (1992) explains that it is important, when negotiating, for teachers to talk openly about how new information may be learned, and about constraints such as obligatory curriculum. He comments on the meaning of negotiating the curriculum:

Negotiating the curriculum means deliberately planning to invite students to contribute, and to modify, the educational program, so that they will have a real investment both in the learning journey and the outcomes. Negotiation also means making explicit, and then confronting, the constraints of the learning context and the non-negotiable requirements that apply. (p. 14)

Cook (1992) explains why negotiating the curriculum with
students is important:

Learners will work harder and better, and what they learn will mean more to them if they are discovering their own ideas, asking their own questions, and fighting hard to answer them for themselves. They must be educational decision makers. Out of negotiation comes a sense of ownership in learners for the work they are to do, and therefore a commitment to it. (p.16)

Smith (1993) concludes, after incorporating negotiated curriculum into an interdisciplinary course she team-taught, that negotiating curriculum means "custom-building classes every day to fit the individuals who attend" (pp. 1-4), and that through negotiating curriculum, the students accept more responsibility for their learning.

The intriguing thing about Pat's development as a constructivist teacher is that throughout most of this process of development, he operated without theoretical knowledge. He and Jim, and then later himself, simply conscientiously engaged in classroom practices trying to find what would work best with their particular students, a type of reflective practice that we, and they, now know as action research. While reflection occurs constantly as part of the ongoing daily practice of teachers, "reflective practitioners", according to Schon (1983), in a process which he
terms "theory in action", bring into consciousness, and reflect upon, routine actions in their practice that normally go unacknowledged and uninspected. And so the knowledge that is embedded in their actions goes unrecognized, and the possibility for it to be transformed or reconstructed does not exist. It seems that a teacher's tacit knowledge must be brought to awareness, to be made explicit, for that teacher to know what she or he knows, and then to change it. And so reflection, while it didn't provide theoretical labels for Pat at this time, may have provided him with the knowledge that he needed to continue developing and evolving, a constructivist process in itself.

It seems that those early years were apprenticeship years, and while Pat's experimental activities in the classroom at that time were exploratory, they evolved into a constructivist philosophy that is supported by the work of other classroom researchers like himself, perhaps also considered nontraditional. Nancie Atwell's individualized writing programmes and student conferences (Atwell, 1987), Lucy Calkins' work on small groups, conferences, and mini lessons (Calkins, 1986; Calkins, 1991), Moffett's student-centered curriculum (Moffett, 1968a; Moffett, 1968b; Moffett and Wagner, 1976; Moffett and Wagner, 1992), and Appleby's (1993) and Langer's
The mini lessons to which Pat refers are akin to the mini lessons devised by Calkins and used in conjunction with her writing workshops (Calkins, 1986). Like Pat, who uses the mini lessons to address common problems that either a few students or the whole class are experiencing, Calkins addresses issues that arise in previous workshops or in students' writing, and knowledge of both the teacher and students may be shared in a three to ten minute lesson (Calkins, 1986, pp. 163-193). While Calkins suggests that "[i]deally, both teachers and students should bring all of their skills, wisdom, and energy to the teaching-learning transaction" (p. 165), the mini lesson is often conducted in a direct instruction format.

In commenting on the many ways in which teachers and students are able to benefit from individualized instruction, Pat identifies what Lucy Calkins considers to be a crucially important aspect of a teacher's job: being a researcher of kids -- watching, listening, and asking questions of students in order to learn about them and about how they learn so that teachers may be more helpful
to students. Calkins (1986) notes that there is a thin line between research and teaching. At the same time that we teach children, they also teach us because they show us how they learn; we just have to carefully watch them and listen to them, like case-study subjects (Calkins, 1986). This is not unlike Yetta Goodman's concept of "kidwatching" (Goodman, 1991), so named "to highlight its ongoing and interpretive nature within the classroom setting" (Goodman, 1991, p. 507) and about which Goodman comments:

As teachers are working directly with the students, they often step back to observe students and, in such moments of professional observation, make evaluative judgements about the students that inform instructional planning. . . . Kidwatching may be one of the major forces that influences teachers' reflective thinking about evaluation of students and the planning of instructional activities in the classroom. (Goodman, 1991, pp. 507-508)

This kind of watching and listening may have contributed to Pat's insights concerning the shortcomings of individualized instruction when it is slavishly practised in a prescribed, behaviouristic way, and the rich possibilities of individualized instruction when the learning context as a whole, including the presence of other learners, is considered.

It may also have contributed to Pat's ability to do what he does
in the classroom, using what the classroom experience provides to help him create contextualized and meaningful lessons for small groups and individuals. This thought is perhaps illustrated by Dave Wilson, whose work with Pat prompted him to make the following observation:

He has a great interest in teaching, and that interest is rooted in his understanding of and his relationship with kids, and so what he does, what he says, what he writes comes out of that kind of awareness of what is there for him. He listens to, and reacts to what is happening in the class, and thinking on his feet, he creates what he does.

While Pat, in relating his discovery of Moffett and Wagner's *Student-centered language arts and reading, K -13* (1976), speaks generally of becoming a "student-centerest", and provides only one example to illustrate Moffett's and Wagner's influence on him (vocalization in punctuation), when we look at the book, and subsequent editions of it, including the 1992 fourth edition publication, and when we reflect on all that we know about Pat's teaching, we can see a far more pervasive influence of Moffett and Wagner in Pat's teaching.

Much of what Moffett and Wagner emphasize in their student-centered language arts curriculum (Moffett, 1968a; Moffett and
Wagner, 1976; Moffett and Wagner, 1992) is contained in Pat's programme as it has been revealed in the past four chapters of this book including, in addition to a general student-centered approach, a literature-centered, integrated, non segmented approach to language; reader response; group learning; an emphasis on process; peer editing; conferencing; student choice about learning activities and materials; and what Moffett and Wagner refer to as "students building their own knowledge structures" (Moffett and Wagner, 1992, p. 2), better known to us as 'student as meaning-maker' or constructivism.

Of course, as Pat has related, he put his own "personal spin" on Moffett and Wagner's ideas as he experimented with them in his classroom, and probably integrated those ideas with all that he was learning from other sources, as well, including the ongoing classroom experience, to achieve a unique classroom situation. Early in Pat's career, his colleague, Martin, had advised him and Jim to regard their classrooms as a laboratory. His classroom had, indeed, become a laboratory, and he a teacher/researcher.

I asked Martin to explain the advice he had given Pat and Jim about regarding their classrooms as a laboratory, advice which has become a way of life for Pat in his classroom:
It's just the way you keep yourself from falling into a ritual. You work actively to prevent yourself from becoming too self-satisfied, too complacent, too set in your ways. We tried to establish an environment in which you don't fossilize. If you recognize the contradiction, and the dynamic that results from that contradiction, in having to teach a curriculum and maintain standards, and at the same time to meet the needs of unique individuals, to always serve the individuals as well as you can, then your classroom can't be anything but a laboratory. It can't be anything but a series of experiments.

As Pat continued to read, and to find success in his experimentation with new ideas, his belief in what he was doing increased, along with his understanding of the theory upon which this experimentation was based: the overriding philosophy of constructivism.
Chapter Five

Teaching Out Of Plumb

The reading that Pat was doing, and the textbook writing project that he had undertaken, eventually led him to reader response theory. Reader response theory revolutionized his literature instruction programme, which is presently almost exclusively an integrated reader response programme. In the journal entry in this chapter, Pat describes the development of his interest in reader response theory, and discusses how he has incorporated this constructivist theory into his literature instruction programme, and why he believes it is a superior way to teach literature.

Steven, a student in Pat's senior English class, made the following comment about his experience in Pat's response-centered class:

You're no longer sitting in the classroom just learning Shakespeare; you're interacting with Shakespeare. Not only is Shakespeare rubbing off on you, you're rubbing off on Shakespeare, and because you're clearly separate individuals from anyone else that's gone before you, the interaction you have with these works is unlike what anyone else has or has had.
From Pat's Journal

When I first started teaching, for about the first two years, in addition to wanting just to survive, I began to feel that literature and language and teaching English were so imprecise and so everywhere that it was difficult to get a handle on them. One of the major factors in pushing me towards individualization at that time was that I believed that skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening could all be segmented and could be given to students bits at a time and, therefore, instruction could be individualized. My view at the time was quite positivistic, I now realize, and it took some time to get away from that, and to feel comfortable with the assertion that teaching English is sloppy. It's really messy. There aren't any square corners, and everything at times can appear out of plumb, which is what intrigues me about teaching English now, but I had to go through a certain period of just coming to terms with that so that I could accept that teaching English is not necessarily segmentable.

My graduate course work in Exceptional Education was kind of a paradox. In one class we'd be arguing vehemently that you couldn't segment reading, that you had to teach the whole skill, but in the next class, we were asked to segment our diagnosis of a student, so that we could perform the proper machinations on her or him, and it seemed to me that the whole reading idea was terrific, but the medical model was contravening the sensibility of the whole. And now in teaching
literature, I use a personal reader response approach where subskills are integrated into the response activities, and practised, managed and developed in context.

I was introduced to reader response by Dave Wilson when we began writing a textbook series. I didn’t really understand it at first, but then when I began to understand it, it just made good, natural, logical sense, and it seemed as if I’d been around it forever. It didn’t really seem to be that much of a big deal. And it wasn’t until later that I realized why. When Jim and I were working on an individualized program, we thought it would be important to provide a number of different writing, reading, speaking and listening activities to kids so that they could, in fact, design their own program, and so one of the things that we became involved in was constructing a large set of activity cards, colour coded by Bloom’s taxonomy, believe it or not, and we designed the activities so as to involve the student in the process. What each activity does is present a situation or scenario, but it also involves the student in the scenario. For example, it might say ‘you are’ addressing the student specifically. I don’t know how Jim and I came to that, but we knew that that kind of writing activity phrased in that way worked. Kids were interested in stuff like that, and so every activity we wrote involved the student. ‘You are the mechanic’, or ‘As a mechanic of expensive foreign cars, you decide to write a letter to the head office’. We always involved the student in much the same way that reader response does. This may have been mid Moffett, I don’t know. They didn’t seem to be connected. It’s funny that all these things that look connected now, and when you read authority
on them a connectedness of these ideas is suggested, didn't really seem to be part of the same package back then, because we didn't know. We were just stumbling along and trying new things. At any rate, I don't know how we came upon this sociolinguistic response package. Once again, it was another accident. We came up with this prototype, this template, with which to create all these writing, speaking, reading, and listening assignments. In retrospect, these activities had all the earmarks of reader response questions, except they were sociolinguistic in nature, and so when I was introduced to reader response, it didn't seem strange. It all seemed familiar. I believed that a student's individuality, perspective, biases, prejudices, experiences, and everything else had to be included in whatever he or she did in the classroom. And so reader response seemed like a natural way to go.

What many teachers do, and what I used to do but don't anymore, is select a piece of literature, or probably somebody else has selected it before them and it's just handed down as what you teach in grade ten, eleven or twelve. And then the teacher reads that piece of literature, and comes to an understanding or an interpretation of it, not unlikely to have come from a colleague or a friend, or, in many cases, from Cole's notes. And then the task in the classroom really is to lead students through the forest of confusion, to the only correct interpretation, the teacher's. And so the questions that are presented in class lead directly to the interpretation. The questions that are photocopied and passed out to the class all lead to the same conclusion. It's ludicrous to think in that way because there are thirty to forty different
interpretations in a classroom of the piece of literature, as many interpretations as there are readers, the teacher included as one of the readers. It seems to make more sense to allow the students to follow their own noses in coming to an interpretation of literature, sharing it, perhaps in the process refining it, or editing some things out because they realize, 'Yeah, this isn't a good interpretation'. In this way, a class of students can develop a mutually satisfying interpretation of a text, and then finally come to a shared interpretation where they can comfortably live. Of course, this is all reader response, or personal response to literature, but it seems to make the most sense.

My literature programme begins with a selection of themes negotiated with students. I tell them what a theme is, and, as a whole class, they come up with a variety of themes. The class directs somebody at the board to write down certain themes like crime, comedy, friendship, love, various themes. From there, we set about to prioritize them, that is, which we would like to work with first, second, and so on. My task after that is to locate literature which will develop each theme, and so what the programme becomes then is finding literature with which we can deal in an interesting and, hopefully, profitable way.

The job of the teacher, then, is first of all, to become familiar with the students in her or his class, and after that, be very familiar with the content. I like to find out what kids bring to a new learning experience, and often times by just mentioning a single word, and having them respond to that word, I'll find out
exactly how much they know. For example, under the theme of crime, and with the story, 'Lamb to the Slaughter', 'murder weapon' could be used to spark ideas in kids. It's possible that the content can be affected by the kinds of students you have in your class. You begin to construct an anthology of pieces around that particular class. As you're getting to know your class better, then you can just revise the anthology, and then the trick becomes to conceive of and implement a series of activities each of which leads students to some kind of learning. The interesting thing about teaching this way is you're constantly watching, you're constantly looking at your students and their responses, and you're constantly searching for pieces of literature that would best suit your students both educationally and motivationally.

After a piece of literature has been read, I ask kids to make a response of some sort. What's happening is that they're writing all the time, but not writing always to be analyzed and corrected and a mark given to it. It's just to give them practice writing. Probably one of the healthiest parts of the expressive response programme is that I encourage my students to craft their own responses by teaching them the writing variables as articulated by John Parker in his book, The writer's workshop [1990, 1982]. Parker says that any expressive activity has several variables -- topic, situation, speaker, audience, purpose, and form [1990, pp. 14-19; 1982, pp. 202-209]. And I suggest to students that form could be a written, spoken or visual response, so a response could be anything from a letter to
an address to the troops to a poster. So you've got writing and speaking going on between the reading activities, and at the end you have a catch all assignment in which kids have to use everything that they've picked up, perhaps, from that unit and put it into practice. The critical point is that we English teachers provide a linguistically conducive environment which encourages new language ideas, sponsors them, and, finally, celebrates them. Kids should feel comfortable with language and risk-taking.

I've stopped using teacher generated worksheet questions completely now, but instead use extended response activities. Kids work on a reading activity that forms some sort of reader response that personally involves them in an interaction with the story. For example, I gave the kids the poem, 'The Execution', and divided them into groups of four, and in each group of four I asked the students to provide a dramatic oral reading of the poem rendered in a way that they think will help others to understand the poem better. On other assignments, I've used extended conversation between character A and character B, or a written letter of confession, or a spoken eulogy for the heroine in one of the stories. It obviates the need for questions because they are, in fact, responding to the piece of literature, but in more of an extended response.

I think that these activities work a lot better than a common set of teacher devised questions because often students are working with at least one other person which requires that they talk about the selection, and I think that's as important as
anything else. Also, it's not a fragmented response as questions tend to produce, but a resonably intelligent, long and extended response which enables kids to get to the heart of the matter and to do something important.

I try to get kids to vary the kind of response that they produce in the extended response part so that it's not always writing, maybe first writing, then speaking, then visual, and then going back to writing so that they try a number of modes of communication.

Once students have crafted their own writing response activities, I usually give them some class time to dash down a first draft. After the regulation wait, I use an activity that I learned from Dave and modified for my own students. I ask students not to put their names on their papers but to identify themselves with a four digit number. Then I ask students to form groups of four or five, and their task is to read all of the responses that come to them and to select the best of each pass, so by the time the papers have gone all the way around the room, they've been read by everybody, and everybody's had a chance to support which one they feel is best.

After that, on a matrix indicating groups and passes, students offer the code number of the assignment that they had selected on a particular pass and, by this declension, the one liked the best is picked by number. I always invite the creator of the response to present that particular product to the rest of the class, and as he or she does present that particular item, I ask the class to select one thing that they felt that particular response did well, and I encourage them not to just say it was interesting
because it was good, but to come up with definite criteria, very specific things, for example, 'I liked the active verbs in the piece'; or 'The girl used an interesting contrast of colour here'; or whatever. And those responses to the criteria of the best piece are jotted down on the board, and discussed and added to their list of other criteria which they've developed in previous assignments. The next phase is the revising phase, and I ask students to work in pairs to pick any two responses, and try to change the papers to improve them so that they meet the criteria that the class has set for it. Once that's been taken back, students, of course, are encouraged to produce a final product for a mark, although I'm not the only audience who marks. I've had students evaluate themselves, of course, and small groups of students evaluate specific pieces.

What I like about a personal reader response approach is that, like a sociolinguistic approach to speaking and listening, it, first of all, integrates and contextualizes the relevant skills, and secondly, it involves the student, along with the idiosyncrasies of that student, in that way empowering the student. I think in a response programme, you have to provide for experiences that will entice students to respond, experiences to which they will like to respond, but, in effect, reader response allows students to teach themselves.

While Pat's discussion in this journal entry focuses on his reader response approach to teaching literature, when I read the
entry, it was the student-centeredness of Pat's classroom, and his process oriented approach, that once again became most apparent to me, a reader response approach, of course, being student-centered.

In his journal entry, Pat has rejected the idea that all students should necessarily come to the same interpretation of a selection of literature, that single interpretation being the teacher's, or Cole's, or someone else's. He prefers instead a reader response approach that allows students to explore variant interpretations, his own interpretation being only one possible interpretation in the classroom.

As was noted in Chapter One, in Rosenblatt's (1938) theory of personal response, each reader, armed with a personal set of biases, attitudes, perceptions, and, in general, different life experiences, "transacts" with a work of literature creating a new and unique "text" with each reading. Holland (1975), taking a more extreme stance, contends that each reader, "in effect, re-creates the work in terms of his [or her] own identity theme" and interprets the "new experience" in such a way as "to cast it in terms of [his or her] characteristic ways of coping with the world" (pp. 124-126). A response-centered approach, by definition alone, would place students in a central position in the classroom.
Recognizing the significance of the unique experiences that each reader brings to the reading of a selection of literature, the teacher, in a response-centered approach, seeks to explore the transaction between the student and the text to promote or extract a meaningful response (Rosenblatt, 1978). Again, of practical necessity, this places the student in a central position in the classroom, since exploring this transaction seems unlikely to occur unless the teacher is willing to relinquish the traditional position of sole authority. In this way, the teacher legitimates the unique experiences that each member of the class brings to the reading rather than just those experiences the teacher brings. It appears from Pat's comments in his journal that he has been able to do this. The resulting perception and effect in the classroom are explained by Don, an intern in Pat's classroom:

It was that approach of not being an expert with a body of knowledge to impart that showed right off the top. There is a brightness that comes into the room when the students recognize that this is a legitimate discussion nobody knows the answer to. It isn't a treasure hunting thing where they are trying to guess what is in Pat's head. . . .

The first time I sat in Pat's class, he was doing the Wif of Bath, and he asked, "If the Wif of Bath were a meal, what meal would she be?" I asked Pat later why he asked that and he said, "Well, you have to start where they are." And they got in a good discussion about the Wif of Bath in a way that they never would
have if he hadn't made that connection.

As Pat's student, Steven, explained "not only does he come down from the pedestal, but he hands over the reins."

Joe, also a student in Pat's class, commented, "Mr. Gray kind of makes everyone feel like they're the teacher," an interesting comment in view of the fact that Pat has indicated in his journal that, "in effect, reader response allows students to teach themselves."

In allowing students to "follow their own noses in coming to an interpretation of literature", sharing their interpretations, developing a "mutually satisfying interpretation", and creating extended response assignments of a written, spoken or visual nature, it would appear that Pat has constructed the kind of response-centered classroom that Purves, Rogers, and Soter (1990) articulate. Purves et al. (1990) tell us that in a response-centered classroom, students are explorers of literature, respond to the literature in a variety of ways, and play a very active and constructivist role, often being expected to respond without undue teacher direction, as individuals, in pairs or small groups, and at times as a whole class. Pat's classroom is exemplary of this description.
Purves et al. (1990) suggest that in a response-centered classroom, students engage in "exploratory talk" or "response-centered interpretive communities" where ideas are only half-formed and can be revised based on what other people say. Talk in these communities more closely reflects how people really read and talk about literature outside school (Purves, Rogers, & Soter, 1990). This is expressive of Langer and Applebee's (1987) view. They suggest that in a process approach to learning, students incorporate prior knowledge, and develop ways to examine their own interpretations and abilities to summon evidence for their beliefs. By using a process approach, teachers create an environment "where ideas are allowed to develop in the learner's own mind through a series of related supportive activities; where taking risks and generating hypotheses are encouraged by postponing evaluation; and where new skills are learned in supportive instructional contexts" (Langer and Applebee, 1987, p. 69).

This exploratory talk may be followed by more indepth linguistic or nonlinguistic responses. Pat does this by having his students respond to a selection of literature in an extended response activity, obviating the need for teacher-generated worksheet questions. This process approach which Pat has developed is
supported by Hynds (1992). She comments that "teachers who confine student responses to short answer questions about literary works, as opposed to more open-ended student-centered instructional methods, inevitably limit and restrict what their students learn about literature" (p. 83).

In the classroom of Purves et al. (1990), students would also participate, to some extent, in the selection of the literature read in the classroom, helping to flesh out prescribed themes. In Pat's classroom, as indicated in his journal, although Pat selects a range of literature, students do participate in the selection of the themes and sometimes select literature from within the predetermined range.

Pat explains that when he uses a response approach, students are writing all the time, but not always writing to be analyzed, corrected, and evaluated. This is precisely the kind of learning to which Langer and Applebee (1987) refer when they say that in a process approach to learning, "taking risks and generating hypotheses are encouraged by postponing evaluation" (p.69). The response-based approach is very risky, as Purves, Rogers, and Soter (1995) warn, because you don't know what is going to happen, but when you "come out from behind the shelter of certainty and
teachers' guides, "it's fun" (pp.87-88).

This reader response approach, combined with Pat's stated effort to "become familiar with the students" in his class, and to discover "what kids bring to a learning experience" helps to create a comfortable student-centered learning environment where students appear to enjoy learning. The fact that they are learning isn't always immediately evident, however, as indicated by a comment made by Pat's student, Melissa, who says, "You're learning when you don't even know you're learning, and you're having a good time at the same time." Yet a comment by Pat's student, Steven, reveals that students can appreciate and understand the kind of learning that occurs in an interactive, reader response situation:

The sign he has on his wall, "None of us is as smart as all of us", really sums it up. By working in groups, working with others, not only do you get perspectives on the material, but you're also getting an interpretation that might be closer to your own culture and time of your class. At the same time, it can also have variations on the interpretation, and so it's very constructive.

As Pat's story in this chapter suggests, it appears that his practice has preceded his theory. He has realized that the reader response theory he used later in his career is the same theory that informed the sociolinguistic response activities he used earlier in
his career.

From, by his own admission, a quite positivistic view of teaching English, eager to latch on to "a way that [he] could control [his] subject area," Pat grew to become not only comfortable with but intrigued by a subject area that "is really messy." Thus he was able to make the paradigm shift that, it seems, is necessary to be a constructivist teacher. The idea that our beliefs about teaching and learning affect our classroom practice, as well as our ability to change our practice, is expounded by Lester and Onore (1990) who solicit support from Kelly's personal construct theory.

Lester and Onore (1990) hypothesize that teachers' personal construct systems account for the kind and extent of change that they are able to make. That is, they view their situation through the lens of their personal construct system; their constructs of teaching and learning account for how they think and act as teachers. Specifically, teachers' definitions of the nature of knowledge (what knowledge is, how people acquire it, and how they determine whether knowledge has been acquired) account for the degree and kind of change teachers will experience.

Further to what was said about personal constructs in Chapter One, personal construct theory, devised by Kelly in 1955, proposes
that, like scientists, we continually hypothesize about experience, formulating expectations based on a template or pattern of reality we have created through experience and reflection. We make predictions about the way things are, test these predictions against what actually happens, and alter our hypotheses with respect to what happens. In other words, we come to believe something through accumulated experience, and then interpret experience according to that belief. These hypotheses, or personal constructs, may be modified with new experiences, but some are continually reinforced and confirmed, until, over time, they may actually shape experiences. Yet when they were developing, experience molded them. Lester and Onore (1990) believe that this is the reason that beliefs and practices about schooling are so difficult to change. They suggest, then, that teachers need to examine the constructs that inform their decisions about teaching and learning in order for change to occur. In short, they suggest that only by changing our beliefs or constructs about teaching and learning are we able to change our practice.

They suggest that the core construct affecting a teacher's ability to teach in a transactional, constructivist way is the one that defines the nature of knowledge: teachers need to believe that
knowledge is constructed by human beings. And so, as Pat has apparently done, teachers would need to make a paradigm shift and change what they believe about knowledge in order to really change their teaching.

Lester and Onore (1990) propose that genuine learning or change comes not from disregarding all prior learning in order to relearn, but "from questioning or reassessing our existing beliefs about the world" (p. 41). Like Fosnot (1989) who recommends that preservice and inservice model constructivist strategies, Lester and Onore (1990) have suggested a very constructivist approach to effecting change: teachers need to make connections to what they already know. In Lester and Onore's words, "Change can occur through having experiences that present and represent alternative systems of beliefs and trying to find a place for new experiences to fit into already held beliefs" (p. 41).

Cuban (1986) also suggests that changing one's practice involves changing one's beliefs about teaching and learning. He offers the following advice to policy makers wishing to change classroom practice:

Teacher repertoires, both resilient and efficient, have been shaped by the crucible of experience and the culture of teaching. Policy makers need to understand that altering
pedagogy requires a change in what teachers believe. Getting professionals to unlearn in order to learn, while certainly not impossible, is closer in magnitude of difficulty to performing a double bypass heart operation than to hammering a nail. (p. 109)

Lester and Onore (1990) point out, however, that while having this core construct, the belief that knowledge is constructed, enables a teacher to explore and reconceptualize the implications concerning teaching and learning that result from holding a constructivist view of knowledge, the job of creating the means for acting on this belief in daily classroom life is still present. This job is often made difficult with all that impinges on it, for example, the existing school system and its policies, and the school culture.

A constructivist student-centered approach like Pat's places more focus on students learning than on teachers teaching, whereas an objectivist perspective tends to focus more on teaching. While Pat discusses in Chapter Two how he began to focus on how students learn, his discussions throughout these chapters reveal his development of an essentially constructivist view: knowing occurs by a process of construction by the knower. This view was perhaps present even during his early career, albeit unrecognized and
undeveloped. Lindfors (1984) advises that how we teach should originate from how students learn, and so Pat's constructivist teaching arises from his constructivist view of learning. He has developed this view over time through a process of experiences and reflection, a process that resulted from experimentation, interested observation, and a constant revision of his ideas, beliefs, and practice. In other words, he continually examined and transformed his own personal constructs about teaching and learning.

In Chapter Four, I discussed Pat's ability to observe and listen to his students and their experiences in the classroom which contributed to his ability to use a constructivist approach. Paradoxically, in his journal in this chapter, Pat discusses how a constructivist approach contributes to his ability to observe and listen in the classroom. Thus, the process is circular.

At this point in my interviews with Pat, I had acquired a better understanding of how he teaches and how he came to be a constructivist teacher. I was now interested in learning how he organizes and manages his constructivist classroom. In the next chapter, informed by a greater understanding of Pat's teaching and of constructivist theory, I describe my return visit to his classroom where, from my new perspective, I focus on organization and
management, and the way students are part of the structure of his classroom.
Chapter Six
Welcome To High School English

I returned to Pat's classroom to focus on the the management and organization of his class, on the kind of environment that is created in the classroom to facilitate constructivist teaching and learning, and on the students' role in this situation.

The most compelling perception of my visit was the democratic and student-centered nature of the classroom. Student empowerment and student autonomy were very obvious qualities. Whether empowerment and autonomy were goals or outcomes of Pat's constructivist arrangement, however, is not clear.

A comment by Steven, a student in Pat's class, is suggestive of the constructivist nature of the class -- independent, active, and interactive learners immersed in an experience that is unlike anything they've known before:

From the moment you come into the classroom, it's a different experience. It's not the typical experience most students have where you sit down and the teacher teaches. It's a very interactive experience. You become an active learner, and you also teach yourself.

On my return visit to Pat's classroom, he was teaching an enriched level grade nine class of over thirty students. On the front
board, a chart had been constructed with spaces to indicate writing variables to be chosen (speaker, audience, purpose and form). On a side board, due dates for current assignments were posted: Conversation, final draft copy due February 15; Characters in Collision, good copy due February 17. Bulletin boards displayed visuals abstractly depicting Shakespearean characters by colour, shape, size and arrangement of geometric designs, along with explanations for each.

Pat asked students to move their desks into small group configurations so that he could better manoeuvre his scooter among the desks. He charged one student volunteer with the task of orchestrating the move. After some initial uncertainty about where to move, the groups formed. The configurations looked like good learning situations.

As part of a student-selected theme of crime, they spent fifteen to twenty minutes completing the viewing of a video, "The Client". Following the video, Pat gave the students five minutes to respond in their learning logs to "The Client". Then he asked several students to share their responses. Responses were concise and specific with minimal explanation and discussion. Pat didn't encourage very extensive discussion of the learning log responses,
or ask students to elaborate, extend or explain their responses in any great depth. I was curious about this, and when I asked Pat about it later, he explained that their learning logs were a place for personal reflection and that opportunity for more extensive discussion and explanation would occur in subsequent activities.

Like Lucy Calkins, Pat has come to realize that first drafts involve writing for the purpose of learning. Such writing is full of sketches, lists, and fragments of ideas. When these notes are written in students' own learning logs, students perceive them as a vehicle to develop and record their ideas, rather than a series of exercises completed to meet the demands of the teacher (Calkins, 1986).

Pat later told me that he has been using learning logs a lot this year. After his students have read a story, he often asks them to write down the title and after the title, write down anything that they liked, that they didn't like, an opinion that they had, a memory that was evoked, a feeling that was evoked -- anything that would fit in the response side of the learning log. And sometimes before they read a story, or part way through a story, he asks them to make predictions about the story or the characters, which they then share and discuss with their learning group:
Following the learning log responses to "The Client", Pat asked students to assume the persona of one of the characters from the video (Mark or Reggie), and gave them six minutes and half a page to correspond with the other character, the character not assumed as a persona. He explained that they would be asked to share their responses with the class.

Most students worked quietly, while a few chatted occasionally, and a few talked continuously while they wrote. Their responses were surprisingly substantial for such a short writing time. A few students weren't prepared to respond and Pat didn't try to force them to make a response.

Pat then explained to his students the constants in writing -- speaker, audience, purpose, and form, and asked them, as a class, to fill in the example chart on the board. A student had been designated to do the chalk work filling in the chart on the board as the class made their decisions. Then, still on the student selected theme of crime, Pat asked students to fill in the chart individually in their notebooks to design their own assignment, to decide on the number of people they would need in their group if they chose to do a group assignment, and to have their plan prepared for the next day.

The next day, Pat sat on his scooter in the middle of the
classroom surrounded by about six clusters of students, the group configurations they had formed with their desks the day before. He had requested feedback from the students regarding the style of instruction used in the classroom, and various students had put up their hands and offered comments indicating their preference for his way of teaching to sitting in straight rows and copying notes from the board:

"You're not really learning the other way. All you're doing is memorizing things about characters, stuff like that."

"You don't bore us to death."

"It's interesting being in the class when you're interested in what we're doing."

Pat complimented the students on their talent and behaviour several times during the class. He explained quiet times and talk times, emphasizing the importance of talk among students in the classroom, but also the importance of differentiating when it was appropriate to talk and when it was appropriate to be quiet and listen.

Then Pat asked the students to share their ideas for the assignment they had begun to design the previous day. An example of one student's assignment variables was:
A due date for the new assignment was negotiated with the students. Pat suggested possibilities and asked the students for preferences. After this discussion, a student, whose appointed task it must have been for he did so without being asked, posted the agreed upon due date on the board.

Students then worked in their groups on their assignments while Pat scooted from group to group discussing with each group their assignment in more detail.

In the meantime, a student assistant filed materials on the shelves beside me, occasionally making unsolicited remarks to me as she worked:

"I was in Mr. Gray's class last year when I was in grade ten. I just loved his class. The semester went by so fast. I wanted each class to last two hours instead of one."

"He's really funny, too, kind of a twisted sense of humour."

"I did really well in English in his class. He'd always ask for
my opinion. He cared about what I thought. I have a whole bunch of books in my locker that he gave me to read, and he wants me to tell him what I think about them."

A second student assistant was in the photocopy room copying materials for use later in the week.

Students worked throughout the class in their groups, stopping talking whenever Pat needed to speak to the whole class. To get the attention of the whole class, Pat had entrusted to a couple of students the privilege of whistling shrilly through their teeth whenever he called upon one of them to do so.

Teachers who like a silent classroom would surely be uncomfortable in this kind of classroom situation, but the students were vibrant, enthusiastic and involved. Moreover, they had fun. I heard them chuckling and laughing as they suggested lines of dialogue to each other and tried them out.

No, they all weren't on task all the time. In one group I noticed two students discussing the information on the back of a paperback book one of them was reading. I saw a student in another group showing her make-up to her friend sitting next to her. But I also heard that same group making plans to meet in the morning before class started to do some additional work on their group assignment.
A number of days later, I returned to the classroom, the day, in fact, on which the students presented their assignments. In the meantime, they had had a couple of days of class time to work on their assignments, and a couple of days to do other things in class.

As each group or individual came up to present, Pat asked them to submit a sheet of paper on which they had indicated by what method they chose to be evaluated. Most groups had chosen to be given a group mark rather than individual marks.

Assignments ranged from conversations and dialogues to an internal monologue, a letter and its reply, and a court drama. Some students had chosen to do written assignments, one or two individually written, and one group written, to be submitted for marking rather than presented. Presentations were inventive, funny, and demonstrated considerable effort.

Later, I reflected on what I had seen and heard in Pat's classroom. During this visit, I had tried to focus on how Pat organized and managed his class as a possible factor to explain the success he appeared to have in creating a classroom environment that was conducive to constructivist learning, and an environment in which students enjoyed learning.

What was eminently obvious was the democratic nature of the
classroom. It is generally agreed (for example, Dewey, 1916; Dewey and Bentley, 1949; Lester and Onore, 1990; McNeil, 1986) that practices which typify democratic classrooms include: acknowledgement of the importance of human experience in learning; accommodation of small groups, individuals, and, occasionally, the whole class in instruction; creation of an environment that supports the active involvement of students in collaborative and empowering activities such as the exchange of ideas and opinions, and responsibility for making decisions about learning and for generating flexible rules; and teacher focus on students' learning rather than on teacher performance. Lester and Onore (1990) suggest that the attitudes, values, and beliefs of a teacher, specifically those related to the belief of student as constructor of knowledge, make it possible to create a democratic environment.

It was evident in Pat's classroom that constructivist beliefs were driving his creation of a classroom situation that appeared to meet the above criteria. Students were directly involved in all matters in the classroom that affected their being there as learners and as people. A major goal for Pat appeared to be student empowerment and autonomy. Rather than overtly controlling the students, Pat had structured the classroom so that students could
control their own environment.

The phrase "students actively involved in their own learning" has almost become a cliche, perhaps because it is said more than it is practised. In Pat's classroom, however, there is abundant evidence that it is a vital reality. Students had participated in the construction of the curriculum by negotiating the themes that would be the focus of the semester's work. And although Pat had then selected the literature for the themes; he informed me that sometimes he would give students choices within the range of literature he had selected. Students also participated in the design of their assignments, although the parameters for these were established by Pat, and they appeared to have some involvement in the way those assignments were evaluated.

Students seemed to have either ongoing responsibilities such as posting assignment notices on the board, and gaining the attention of the large group at Pat's request, or one time responsibilities meted out on a daily basis as the need arose, such as taking charge of arranging the desks into groups that left enough space around each one for Pat to navigate his scooter, or writing the class notes on the board.

Students were involved by Pat's frequent seeking of their
feedback and opinion, and by his supportive and reinforcing recognition of their abilities, efforts, and accomplishments. Requesting their opinion, no doubt, also empowers students as they are likely to feel that their opinions are worthy and needed, that they themselves are needed, that they are significant, and that their teacher cares about and trusts them. And all this may have some important effects on motivation.

Two senior student assistants on spares were present every day managing materials (photocopying, organizing, filing, changing bulletin board postings, and so on), and assisting the grade nine students as required. For example, on one of the days that I observed the class, an assistant took aside a student who had been absent for a few days and helped him collect all the materials he had missed. Sometimes assistance involves tutoring the students, as well. The work these student assistants do in Pat's classroom is voluntary; they receive no academic credit for their work in any sort of work-education programme.

Pat explained that he uses student assistants in part because of his illness, and in part because he believes that peer assistants can play an important role in the classroom for both students and teachers. In an article he published (Gray, 1980), he discusses how
peer assistants not only provide a trusted learning relationship with their peers, but also undertake a variety of secretarial and administrative tasks, thus freeing the teacher to spend more time with individual students.

Generally, it was evident that there was an expectation that students would be autonomous learners who would be responsible for themselves and each other's learning, that they were all in this together, but they all had something to contribute and they would all be looked after by their teacher. No harm would come to them. They would grow as learners and individuals, and they would have fun doing it. But they had to be involved, and this involvement empowered them.

Student participation and involvement were inherent in the structure of the class. Activities such as making decisions and choices about their own work, choosing the assignment they would do, and participating in conferences about their work automatically drew even the most reserved of students into the centre of involvement. Lester and Onore (1990) discovered during the course of a long-term, professional development project with teachers that "changing any one aspect of a classroom, in particular, how language is used, isn't possible without simultaneously changing who has
power and control over knowledge" (p. 5).

The effect of student participation and involvement in Pat's class on student motivation, empowerment and self-worth is made evident by students to whom I spoke who perceived that they were trusted, respected and cared for, and that what Mr. Gray does, he does for them as much as for himself. Melissa, a grade ten student, comments that "Mr. Gray didn't tell you what to do. He gave you choices and you got to pick what you wanted to do, so you're learning something you want to learn and so you're more interested." Joe, a twelfth grade student, makes a similar comment when he says that "Maybe it has to do with motivation. If students can get involved with their work, then obviously they'll learn more because they're interested in it. And that's what Mr. Gray does a lot." Joe explains further:

He actually cares about the students, and teaching is kind of his life. It seems like Mr. Gray puts a lot of time and effort into his teaching. It seems like his whole life is involved around teaching, and I feel guilty that I'm making him do all this work.

Reflecting on Mr. Gray's egalitarian stance vis a vis the class, Steven, grade twelve, notes the effect on the students:
When a teacher doesn't set himself up on a pedestal, you're playing on a level field, and so everyone makes a contribution. A student's self-worth is so much more in that class because you feel you're putting something in. I got the sense that he cared about me as a person and as a learner, and I'd have to say that everyone in the class did, as well. As odd as it may sound to some teachers, at the beginning of the class, he might just sit down and talk to us. In a traditional classroom, it's "Sit down, be quiet, open your books, turn to page" . . .

In Pat's classroom, student empowerment was also aided by learning logs. It's hard to believe that a simple activity like learning logs could promote student autonomy and empowerment, but it did, indeed, affect the level of students' involvement in their learning. Pat has adapted and included this familiar activity in his language arts and literature response programme. According to Calkins (1986), learning logs provide a forum and an occasion for learning. They can help create the conditions in which learning can happen by encouraging students to ask questions and to construct hypotheses, by making them active learners, and by teaching them habits of thought.

Calkins laments that in most classrooms, we neither teach students to ask questions nor allow students to ask questions, but simply require them to answer questions. She points out that asking questions is a challenging and important part of thinking and
learning, especially if students are continually encouraged to ask more probing, more appropriate, and more effective questions, and to think about their questions. Often questions can become the basis for small group or class discussion. Similarly, Calkins suggests that students can be encouraged to reflect on predictions or hypotheses made in their learning logs while reading or watching a video. Logs can also help students recall what they previously knew, and then assimilate or accommodate new knowledge to this pre-existing knowledge. For example, in their learning logs, they ask themselves what they already know or believe about a topic, and then reflect on how the new information fits with or does not fit with what they already knew. Calkins concludes that as learning operations become internalized, students acquire more consciousness of, and control over, their thinking.

In Pat's use of learning logs, he appears to have incorporated all the activities that Calkins suggests. Students having "control over their thinking" is an important matter in Pat's classroom. He is concerned, as Calkins was, about the lack of opportunity for students to ask their own questions. Addressing this concern almost twenty years ago, Pat and his colleagues explored ways of getting students to ask questions, rather than the teacher asking all the
questions, to make their students independent as language learners. Martin, a colleague whom I introduced in Chapter Four, and with whom Pat engaged in discussion and reflection earlier in his career, explains:

We had come to the conclusion that the ability to give questions to the learners rather than to keep all the questions for themselves, to be the final authority, was a bridge that most classroom teachers were not able to cross. Who asks the questions really has the answers. So our conversations centered around ways of getting kids within the classroom environment to ask their own questions, ways of managing that in terms of practical classroom activities.

But what is really meant by Martin's comment, "Who has the questions really has the answers," is 'Who has the answers really has the power.' Pat discovered this truth during the course of his career. This is a key element in his classroom. Power is not wielded by Pat, and control is not imposed on students. Instead, Pat appears to use an indirect form of control, and empowers students by involving them, by giving them responsibility, and by encouraging them to be self-controlling and autonomous. As Pat explains, students are given a lot of choices within his classroom. But these choices are contained within parameters. Students are able to negotiate themes, but must live with the literature that Pat selects
for those themes. Students may design their own assignments, but the assignments must accommodate established variables. Students are able to select the form or genre of their assignment, but must rotate the form with each new assignment. Students may often select their own groups, but must choose different people for their group each time. Melissa, a student, explains that "you weren't usually allowed to go with the same person twice, so then you go with other people, and you just work your way around the room."

The apparent paradox in this 'constrained freedom' is highlighted by Daniel Sheridan (1993), who comments on the use of structure in a constructivist classroom:

Structure is one of the conditions of freedom. Yet we cannot leave it at that, for paradoxically there can be no freedom without some element of constraint. Thus within the structure of a learning situation there are always some constraints -- yes, even in the most apparently "free" classroom, like the one Nancy Atwell describes in "Making Time." Of course we can see here many of the hallmarks of individualized instruction. Moffett would approve, for Atwell's students are constantly making language choices. Still, they are not "free" in any radical or idealized sense . . . there is a lot of structure in Atwell's classroom. (p.116)

I have a feeling that if somebody who was unfamiliar with and didn't understand what Pat was doing were to walk into his class
they might say, "You know, these kids are all doing different things. Some of them are talking, some of them are writing, and some of them are making things, and it looks like it's not even organized chaos." In fact, it is highly organized. What Sheridan is saying here is exemplified in Pat's class, that unless kids are provided with behavioural parameters, nothing gets accomplished because they don't know what it is they're really supposed to do. But once these behavioural parameters are put in place, there can be a lot of choices within them, and those are the kinds of things Pat tries to get students to do -- to make choices within the parameters, so the choices may involve selection of a piece of reading, a choice on two or three different writing assignments, and so on. But in addition to this, he listens and watches and asks questions, and is prepared to change direction or shift gears depending on what the experience in the classroom demands, and whenever his intuition suggests that he do so. Even in a much earlier time in his career, when he was still using whole class instruction, this kind of flexibility within parameters was already evident, as his colleague, John MacIntyre, explains:

He was very structured, but at the same time extremely innovative and very flexible within that structure. He always seemed to have a pretty clear plan, and yet he planned well
enough, and carefully enough, to give himself the option. He always had outs that were built into his daily lessons. There was an opportunity to make a switch, to change direction, to pick up on a slant that perhaps a student might suggest. He always was very sensitive to which way the class was going to go, so in his structure, he always had planned for maybe three or four routes to get there.

And now, with the focus of his instruction on small groups and individuals, his structure and his flexibility are far more sophisticated and complex, and he operates more intuitively, but both the structure and the flexibility are still present.

It's interesting to think that students are not really constrained in the classroom. The paradoxical thing about student-centered instruction is that the more control you turn over to the students, the less you need to worry about control. In fact, the students are quite able to look after themselves and, even more, look after each other. Pat explained that he has three biases that he shares with his students at the beginning of the term: students are as bright as we teachers allow them to be; students are as good as we teachers allow them to be; and students are as responsible and mature as we teachers allow them to be.

From there, as this comment by Pat's student, Steven, seems to suggest, students appear to get the idea that "Yeah, this guy's on
our side, and let's go with it":

He started this format from the beginning of the term. From that first project, how could he know what was going to happen? Or if there was going to be a positive thing that happened? And yet he let it go. And you feel trusted; you feel empowered. I mean, not only does he come down from the pedestal, but he hands over the reins.

While Pat seems to move within this realm of nondirected control with relative ease, unless there is administrative support for this kind of teaching, a teacher, especially a new teacher, is apt to experience a great deal of frustration. This is explained further by Dave Wilson, professor:

Even though you change your rationale for teaching, the issue of control is always there. It's part of what you're up to. But understanding control might be different, and a principal who doesn't understand nondirected control, the notion that control comes from students' involvement in responsibility, and that if you can't achieve that, there's not much value to be achieved by imposing external control on students, would not be willing to appreciate what you were struggling towards.

Actively involved students, learning logs, negotiated curriculum, redistribution of power, control, and responsibility -- what does it all lead to? Perhaps Don, an intern in Pat's class, expresses it best, although I think I would add 'responsibility' to 'choices and freedom' in Don's comment:
If the idea of education is to increase the autonomy of the student, then obviously you start moving the choices and the freedom down to that level. And if Pat can do that, and make that work within the classroom, then he's really achieving that goal of making those students autonomous.

With the development of a constructivist philosophy, Pat is able to create a democratic classroom environment within which students are able to feel empowered and to become autonomous learners. Whether empowerment and autonomy are goals of constructivist teaching or are results of it, I wasn't able to determine. They seem to be intertwined. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) report that constructivist women aspire to work that contributes to the empowerment and improvement in the quality of life of others. And while their study does not include male constructivists, perhaps it is a quality of constructivists in general, since Pat, as a constructivist teacher, also works towards the empowerment of his students.

In the following brief chapter, Pat and I discuss the way he perceives that his illness has affected his teaching and his development as a constructivist teacher.
Chapter Seven

Reality One: MS

The fact that Pat is ill is not an important point in understanding the development of his constructivist philosophy. He was far on this journey before he was actually diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and before his illness compromised his physical abilities. He would likely have evolved in much the same direction had he not become ill. But multiple sclerosis is a reality of Pat's life, and it sometimes makes an impact on the lives of others. Some people, for example, may interpret his illness as a precipitative cause of unconventional classroom practices, or may equate unconventional methodology with the symptoms of the illness. The other perception is that Pat's illness intensified and sharpened what he was doing professionally, as a colleague has surmised, because, unable to be physically active, he focussed his energy on intellectual and pedagogical pursuits, specifically, classroom instruction.

But MS is a part of Pat's life that he has had to reconcile with his professional life, and the way he has handled that is reflected in the following comment:

I've admired that mental toughness that he has shown, just to do, and think, and be what he is.

Dave Wilson, professor
When Pat was twenty-five years old, in his third year of teaching, he had his first major attack of multiple sclerosis, and had to be off work at home for several months. Since that time, he has had a number of exacerbations along with the chronic progression of his illness. At the present time, he has problems with his balance and difficulty walking and writing. He uses a cane or a walker, and in the classroom he uses a motor scooter. He often uses the computer to word process his comments about students' work, attaching these to the assignments he marks. He also word processes a broad plan for each day's classroom learning activities. At the time of this writing, he teaches on a half-time basis.

John MacIntyre, a friend and colleague of Pat, indicated that he often thought Pat worked too hard, and wondered at times if it didn't hasten his illness: "Even if you like what you're doing, if you work so hard and you know you're accomplishing something, it's still stress. It's still wear and tear on the body."

I often wondered if Pat's development of MS, this "wear and tear on the body," had affected his teaching in any way. His students appear to be quite autonomous and active in their learning, and I wondered if, for example, his decreasing ability to move around his classroom physically might have prompted him to make the
students more active in, and more responsible for, their own learning. I wondered if it had contributed to his use of conferencing in the classroom, and to the extensive cooperative learning that takes place there. But Pat wasn't sure if his having MS had affected his methodology all that much.

I find that when kids work in groups, if I use the scooter in the classroom, it's easy to buzz from group to group and stop and listen and get on to the next group, but I'm not sure if I didn't have MS that that would be any different. I'd just be using my legs to get me to go from one place to another, so I can't truthfully say that my illness has affected my teaching in any way. It may have, and again this is a major guess, but it may have made me a more empathic teacher to kids who are having difficulties of a variety of types.

I can't truthfully say that my gradual loss of physical ability has contributed to my giving more responsibility to students, thereby making them more active in their own learning. I see the two things as being isolated. What happens in the classroom is reality two whereas MS is reality one. They don't cross over.

But I still couldn't see how Pat's personal experiences didn't affect what he did in the classroom, considering how strongly he believed that a student's personal experiences affected the way a student responded in the classroom. By analogy, what a teacher brings to the classroom should affect how a teacher teaches.

I don't really think that as a consequence of MS my teaching practice has changed. Perhaps, it has, but I'm just not sure of it. I do know that MS, as it progresses, means that you're
continually having to change and cope, and so, for example, in my case, because of hand tremors, I've had to begin using a word processor. Because of problems with the muscles in my legs, I've had to get a scooter, and propel myself even in the classroom on the scooter. I think if there's a connection, it could be intellectual. For example, MS has progressed to the point where I'm not able to play sports anymore. A fellow at work, when I showed him an article that I was going to have published, asked me why I do that, and I couldn't give him an answer then. I thought about it later, and I thought that the real truth was I write and publish because I can't play hockey, or golf, or basketball, or fastball, or go for a run anymore, and so maybe that's the way that I've been influenced. I think it's important that if you have physical problems from the shoulders down, that you work on preserving and fostering your health from the shoulders up, and if one of the ways is to constantly think of and try different ideas, and to be inventive and innovative, then maybe that's the connection between my teaching and my physical health. I'm not sure, but that would be the connection I'd see.

While there may be a connection between Pat's health and the amount of innovation that he currently does in his classroom, he had begun to be inventive and innovative in his classroom before his health was seriously impaired by MS. But then who is to say how the knowledge that one has a debilitating disease affects one's thinking and sensibility, either consciously or unconsciously, not only over an extended period of time but from the moment that one learns that knowledge.

Don MacKenzie, an intern a few years ago at the school where
Pat teaches, spent a considerable amount of time in Pat's classroom, and speculates about the effect of Pat's illness on his teaching.

I think his illness contributes to his ability to do what he does because it contributes to a vulnerability that he brings in with him. I saw Pat in just a very narrow window in his teaching career; I didn't see a development. But I think that his illness may have given him an outlook that said, "This is what I'm going to do, and this is what I'm going to do well, and there's really nothing anybody can do to me that hasn't been dealt to me already." I think that gave him a freedom to work.

Thorvald Jacobson comments on the effect of Pat's illness on his teaching from his perspective as an administrator working with Pat at a time when Pat's health was in an exacerbating state and had made walking and writing difficult for him:

At that point in his life, he couldn't write legibly so kids were not getting written critique of their work. I know he was doing a lot of that verbally, but I guess I wondered as principal, how he could possibly do that, and when he was spending time doing that with one individual or a small group of individuals, were the others gainfully learning? Normally, an English teacher would be doing their marking and critiquing of student work away from the classroom, so if it had to take classroom time to be done, what was being sacrificed for that?

Jacobson's view of Pat's classroom may originate from a different perspective than the one which recognizes that while
conferencing may be a practical and sensible compensation and adjustment to Pat's illness, it is also a process-oriented, student-centered, constructivist approach to teaching writing and grammar. For example, conferencing is an important part of the process that Atwell uses in her students' writing program (Atwell, 1987), the goal of which is to help students grow to independence, with conferencing being a springboard for student initiative and autonomy (Atwell, 1987). This is an important goal in Pat's classroom, as well.

Lucy Calkins notes that conferring challenges us "to think quickly on our feet" and implores us "to invent, instantly, altogether new responses to whatever curve balls" students throw at us (Calkins, 1991, p. 235), and while Pat is completely comfortable with this kind of interaction, and with managing multiple and simultaneous activities in the classroom, as he reveals in Chapter Four in his discussion on individual instruction, many teachers would not be. Perhaps a traditional, direct instruction teacher, accustomed to leading the whole class at once, would find this process difficult to imagine, and discomforting. From this perspective, Thorvald's concerns are legitimate. At the same time, Pat's practices are supported by constructivist
research, and so the importance that his illness assumed in this situation is uncertain.

Thorvald Jacobson contrasts Pat's current practice with an earlier stage in his career when he had "quite clearly taken a transmission, traditional stance for some of his instruction," using the chalk board and the overhead projector. He has observed that because of his health, Pat was relying almost entirely on verbal interaction:

He was sitting at his desk, he rarely got up and left it, and all interaction was verbal with the exception of some handouts that he would have prepared, and my concern was rooted in whether the kids were getting the full measure.

This situation may suggest two very different but equally valid things, depending on whether it were viewed from the perspective of a direct instruction teacher or from the perspective of a constructivist teacher. Viewed through the lens of a direct instruction teacher, what would be omitted from the verbal interaction in Pat's classroom would be notes on the chalk board, perhaps notes and illustrations on the overhead, as Thorvald explained he had seen Pat use at an earlier stage in his career, and students silently and individually responding to questions in their
notebooks or completing writing assignments at their desks, activities that are all fairly commonplace in a direct instruction classroom. From this perspective, one can certainly appreciate Thorvald's concerns. On the other hand, from a constructivist perspective, verbal interaction is an important part of learning, and a constructivist would question the limited amount of verbal interaction in a direct instruction process where talk is generally one-sided with one person, usually the teacher, speaking while the students listen silently or take notes. And so again, depending on one's perspective, Pat may be seen to be either employing legitimate constructivist practices, or floundering at the mercy of his illness.

Pat's friend and colleague, John McIntyre, expresses the opinion that "Pat confronted his illness with the same courage and determination that he did anything in teaching." His comment is reiterated by Dave Wilson who worked quite closely with Pat for a number of years, and visited his classroom on numerous occasions. He remarks that "Pat's reaction or his behaviour with respect to multiple sclerosis is very consistent with his reaction to things and people generally; that didn't deter him."

These views correspond to Pat's own view of his situation.
As he has himself expressed, he doesn't think his teaching practice has changed very much as a result of his illness, although because of his physical disability, he may tend to focus more on the generation of new ideas. It's difficult to imagine that Pat would do anything differently whether he were well or unwell since his cooperative group work, his student conferences at his desk, and his class discussions conducted from his chair, are all part of his student-centered, response-oriented, and constructivist philosophy of teaching, undertaken because he believes in its value.

Whatever relevance Pat's illness has to his teaching, it is a part of his life history, and a factor of his personal context which is in some way embroiled in his professional context. From Goodson's (1992) perspective, personal experiences impact on educational experiences and affect a teacher's practice, with what a teacher knows about teaching being shaped by both teaching and nonteaching experiences. For Goodson, a life history also embraces both contextual and intercontextual analysis. It is necessary, therefore, to have an awareness of how the factors of Pat's illness in his personal context may affect the classroom activities of his professional context, if in fact they do. Such an awareness may contribute to an appreciation of the various reactions of colleagues
to Pat's teaching, along with the ways that Pat deals with, and is affected by, these responses which are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter Eight

Never Ask A Question To Which You Already Know The Answer

Whatever Pat does as a classroom teacher may impact on many other people in the school culture, including students, colleagues, administrators, and parents. The way these different stake-holders have responded to Pat's style of teaching throughout the years is an important part of Pat's story as an evolving constructivist teacher. Pat identifies indifference, hostility, and supportive acceptance as some of the various reactions that he has experienced, and explains how he has dealt with each of these. Responses provided by colleagues and one administrator with whom Pat has worked are presented in this chapter, while student reactions are discussed in the following chapter.

Opening comments by two of Pat's colleagues illustrate a general perception of Pat as an innovator and a risk-taker. He always tried new things and was happy, I'm sure, in the sense that he was recognizing the value of what he was doing, but was never satisfied, and constantly took an interest in different aspects of the job and his approach. I think he was actually quite pioneering in many ways. He did a lot of record keeping, made notes, anecdotal stuff, long before it became popular, and part of various courses to do this sort of thing. He also took the idea of prevision in writing, and that was institutionalized in his classroom. And

164
peer coaching, and all the rest of it that's kind of trendy now, he was doing twenty years ago. But he was willing to make the effort.

John MacIntyre, colleague

We supported each other in our discussions which centered around actively breaking out of those rituals of teaching so that the students would take more responsibility for learning, and so that teaching would be a creative process in which fresh, vital, tough, risky activities were applied, rather than simply a series of rituals, and learning would be a genuine and creative process.

Martin Wexler, colleague

"Navigating a different tack does not always mean that the sailing will be smooth," Pat stated as we began another interview at the Windows Cafe.

He was referring to the reaction over the years of colleagues and administrators to his work as a teacher using forms of instruction that often didn't conform to conventional practices.

Colleague reaction and administrative support, or lack of support, can have a major impact on a teacher's experiences of pursuing innovative classroom activities, I reflected. I was thinking about the culture of the school, and some of the many impediments to the development of a democratic classroom and constructivist teaching that exist, or to unconventional or innovative teaching
practices, in general. Teachers', administrators', and parents' beliefs about teaching and learning; the organization and structure of the school and school system with their institutional hierarchy of power; and practices and policies that have become institutionalized may all impede constructivist teaching.

The school culture is made up of many people, including students, teachers, school based administrators, school board members, local and provincial administrators, and the larger culture of parents and communities. And the mechanisms underlying the development of belief systems about schooling are, as Lester and Onore (1990) suggest, developed through experience, perpetuated over time, and seem impenetrable.

And so one wouldn't expect all colleagues or administrators to always react positively to practices that don't conform to mainstream beliefs. And while reaction to Pat's teaching over the years has been mostly positive, either supportive or indifferent, his style has sometimes created antagonism and conflict, as well, particularly when Pat has been ill, or when his substitute has been unable to work in the same way that he does.

I was curious about Pat's perception of the reaction of colleagues, and others in the school culture, to his classroom
experimentation and unconventional practice. He explained:

I think there are three reactions to anything different. One is indifference. People just don't care what it is you're doing because that's just their attitude. They just don't care. Another reaction is hostility, probably because people know what you're doing is different, but they don't understand it, and they don't have a very clear picture about what it is you're doing. They get information in bits and pieces, perhaps from students, or by reading something that you've written, and it comes in little dribs and drabs, and they form erroneous interpretations. The third way is, of course, the best where you actually find people who are interested in what you're doing, or who are doing things that you're really interested in, and together you work collectively to provide a really supportive and developing core of teachers, of people. People can embrace, and sponsor, and support, and celebrate what you're doing, or they can reject it, and develop a feeling of hostility toward it.

I have experienced each one of these reactions. It's just marvellous, of course, when you have supportive people around you, because not only are people anxious to find out about what you're thinking, they oftentimes share a lot of what they're thinking, a combination of which produces a better product. It's a lot of fun. And because I was usually working with one other supportive person, if there was indifference towards us, the indifference didn't really bother us because we were more interested in what we were working towards.

I juxtaposed what Pat told me with what I had read and with what Pat's colleagues had told me. Carr and Kemmis (1986) comment that collaborative participation is a key feature of educational action research, although many individual teacher-
researchers are forced to accept solitary reflection because they lack the interest and support of colleagues. Pat's colleague and collaborator, Jim Scott, commented on his experience of working with Pat in a supportive, collaborative relationship:

I know that ideas if they come from you are probably more significant, and working with Pat was one of the first opportunities in my professional experience to build ideas. That's probably one of the most significant things that has happened to me. It's like writing a good story, or a good poem, or drawing a great picture.

Jim confirms Pat's statement about indifference not bothering you when you have the support of another person with whom you're working. He says, "I don't know if others thought what we were doing was all that important. I don't think that that really bothered us though."

"Hostility is bothersome, though," Pat continued, "because you truly are working without a net." He elaborated:

Almost everything that you do in the classroom is innovative. There may be nets around of which you're just not aware. For example, people may be writing about or talking about the same things you're trying to do. But if you don't read what is being written or talk to those people, you don't realize that what you're doing is valid.

I was interested in how a teacher like Pat who is experimenting with nontraditional methods would deal with
rejection and hostility. Pat explained that you could deal with rejection in one of two ways. You could become like everybody else and integrate yourself into the great fabric. Or you continue on and do what you feel is best in your classroom, and try not to allow the hostility or resentment to affect you too much.

His colleague, Jim, concurs when he explains that what he and Pat were doing was sometimes disturbing to others, as the following example indicates, but that they "didn't spend a lot of time worrying about hostility." He adds that perhaps it was sometimes a good thing if people were disturbed:

Pat and I realized that kids were interested in a variety of things and wanted to be part of making decisions about their learning. Everybody wasn't doing the same thing, and that sometimes was a concept that was disturbing to other people. Sometimes it was disturbing to kids, sometimes to parents, and I think sometimes to staff members. Maybe one or two times it made some administrators wonder what was happening, too, which was good because then they came and looked. And parents asked questions.

"I believed that what I was doing in the classroom was worthwhile," Pat observed, explaining why he continued to pursue innovative classroom practices:

I liked seeing the results. I liked seeing what the kids were
doing in the classroom. I felt they were learning, and wanted to learn more, and were excited about doing things, and so I continued to do those things. If other people were threatened by it, I decided first and foremost not to make a problem they'd hallucinated my problem, so if they didn't like what I was doing, that was their problem to resolve.

But as I thought about this, I knew that Pat wasn't always able to detach himself in this way, and prior to learning this response, he experienced horrible feelings of isolation and loneliness. He elaborated on his feelings, and explained why he continued an unconventional practice in spite of those feelings:

No one likes to feel unsponsored and unsupported. It's especially tough when you're doing something that you know is good, you know is working, and you know that people appreciate, but I'm not willing to walk away easily from what I do because I know it's effective.

There hasn't always been a Jim Scott to be supportive of what I do, but there is you, and you and I talk and share ideas, and you're supportive.

There are also other people with whom I can talk who are educated in nontraditional methodologies, and who are supportive and provide me with encouragement. For example, I've received a lot of encouragement and advice from Dave at the university. Dave was sort of a voice of authority. Here was someone who looked at what I did, and found value in it, and was really willing to support what I did with educational validation. That is, this author and this author and this author all suggest that . . . , so I'd be guided to read the authors, and I'd say, 'Yeah'. Or just through his speeches at gatherings of English teachers, he'd be seen as nontraditional and unconventional, and as a consequence, interesting.
Jennifer Miller [a colleague of Pat who was not interviewed for this research] was exploring the writing process long before most English teachers had ever heard of it, and it was interesting to talk to Jennifer about her use of this process, what it meant, why it was better, then trying it myself and saying, 'Yes, this does work. It's a good idea'.

John McIntyre is probably one of the most traditional teachers around, and although he's very talented in a methodology that works perfectly for him, he has never been afraid to question or to talk about new ideas, and regardless of what it is he does, and what it is I do, he's quite a supportive person.

Allan Douglas [a colleague of Pat who was not interviewed for this research] is a person who is always eager to try out new ideas, and realizes you may have a few new ideas, and is anxious to talk about them, and to share new things with you.

There are always people around who are not threatened by a new idea, and who are anxious and willing and even excited to explore the new idea and sit down with you and exchange ideas. I don't think anyone would ever say that what you're doing is really great, and that you'd better make sure to keep going with it, but somebody might talk about a new idea that he or she is trying in the classroom, and it encourages you to see that other people are also thinking without a net and developing new ideas. I guess I've always admired risk-takers, people who are willing to take a risk on an idea that perhaps, at first glance, looks a little outlandish, but when you investigate it closer, it is fine; it is all right.

Dave Wilson's response to Pat's comment about him providing validation for Pat makes an interesting statement about Pat: "If I validated some things for Pat, that's actually mutual. A lot of
things that he's worked out, I've validated because Pat's done them."

John MacIntyre's comments are equally supportive of Pat both as person and as a teacher, and tend to provide a perception of Pat in terms of the qualities he brings to the job:

He brought a sense that the job was worthwhile, which it is, but sometimes you really have to remind yourself of that. Those were probably the golden years of the English department. We talked a lot, and there was an energy in that department that I've never seen anywhere else, and I saw more good things happen on curriculum development, more experimentation, in those few years that Pat was there than I have seen in all the schools in all years since. He always made not just me, but other people, really think about what the hell we're doing because he would ask that kind of question of himself, and others.

It seemed to me that administrative support, or lack of support, would be a critical factor in how much classroom innovation a teacher would be prepared to pursue, and while I had spoken to one administrator, I wondered what kind of support Pat had received generally over the years from administrators. He explained:

Surprisingly, I've received great administrative support, both in school and from central office. In fact, it's because of what Jim and I did with individualization that I was allowed to take a year off and go back to school and learn more. Every administrator, with the exception of one, with whom I've worked has been rather supportive of the things I've tried, and
while the one exception wasn't supportive, he didn't interfere, so just by his silence he provided some very silent support. And that's not a criticism.

Gazing across the street, I was amazed to see how the Meewasin skating rink area had been transformed yet again, this time into greens, pinks, and brilliant yellow, the colours of grass and spring annuals, petunias and marigolds, no doubt. Over the time that Pat and I had met at the Windows Cafe to reflect on his career, the changing images of the park had provided new and interesting perspectives.

And it's interesting how different people are able to provide different perspectives on a situation, I mused, as I compared Dave Wilson's perceptions of Pat's experiences at Freemont and Harold Maxwell vis-a-vis the people who comprise each of the two schools, including other staff members, with those of other colleagues, including the administrative perspective of Thorvald Jacobson.

Thorvald sees Pat’s career in three stages corresponding with the three different schools in which he and Pat have worked together. Here he comments on the early stage in Pat’s career, and his first association with Pat:

My first experience with Pat was at Mount Pleasant at a very early stage in his career, where in a context of a staff who were very tied in to a tradition of things, he was willing to
question some of the ways things had been or were being done. I saw Pat as a professional teacher with very considerable potential, and if I'd been in a situation where I was picking a staff for a school, he would have been high on my list of ones I would have been interested in.

The years in Pat's career to which Thorvald refers in the above comment have been commented on fairly extensively in these chapters where the perceptions of other colleagues, such as Jim Scott, John MacIntyre, and Martin Wexler, generally corroborate Thorvald's views of Pat as a highly innovative and highly professional teacher.

Thorvald explains that he later requested that Pat be placed at Freemont where he himself had been placed as principal, and where they needed some strong leadership in the English department, and he felt Pat had the potential to provide that leadership:

And I think that my view and my faith in Pat were well justified and well supported by his performance. It was an extremely model professional atmosphere, and the whole department grew extremely significantly in the period of time that Pat was there. And in his classroom, I saw a lot of really interesting kinds of activities.

This view is corroborated by John MacIntyre who comments on Pat's leadership abilities:

He showed some real leadership, but it was leadership by example, and not by dictate. I often thought I would have liked
to have been in the department in which he was coordinator. I know that I would have taken part in a lot more things. Pat was always good at getting people to work together on things because he could ask people in such a way for help that whether they knew it or not, they were all of a sudden involved in what was going on. It couldn't help but be good for them.

Dave Wilson comments on the interactive effect of Pat on the Freemont culture, and the Freemont culture on him:

I would think that the Freemont culture was in itself as nourishing as a secondary large school culture could be to the kind of thinking that Pat was doing. But at the same time, I think Pat was probably one of the individuals who was forming that culture, as well, and all that happens intuitively. You don't know that this is going on.

But later, when both Thorvald and Pat had been transferred to Harold Maxwell, and Pat's health had taken a bad turn, Thorvald explains that from an administrative point of view, working with Pat was difficult:

Pat's colleagues and I had concerns around whether he was doing the marking that he should be doing. I think there were criticisms from staff that related sometimes to the selection of materials, whether all dimensions of the English programme would be addressed or not, and I guess I was wondering at that stage whether his health was colouring his judgement. There were fairly frequent expressions of concern from students and parents who perceived Pat's classroom behaviour at the time as a little off the wall, erratic, not tending perhaps to some of the things that the students and parents felt they should be doing, and some of that was also coming
from his colleagues at school where his way of dealing with kids at the time would have them off balance. We were dealing with concerns expressed by students and parents and colleagues about what was happening in the classroom both when Pat was there and when he was not there, and I had to more or less call on a couple of other department members to provide the structure for the substitute. There were individuals who were not comfortable for whatever reasons, and I suppose many of those people had a pretty traditional view of what was important, and in some cases, I'd say the discomfort that was there sometimes stemmed from his own manner, and the way he was handling things in the classroom at the time. I think I understand some of the connection between a person with a disease and a professional role, and I realized that to continue working was Pat's way of fighting his illness. To take himself out of the equation, or to reduce his teaching assignment, or anything like that was tantamount to giving into his disease, and the fighter in him was not about to accept that. And so I thought, at what point does the administrator put the interests of the kids ahead of the health condition of the teacher?

One can certainly appreciate Thorvald's dilemma, immersed as he was in the cultural milieu of classroom teacher, colleagues, students, parents, and substitute teachers, and charged with the overwhelming responsibility of making decisions in a complex situation where whose best interest to serve is not always clear.

Thorvald comments on the perplexing dilemma of isolating the intertwining factors of personal qualities and paradigmatic professional differences, and of the inability to attribute any one
factor to the conflict:

By that particular group at Harold Maxwell, he was perceived increasingly as a maverick. I could never persuade myself how much of that perception stemmed from the professional role, and how much of it was rooted in the personal, the way he interacted with people, the way he interacted with his disease, the way he was handling things at the time. That was a hard department to break into. And where Pat's views of what curriculum should be, and what instruction should be, might have differed from the views of department members who are fairly traditional in the way they go about doing things, he never succeeded in either becoming part of the group or bringing them to buy his view of things.

Viewing the situation from an external position, Dave Wilson is able to provide a more philosophical perspective:

In the past couple of years, in moments when his guard was down slightly, Pat has made comments which opened for me the door into his life at Harold Maxwell where I think he was feeling threatened, abandoned, alone. And my guess is that Pat isn't able to be part of that culture forming that he was able to be at Freemont, and so he's operating now probably more as an isolate.

Yet, I know from talking with Pat, probably in later years what had become important for him was the realization that his thinking was not an island, that there were other people who were struggling with the same things with which he was struggling. There were people who were writing who were complementing, reinforcing, indeed, in some cases, probably extending his thinking. So I think Pat probably needed the reinforcement, and, in fact, needed the success that he got from his involvement with writing, which I'm not sure he was getting from his involvement with school when he was
working. And the stimulation and recognition that he got by putting his thoughts into a book for him was very reaffirming, and maybe even has allowed him to continue with what he is doing even though the current culture that he is in at Harold Maxwell is not necessarily an affirming culture, that he's really stretching the bounds of that culture, as well. Pat's involvement in writing, and the talks the writing team had about what it all means . . ., may have provided him with a Linus-like security blanket which said, "I'm not a maverick."

A teacher intern is able, as are students, to provide a classroom perspective of Pat's teaching. Don MacKenzie attributes to Pat's illness what he perceives as a freedom engendered by the vulnerability that his illness brings, a freedom that allowed Pat to create "an atmosphere in the room that was qualitatively different from other rooms," and that he says he'd like to be able to pass on to other teachers somehow. Don explains the reaction of his colleagues to Pat's style of teaching, and their recognition that they couldn't do what he does: "People recognized that they couldn't imitate him, and that's the difficulty. Other teachers could see something was happening, but they would probably be afraid of the spontaneity."

Pat's comfort with spontaneity and ambiguity is made further evident by Don when, after observing in Pat's class when he taught Chaucer's The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, he makes the
following comments about how the experience affected him:

One thing he told me that I stay with is try not to ask a question that you already know the answer to. There's no right answer to the question he asked the class when they were discussing the Wif of Bath, "If the Wif of Bath were a meal, what meal would she be?" That question has become kind of a pillar for me to build on because it works, and I've used it to defend my way of working, and it stands.

Don again illustrates the influence of Pat's constructivist teaching on his own teaching in the following comments as he explains how his observation of Pat teaching Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales affected the way he set up his instructional activities for Romeo and Juliet in his own class.

I remembered Pat's class, the way he did the Wif of Bath. They didn't cover all the points of the Wif of Bath. And I recognized this isn't going to be the students' only chance in the world to read Romeo and Juliet. What's more important is that this group is making a point about Friar Lawrence, and this other group is arguing about Capulet. And I remember talking to Pat about the fact that I might be doing Romeo and Juliet this way, and in another room another teacher is doing Romeo and Juliet in a different way altogether. The students in that class and the students in my class are not going to get the same set of insights. Why should I, then, within a single classroom, try to ensure that group one has the same set of insights that group five has? Once I was released from that, and it was Pat's class that gave me that critical release, then I could do all kinds of things that I couldn't do before.
But Don also recognizes the legitimacy of working from other paradigms, and that each paradigm has its own merits and challenges, and where a more traditional teacher may not be able to "ask questions to which you don't know the answer" as Pat does, Pat perhaps would not be able to operate well in a situation where he had to wield tight controls.

Don further recognizes the limitations Pat's style of teaching has among different types of students, that some students are not going to be able to work in a nontraditional manner:

How does he take into account those students that do learn by lecturing or taking notes and studying them? A class like Pat's really relies on that curiosity factor, and students with that high curiosity factor would prosper in there, but for students that might not have that same curiosity factor, I guess that's your role as a teacher to find that connecting point between the Wif of Bath and that student.

But Don's example from Pat's class with respect to the Wif of Bath implies that a teacher like Pat can find those connections, even in a transactional/constructivist classroom. The problem, regardless of paradigm, concerns the whole notion of teacher change.

"The question is," Don asks, "how do you take teachers and get them to let go of the way they've been taught, and can you take
anybody and then do that, or is it a gift?

John MacIntyre raises the same issue when he comments that "[i]n terms of his attitude and his commitment and his belief in the value of what we're trying to do, he didn't acquire that; he had it with him when he arrived as a teacher.

Perhaps part of the answer lies within the words of Martin Wexler, a colleague who spent many hours of discussion with Pat in Pat's early years of teaching when he first began questioning what he was doing and searching for better ways. Martin explains that Pat, Jim Scott, and he constantly critiqued what they were doing, and certainly, as we have seen, this critiquing for Pat did not stop with those early years, but the pattern of experimental practice and critical reflection continues to the present time. Martin explains more specifically what constituted the discussions he had with Pat and Jim in those early years:

Our conversations centered around what characterized an independent teacher, someone who didn't follow the pattern of using study guide sheets, and giving an assignment, marking it, and handing it back, and around ways of getting outside that structure, and being more effective, being closer to the students.

We had come to the conclusion that the ability to give questions to the learners rather than to keep all the questions for themselves, to be the final authority, was a bridge that most classroom teachers were not able to cross.
Who asks the questions really has the answers. So our conversations centered around ways of getting kids within the classroom environment to ask their own questions, ways of managing that in terms of practical classroom activities. We would return frequently to the fact that it was an extremely difficult thing to do because of all of the routines and rituals that exist around classroom teaching, the rituals of giving an assignment, of prescribing what is important in that assignment, and of defining "what is to be learned" where "what is to be learned" is already known by the teacher, and by any adequate student is practically immediately grasped, but there has to be some demonstration of "learning", of work, actually, which has to be addressed by the classroom teacher in a marking process, and that has to be awarded a grade or number.

It was that single topic of crossing that bridge, of overcoming that fear, and influenced to a certain extent by the general attitude of what learners do if left alone, if the definition of the task isn't so specific that they can't get outside it, around which we focused our discussions.

After a lot of experimental practice and critical reflection, it appears that Pat has crossed that bridge and has overcome that fear for he has, indeed, gotten outside that traditional structure and closer to the students.

Postmodern thought on curriculum and teaching advises precisely this kind of critical reflection, and there is much support in educational research for critical reflection and critical pedagogy.

Critical reflection, Mezirow (1990) explains, involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built,
and through reflection, meaning schemes and perspectives that are not viable are transformed. And when we act on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspectives which result from reassessing our presuppositions, we are involved in transformative learning.

Apple (1990) maintains that educators cannot separate their educational activities from the institutional arrangements and forms of consciousness that dominate our culture, our society, our schools, and our classrooms, which work to preserve, reproduce and distribute them. He emphasizes the need "to place the knowledge that we teach, the social relations that dominate classrooms, . . . and ourselves as people who work in these institutions back into the context in which they reside" (p. 3). Apple advises applying the tools of critical theory to our thoughts and actions as educators so that students and teachers may contribute in a "common process of participation in the creation of meanings and values" (p. xiii). Apple states that "not to engage in such continual questioning is to abrogate one's responsibility to the current and future lives of thousands of students" (p. xi).

Similarly, Carr and Kemmis (1986) comment on the increasing
"transmitter" role which schools are being asked to adopt which "leads them to uncritically reproduce the social, political, and economic relations of the status quo" and to uncritically prepare students for roles in the status quo (p. 222). They suggest that the teaching profession has a responsibility to promote critical reflection both on society and on its own educational processes. Carr and Kemmis recommend emancipatory action research as a way of critically analyzing the profession's commitment to the well being of its clients, providing teachers and students a method by which to explore and improve classroom practices, and the practices which constitute the curriculum.

Giroux (1986) notes that teachers are often trained to use various models of teaching and evaluation, yet are not taught to be critical of the assumptions that underlie these models. Further noting that teachers are encouraged to remove themselves from their own histories, experience, and values which shape the nature of their work, Giroux (1986) advises that teachers must be more than technicians but transformative intellectuals engaging in a critical dialogue among themselves and practising a critical pedagogy.

Perhaps it is Pat's constant critical stance throughout the
years that has allowed him to overcome that disabling fear to which Martin refers, and to cross that bridge to a paradigm that enables him to be constructivist, transactional, and even transformatory. And perhaps it has a lot to do with who Pat is, and how he perceives his role as a teacher. A comment by Martin addresses this possibility:

It's how you see the job, and who you are as a person -- if you see what you do as your life's work, and the exploration of possibilities inherent in working to do your best as a classroom teacher, or if you see your work as a job that you do that has a particular time in your life, a particular place in your life, or a set of procedures to follow, adherence to which will make you a good teacher. It takes a lot of arrogance and independence, and just a desire to realize your potential.

The culture of people in a school is a complex mixture of a lot of different roles, beliefs, and personalities. The actions of one person may impinge on another, and the reaction may be positive and affirming, or it may be threatening and isolating. And if you're a teacher like Pat Gray, operating in a different paradigm from the mainstream culture, you can almost expect some amount of conflict, internal and external, and it is essential that you find a way to deal with it.

As we left the Windows Cafe, images of future teachers like
Pat Gray lingered in my thoughts, and I wondered about the kinds of stories they are likely to have in their careers. Will their stories be different? Or will their stories be Pat's story continually revisited? Glancing out the window, I marvelled again at the changing scenes in the park, the remarkable effects of time, and began to focus on the different kinds of students and their reaction to Pat's teaching, my next topic of discussion.
Chapter Nine

Handing Over The Reins

What is it like to be a student in Pat's classroom? I talked to three of Pat's students to get a sense of their experience in his class. Melissa was in Pat's grade ten class when I interviewed her; Joe had just completed a semester in Pat's grade twelve class at the time of our interview, and had also been with Pat in his grade nine year; Steven had just completed his first year of university, and had been in Pat's enriched class for a semester in each of his grade eleven and twelve years.

While I've focussed to a fairly large extent in this chapter on negative comments, dealing with almost all the negative comments that were made, the students' experience in Pat's class had been, in fact, extremely positive, and all students repeatedly made reference to the fun, the caring, the interesting, and the unusual nature of both the class and Pat, and to the fact that they learned a tremendous amount about themselves, and upon reflection, about their subject matter.

Steven's comments below are an exemplary reflection on Pat's class, typical of the students' comments in general:

I'd never had a teacher like Pat before, and walking into his classroom, there's almost a sense of anarchy in the air.
There's a raw energy that you're going to be able to do what you want to do. At the end of the day you're going to be a student who's going to be happy with what you've done . . .

When we walked in, we thought we were getting just another class, and then you realize it's going to be one of those years, a memorable one. Everyone has teachers or professors that are influential, and Pat would have to rate as that.

Having reviewed my transcript evidence, I reflected that student reaction to Pat and his teaching is like student reaction to any teacher and that teacher's teaching. Personality and practice combine, and some students like him and his teaching, and some students have trouble with it. A comment by Thorvald Jacobson, administrator, makes the point that appreciation for constructivist teaching and for Pat's personal style is really dependent on the individual student:

He always had a personal following. There were certainly individuals who were not comfortable for whatever reasons, and I suppose many of those people had a pretty traditional view of what was important. And in some cases, I'd say the discomfort sometimes stemmed from his own manner and the way he handled things in the classroom.

The question of whether constructivist teaching is appropriate for all students and all academic levels of students is certainly an issue commented upon by a number of individuals including the students themselves. Steven, a student in Pat's enriched level senior class observes:

I think it's really very dependent on the students. My brother
is in Pat's class now, and it's a different experience for him than it was for me, but then again, he's not an academic student. Students don't necessarily need the interest as the interest is sometimes generated in the class, but they have to be able to push themselves. With the lower level classes, they still have an extensive choice, but he imposes more structure.

It may also be that only certain kinds of students profit in a constructivist classroom. Steven, who had hoped for a similar experience in his first year university class as in Pat's grade twelve class, expresses disappointment that it wasn't, and notes that "a lot of my fellow students didn't have that sense of adventure, that sense of rebelliousness."

Melissa, grade ten, observing some students' preference for listening to a lecture and taking notes, comments that "some students would rather just write stuff down because they haven't gained the confidence, and they don't like saying their answers because they're afraid of being wrong."

Joe, the student in Pat's grade twelve class who, as described in Chapter One, had suggested a debate as a class activity for the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and who had been given responsibility for organizing the debate, explains that whereas other teachers would give the students comprehension questions, Pat
would do whatever would get the students most involved and
whatever would give them the most understanding of the literature.

He goes on, however, to explain the dilemma:

[S]ome people are more interested in cut and dried stuff. They like to just look at a question and get the answer. It's got to be really frustrating when they say, "Well, what's the answer, and Mr. Gray says, "Well, what do you think?"

I think it's just the way they're brought up. Their parents are like that, and all the other teachers they had beforehand molded them into the shape that they're in now where they like really cut and dried stuff.

That all students aren't able to participate in this kind of learning is further made evident by Joe:

For a lot of people it's been really hard trying to be able to understand that they're the ones that have to be teaching themselves instead of just having a teacher teaching them. When we had the debate on *Huck Finn*, everyone gave their own opinions, and they weren't talking just to Mr. Gray; they were talking to each other, too, and everyone was the teacher. But you could see the contrasts between the people who were really comfortable with discussing and those who weren't because there were people who were talking the whole time to each other, giving opinions about racism and the social structures and everything in *Huck Finn*, and it was great listening to them. And Mr. Gray tried to involve everybody, but some felt that they couldn't compare with the depth of other's statements, or I don't know what their problem was.

And for some students, it may seem with a process approach
not a lot of work is getting done. Steven indicates that "there were some aspects of Pat's class that could be juiced up so that first year [of university] shock isn't as great." He goes on to discuss the workload in the class which he regarded as too light, a perception which he explains was shared by other students as well:

At times it seemed like there was a lot of wastage of time, like the class wasn't always moving right along. But he would spend a lot more time on something, and the level of analysis would be better. I mean there would be small, interpretive hand-ins, larger essays, and reworked essays. A lot of his class was writing, a lot of rewriting.

This is a fair perception to students who perhaps are more used to a content approach where it appears that, through direct instruction, a larger portion of material is "covered". This may also be an issue of contention with teachers who prefer to use direct instruction for this very reason. Transactional, constructivist teachers, on the other hand, may argue that it is an illusion that more work is done, or may argue that the significance is in the kind of work that gets done and its impact on learning.

Also presented is the idea that learning isn't immediately evident with this kind of teaching. Joe, for example, relates that he was one among many who were complaining that they weren't
learning anything:

When we were doing reading logs for *Huck Finn*, I didn't see exactly what the point of it was. But once we had read some of our reading logs and started talking about them, I realized it's not just about *Huck Finn*; it's about us.

Melissa, a student in Pat's grade ten class, makes a similar comment:

You don't really know you're learning at first, until afterwards and you look back on the class and you find out how much you actually learned and how much it helps you in all your other classes.

Don MacKenzie, a teacher intern in Pat's classroom, lends professional credence to the students' perception when he explains that "[y]ou wouldn't expect to be aware that you're learning at the time with this kind of teaching. It's only in reflection that you realize that you're learning."

These kinds of concerns may be the reality of constructivist teaching, or they may be issues only until constructivist teaching becomes as familiar to students as direct instruction is now. Lester and Onore (1990) report that forces for stasis and change are imbedded in the belief system of individual teachers and students. Their comments illustrate how the belief system of students can cause students to be obstacles to change:

Students' constructs of teaching and learning are developed in the same way as those of their teachers: through experience.
If students are continually members of an autocratic classroom environment, they come to devalue their own insights, expertise, and intentions, as well as those of their peers. . . . Ironically, when students are given the chance to make decisions over what, how, and why they learn, they often object vehemently to it. They blame teachers for not doing their jobs, for not teaching them. They accuse their teachers of giving up responsibility for their learning! (p. 29)

Along with the perception that learning comes with reflection, students also commented that once they achieve a sense of autonomy and confidence from learning in the way that Pat teaches, it stays with them. Both Melissa and Steven made comments to this effect:

With the teacher I have now, you don't get to say your opinion as much, and so you lose that perspective, but once you've learned to be open, that will never go away. (Melissa)

The students learn to teach themselves, and it's something you can't take out of them afterwards. And going on to university, I find that I've become a lot less passive student. (Steven)

These students present the other side of constructivist teaching, and may help to determine if constructivist teaching is worth pursuing. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), in their study of women's ways of knowing, explain that in our society, which values male authority, constructivist women who
have achieved a voice want to be heard, and no longer accept being silenced. Perhaps students like Melissa and Steven, in a school culture that traditionally values the words and authority of the teacher, once they've developed a voice of their own, and confidence to use it, do not wish to be silenced either.

The difficulty of differentiating Pat, person and personality, from Pat, constructivist teacher; really confounds the task of analyzing constructivist teaching. Pat's success with some students, and lack of success with others, may be affected by personal qualities, but trying to determine which qualities, and what impact they have, or even if any personal qualities make a difference, is a formidable, if not impossible, task.

Pat's sense of humour and how he uses humour in the classroom is a personal quality to which some students take and some don't. Joe, commenting on Pat's use of humour, says that "the small talk that goes on in Mr. Gray's classroom is banter", and that "he's always cutting you down for fun, and the mature people understand it, and they head him down, but some people get . . . ."

Steven also comments on Pat's use of humour in the classroom:

I never had a problem with Pat's humour because he plays on a
level playing field. When the teacher's not upon a pedestal, the humour is not aiming down on you. A lot of teachers won't attempt humour, or if they do, it's grade four humour. But these are sixteen year olds you're dealing with. I can't think off hand of one incident where he offended a student.

Steven goes on to comment on the effect on the classroom atmosphere of Pat's brand of humour:

As students, you immediately notice the change in atmosphere. All of a sudden it's this, I don't want to say exciting or dangerous or action-packed, but there's a wild element of energy, and you don't know quite where it's going to go next.

Pat's intern, Don MacKenzie, makes a similar observation as he discusses how Pat's sense of humour, while perplexing to him, nevertheless promotes spontaneity and fun:

He had a really cutting sense of humour with some students, and I was never quite able to rationalize why that worked for him, or how the students that were occasionally the point of that humour took to that because occasionally he would single somebody out for jokes, and I wasn't sure that sometimes that didn't make him dangerous. The sense of humour the students have is almost a "Wayne's World" sense of humour, and I think Pat allowed for that expression, and that would have distinguished his class from others. For other teachers that kind of humour didn't fit within the bounds of propriety. Because of my theatre background I recognized very quickly what Pat was doing because I could see the spontaneity. One of the things we looked for in the theatre was spontaneity, and that's what he was achieving. The difference between a movie and live theatre is there's
always a chance in a live theatre piece that one of the actors is going to fall over dead, or forget a line, or something's going to happen. That creates the immediacy of contact between you and that actor. It will never happen with projected celluloid. And it's that element of danger that's there in Pat's classroom. Maybe that sense of danger was important, that at any time this might erupt. It was fun. And all students want fun. I never saw anybody who I thought had their feelings hurt. I can't say that I did.

Pat explained to me that he never directed his humour at students whom he didn't think would understand it or find it amusing. He actually encouraged students to respond to his humour, and so he never directed it at those who weren't intellectually equipped to respond to it.

It was evident from the students' comments that in Pat's student-centered classroom the fact that he gives up a lot of power and control to the students does not go unnoticed by them. Joe, a student of Pat's this last semester, comments on the level of student involvement in Pat's class, and speculates as to why it doesn't always happen in other classes:

Whatever he thinks would get us the most involved, which would, therefore, give us the most understanding of the literature we are reading is what he thinks is the best way to do it.

If there's a whole big power trip, a big 'I have a better education; I know more than you do', then you're too
intimidated to learn anything or to really get involved in the class.

Don, an intern who worked in Pat's classroom, reflects on the effects of the distribution of power and control in Pat's classroom.

It was that approach of not being an expert with a body of knowledge to impart that showed right off the top. There is a brightness that comes into the room when the students recognize that this is a legitimate discussion nobody knows the answer to. It isn't a treasure hunting thing where they are trying to guess what is in Pat's head. He sat on a chair in front of his desk, and just engaged in discussion all over the room, but he didn't set up a level difference.

The issue of power and control in the teaching process, specifically its connection to the preservation, reproduction, and distribution of the dominant cultural beliefs about knowledge and schooling, is a theme in educational research and philosophy discussed by, among others, Apple, (1990, 1982); Giroux, (1988, 1986); and Foucault, (1980a; 1980b; 1980c; 1980d).

Giroux (1986), for example, proposes that dominant educational discourse lacks a critical understanding of how experience is named, constructed, and legitimated in schools, thereby ignoring the dreams, histories, and visions that students bring to school, and actively silencing them. Its main concerns
rooted in issues of control and management, curriculum language "has an intimate relation to questions of power" (p. 10). Giroux suggests that we need to ask how we can work with students to recognize that the dominant school culture functions to make them feel powerless, and that the answer lies, in part, in developing a critical pedagogy that is grounded in the language of possibility and gives both students and teachers an active voice in controlling their own experiences. "The central question for building a critical educational theory," Giroux (1986) explains, "relates to unravelling the lived relations that characterize school cultures" (p. 11).

Apple (1990) refers to the current process of education as disabling in that what counts as legitimate knowledge is held by and passed on by others rather than being created by students and teachers, a process that is demeaning to teachers and unconnected to the lives of students.

Foucault (1980d) presents a view of the relations of power in society and society's institutions, of which the school is one, that is more insidious. From Foucault's perspective, power is pervasive, "a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power as much as those over whom it is exercised" (p. 156), creating a situation of mistrust. According to Foucault, different elements of
society establish "connections, cross-references, complementarities, and demarcations between them . . . a complex play of supports in mutual engagement" (Foucault, 1980d, p. 159). Modern society, Foucault (1980a) expounds, is characterized both by legislation based on public right and by "a closely knit grid of disciplinary coercions" the purpose of which is "to assure the cohesion of the social body" (p. 106). Foucault (1980b) posits that procedures of power have been established whereby the effects of power circulate in a "continuous, uninterrupted, adapted, and 'civilized'" manner throughout the entire social body (p. 119). Power exercised by surveillance and a hierarchical structure is meant "not so much to punish wrongdoers as to prevent even the possibility of wrongdoing by immersing people in a field of total visibility where the opinion, observation and discourse of others would restrain them from harmful acts" (Foucault, 1980d, 153). For Foucault (1980c), truth, rather than something "to be discovered and accepted," is seen as a set of "rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" (p. 132). Truth is linked in a circular relation within systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it.
Foucault's view of power is reflected in the authoritarian structure of many traditional classrooms. His view of power can be seen in whole class instruction with the teacher at the front of the room able to view all students at all times, in the teacher's implicit authority, and in the expert status of the teacher which is constantly upheld by the knowledge he or she imparts. All the while the teachers themselves are caught in the structural hierarchy of the larger school system. But with Pat's democratic position, power and control is not an issue in his classroom. Steven remarks on the effect on the students of Pat's trust in them, his interest in and respect for them, and his egalitarian stance:

He started this format from the beginning of the term. From that first project, how could he know what was going to happen? Or if there was going to be a positive thing that happened? And yet he let it go. And you feel trusted; you feel empowered. I mean, not only does he come down from the pedestal, but he hands over the reins.

A lot of teachers insist on their dominance in the classroom. Pat, on the other hand, I call him by his first name, and I'd do that in class, and although he'd tell me not to call him by his first name in class, it didn't bother him. He knew he was the teacher. He's the one running the show. He's the one getting the paycheck. But he didn't make the students any lesser individuals. It was a group combination. I mean, he might have been top dog, but he didn't insist on sitting on a platform.

As odd as it might sound, at the beginning of the class, he might just sit down and talk to us. If you as a teacher play
with what the students give you, some sort of strange event has occurred, or some kid's got a black eye or a hickie on her neck, or something, it gives you and that student a chance to break that boundary. You can talk to that student and make a joke, ask how it happened, and it really gets the students moving. Like on stage when you're doing improv, you can't go in with an agenda. You have to play with what's there, and that means feeding off only what your partner gives you, and not coming in with, "Well, this is where I want to take the story." And that's the way a lot of teachers are. This is what I want, and you will refer to me as Mr. or Mrs., and ... jump through my hoops. But Pat isn't like that.

In their research into women's ways of knowing, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), report that at the constructivist level of knowing and thinking, women continually reevaluate their assumptions about knowledge. Their attitude towards "the expert" is transformed, and they are not troubled by ambiguity but are enticed by complexity. They take on a never-ending quest for truth and learning where truth is seen as a process of construction in which the knower participates. Coincidentally, or perhaps not coincidentally, this tends to describe Pat, as well, since his perception of expertise in the classroom is grounded in the experience of his students in interaction with each other and himself, and his ability to tolerate ambiguity is inherent in his tendency to create complexity.
Students can be quite astute when it comes to assessing their teachers, and can recognize very quickly whether a teacher is genuine. Comparing his first year university professor to Pat, Steven makes the following observation:

When I came to university, the professor was in theory attempting what Pat had accomplished, and he failed in the execution because he wanted the students to roam and grow by themselves, but he still wanted control, and at the end of the day as you did your good job, he'd give you a little pat on the head, so he really was not ready to give over control. At the same time he wanted you to take control. Consequently, I locked horns with him on occasion. And again, this was fine as long as it didn't go in any direction he didn't want it to. He wanted the puppets to dance themselves, but he couldn't leave the stage. It was his stage, his agenda.

It is likely that the underlying assumptions about teaching and learning of Steven's professor and of Pat are quite different. Lester and Onore (1990) report that anything other than a complete reconceptualization of learning would result in what Elbow (1986) has called "the pedagogy of the bamboozled". While Steven was not "bamboozled" by his professor, many students might be. Lester and Onore (1990) explain their position in the following manner:

If we change the gimmicks we use to teach, but don't change what we think teaching is, then students are drawn into a trap in which they believe that they are empowered over their own learning when their learning is controlled solely by
Similarly, Boomer (1992) questions the dedication of many teachers in the promotion of the students' power to learn and to learn independently and critically. He makes reference to teachers who purport to take a largely facilitative role, often pretending to divest themselves of power by giving limited decision-making opportunities to the students, but still retaining the significant, ultimate powers (p. 6).

By contrast, Pat shares power in the classroom with his students by involving them in decisions, and by offering them options and choices in their work. Rejecting the common practice of telling students what to do, he engages their trust, and invites them to participate in a constructivist process that allows them to be involved in decisions about their learning, as the following comments by Steven and Joe indicate:

I can't actually remember Pat saying, no you can't do that. We came into his class from a traditional classroom so at times we'd say, "Well, what do you want us to do?" And Pat would never tell us what to do. He wouldn't do that. He might throw forth ideas, but he wouldn't tell us what to do. And then as soon as we came up with an idea, he would tell us to go develop particular aspects. (Steven)

He gives us options of what we want to do . . . . Whatever he thinks would get us the most involved . . . . (Joe)
This aspect of Pat's teaching is corroborated by his colleagues. Thorvald Jacobson, administrator, for example, comments that "there was a lot of choice on the part of the kids, and a lot of creative ideas that Pat would feed into the mix to try to get kids interested in their learning." And John MacIntyre, a colleague, comments that "when kids would not be able or were unwilling to reach his expectations, he would give them a number of options; there were always lots of options."

Another quality of Pat's class on which all three students commented was the emphasis on personal growth and expression. They all placed a very high level of importance on it:

Mr. Gray's class shaped my life a lot. I learned a lot about myself and about how to relate to others in life, which is, I think, the most important thing you should learn in English. (Joe)

In Mr. Gray's class, you didn't learn just about the characters in a story and everything. You learned about yourself and how you're learning, as well. (Melissa)

That element of self-discovery is important, and looking back, it's amazing to see how my personality has grown by that class. If I hadn't been in that class, I'd be a much less expressive individual, and I'd probably have a lesser idea of who I am. (Steven)

Another quality of Pat's class that was mentioned by all
three students was its interactive nature. Melissa and Steven comment on the effect that working in groups has had on them and on their ability to learn:

What I learned the most was how to work in a group, and to participate with everyone, not just using my own view but using everyone else's and getting their opinions. I think it's very important to get other's opinions. You understand their views of what you're thinking, and you learn more about them. You get everyone's views of the subject, and so you learn more about the subject. It makes it more clear. It also gives you confidence. If I had never had that opportunity, I probably wouldn't be as open in all my other classes now, and I'd probably not be getting as good marks as I am because I wouldn't be participating as much. I would probably be just back in a corner and just writing stuff down. (Melissa)

There was a lot of individual work tied into group work. The sign he has on his wall, 'None of us is as smart as all of us', really sums it up. By working in groups, working with others, not only do you get perspectives on the material, but you're also getting an interpretation that might be closer to your own culture and time of your class. At the same time, it can also have variations on the interpretation, and so it's very constructive.

In a traditional class setting, it's all individual work, and there's an individual's mentality, and it's competitive. And if there are students that are geared for academic work, it's very competitive. And moving into Pat's class, working in groups of four or five or six, you're still concerned with your own mark, but that higher mark is through better group work. (Steven)
Belenky et al. (1986) inform us that constructivists distinguish didactic talk, when participants report experiences but no new understanding is arrived at, from real talk where careful listening creates an environment within which emergent ideas can grow. Perhaps this defines the difference between teacher talk in a direct instruction classroom, and purposeful talk by students in a student-centered, constructivist classroom, where meaningful discussion occurs and meanings emerge. Belenky et al. (1986) explain that in "real talk" domination is absent, while reciprocity, cooperation, and collaborative involvement are prominent. Thus constructivist activities in the classroom that focus on speaking and listening, like the ones that occur in Pat's class, may promote constructivist thought. In a society that has favoured boys' development to participate and succeed in society, interactive speaking and listening activities such as these may give all students a chance to develop constructivist ways of thinking and being that may better enable them to participate equally and more fully in society.

What students are saying seems to suggest that, for the most part, being a student in Pat's constructivist classroom has been an exciting, enjoyable and empowering experience, but that
constructivist learning may not always be appropriate for all students, at least not yet, as many students are entrenched in a traditional way of learning about which they have formed beliefs that sometimes create obstacles to constructivist teaching. At the same time, students are saying that the most favourable effects of this kind of learning often don't present themselves until after a certain amount of time has passed.

I recalled the questions raised by the reactions of Pat's colleagues to him and to constructivist teaching, and realized that the reactions of these students raise similar questions, the main ones being whether constructivist teaching is appropriate for all students, and whether all teachers are able to teach in a constructivist way, the implications of which are discussed in the concluding chapter.

Students seem to share the impression of Pat's colleague, Don MacKenzie, that Pat's class is "qualitatively different" from other classrooms. Joe, comparing Pat's class to his current English class, observes, "It's not unique like Mr. Gray's classes are."
Chapter Ten

Constructivism and Change: Questions and Possibilities

This research has posed more questions than it answers. Considering the presence of differing learning styles, can I conclude that constructivist teaching is appropriate for all learners? Are all teachers able to teach in this way? By what process does a traditionally oriented teacher change to a constructivist orientation? What kind of teacher inservice activities adequately prepares teachers to make this change? What form does teacher preparation at university assume to prepare teachers for constructivist teaching? What support is available for constructivist teachers at the school level?

In view of the fact the new Saskatchewan curricula are based on a constructivist philosophy, these questions have a particular relevance to the current and proposed implementation of these curricula. How these questions will be addressed is, of course, the biggest question of all. Perhaps Pat's story may be of some assistance to classroom teachers in understanding the constructivist philosophy, and in making the transition from more traditionalist forms of instruction to constructivist strategies. As Goodman (1995) submits, by recording and sharing teachers' stories, exchanging different ways of making sense of teaching-
learning, we change the way we think about the way we think, transforming the cultures of schools and communities. Goodman proposes that

the impact of teacher story and reflection upon the profession lies in the possibility that teachers will come to see themselves as protagonists, as makers of knowledge and culture, rather than as recipients of theories and methods created by Others. (p.3)

I began this story by describing Pat's teaching practice as postmodern--constructivist, student-centered, integrated, and response-centered, and by stating that through continual experimentation and innovation, his practice is an evolving and progressive one. Pursuing a life-story perspective in which I focused primarily on professional experiences, I sought to know how Pat's experiences, knowledge and beliefs throughout his teaching career have shaped his practice into the constructivist practice that it is, to understand the personal and professional influences that informed his practice, and to learn what motivates and sustains him to teach in what is, in the context of a historically traditional field, an unconventional manner. Through reflection and discussion, in conversation with him, in classroom observation, in journal entries, and through conversation with his
students and his colleagues, I have explored the process of Pat's development as a constructivist teacher from his first experiences as an intern and first-year teacher, who relied on fairly traditional forms of instruction, to his current constructivist practice.

While this approach has in many ways been very successful in illuminating Pat's "personal, practical knowledge", and in revealing the process of his development of a constructivist practice, it has, at the same time, not only left some questions unanswered but has created the dilemma of raising even more questions, which also at the present time appear to have no answers.

What my research and analysis of Pat's life and career do reveal is that for Pat, change to a constructivist approach to teaching has been a developmental process that occurred over time, and involved a complete paradigm shift. My research also reveals Pat as an individual whose genuine liking of, compassion for, and understanding of people inspires a remarkable insight into teaching, and instinctively urges him to empower students with qualities and skills to make them competent and successful individuals in school and in life. He is an intuitive, intelligent and creative individual whose patience, responsiveness, and ability to live with ambiguity has permitted him to spontaneously abandon a
plan in order to accommodate specific individual or classroom situations.

It seems that at the epicenter of Pat's philosophy is student empowerment. Like parents who, from the moment their child is born, do everything possible to ensure that their child has the skills and abilities to live independently of them, so Pat, from the moment a new set of students walks into his classroom, does everything he can to provide his students with the skills and abilities to be confident and autonomous learners and citizens.

In a classroom structure that is centered around the students, he uses a constructivist/transactionalist philosophy to create a flexible and integrated English and language arts programme of instruction that incorporates sociolinguistic and reader response strategies.

One problem that my research raises is that while Pat uses a transactional/constructivist/student-centered approach, some students may actually prefer to learn in a traditional, direct instruction classroom: listening to lectures, taking notes, and answering questions in their notebooks. Comments such as the following examples were made to this effect by students and educators alike:
When there are some students who are not able to work in a nontraditional manner, how does he take into account those students that do learn by lecturing, or by taking notes and studying them? (Don, intern)

Is a transactional constructivist classroom the right experience for all kids? Are there some kids who don't profit in that situation? And is constructing a lesson out of the ongoing experience in the classroom the way that teaching should be going? (Dave, professor)

In most cases, the recognition that some students prefer direct instruction is qualified in some way, either by suggesting that students haven't had enough experience with transactional learning to make them confident and autonomous as learners, or by noting that it's the teacher's job to find connections for all kinds of learners. In defense of constructivist teaching, by the very nature of student-centered instruction, under which umbrella constructivist/transactional teaching and learning stand, a student's individuality, including personal learning style, would be considered or taken into account. A professional and conscientious teacher, however, regardless of philosophical orientation, would be flexible, and would provide alternatives for differing learning styles and different classroom situations, and would be educated in, and prepared to use, a variety of strategies. This kind of eclectic repertoire and flexibility are, in fact, aspects of Pat's
instruction as Don reveals in the following comment:

It wasn't like he was just letting those that wanted to discuss do so, and those who didn't not do so. He made a point of drawing out people from the back of the room that were not participating, trying to draw them in, even in a fairly traditional way if he needed to, such as using directed questioning at them.

Pat's own comments concerning his first years in teaching in which he did practise direct instruction indicate that he is capable of using that kind of strategy well, but chooses to use more student-centered strategies primarily because he finds them to be more effective. When the situation necessitates it, however, he will use other strategies that are more appropriate to the learner and the situation.

And so in a class Pat is currently teaching, he has given two students a prepared package of chapter questions for *Flowers for Algernon*, a novel which the rest of the class are studying through reader response group activities. As the two girls complete a set of chapters, he meets with them, and in a very traditional way, they discuss the novel as he reviews their answers with them.

Some students initially experience frustration with constructivist learning, and it is only with the passage of time that
they recognize that learning has occurred. This raises the issue of whether the transition to constructivist teaching and learning requires a certain period of time during which students will undergo the development of new skills. Such skills would likely be beneficial not only for constructivist learning but also for confidence and competence in direct instruction learning.

There are other questions that arise from the research, as well. For example, Dave wonders what kind of experiences and help professors would provide at the university to student teachers who wish to practise transactional instruction instead of the traditional kinds of objectives, questions, and practices which they currently use to help student teachers do direct teaching.

Perhaps a better understanding of how learning occurs, which encompasses learning style, and teacher flexibility are more important than teaching style. Perhaps what we need to do is equip teachers with knowledge about many philosophies and with skills in many ways of teaching so that they are able to use in the classroom whatever method is appropriate in a particular situation or social context with a particular student or group of students. Perhaps flexibility should be a prerequisite quality of teachers. And maybe students should be encouraged to practise different
learning styles, even though they may have a predominant learning style, in order to engage all of their capacities.

McCarthy (1985) reports that brain dominance research (Levy, 1983; Springer & Deutch, 1989) indicates that the left hemisphere typically processes information in a serial, analytical, rational way while the right hemisphere typically processes information in a global, holistic way where patterns, similarities, connections, and intuition are stressed. In most individuals, one hemisphere of the brain is dominant; hence they rely more on one mode of processing than another. Expressing concern that a teaching-learning style which relies mostly on lecture and question-answer methods appeals to only one type of learner, McCarthy advises that teachers vary their instructional methods to accommodate students of all learning styles, to ensure that all students may have the opportunity both to shine in their preferred way of learning and to stretch to proficiencies in other learning styles.

Another question my research with Pat asks is how does a teacher survive in a school culture that doesn't understand this kind of teaching? Although Dave Wilson proposes that it might be necessary to be selective in terms of the placement for teachers like Pat because "they would need to grow, and to have their
current thinking reinforced, as opposed to having to come to grips with the fact that their thinking was being challenged by a directive philosophy," he is probably right when he suspects that these teachers will have "stories that are going to sound an awful lot like Pat's."

In view of the fact that Saskatchewan teachers are being asked to use constructivist curricula, this research also poses a significant question in asking whether everybody can do this kind of teaching, and if they are not doing it now, can they change. Both students and colleagues expressed doubt as to whether all teachers can do what Pat does because much of what he does is intuitive:

I think it was Mr. Gray's personality that brought out a lot of us because he was really open. (Melissa, student)

If you're a natural born teacher, whatever it is in your genes gives it to you, but you do have that inside you. The thing I've never understood about the College of Education is how so many people actually believe you can teach people how to acquire some of those qualities. My feeling is that Pat could have cheerfully skipped the College of Education, and had done just as well because he had it, the "it" being the inquiring mind, the sense of dedication, genuine liking of young people, a strength of character that has allowed him to confront difficult situations, which he often did, with a lot of courage, and whatever else "it" is. (John MacIntyre, colleague)

I don't think that you can just take anybody and make them
that. I think it's as much a gift as it is learned. (Don MacKenzie, intern)

I think what Pat knows comes from his understanding of people. It's the ease, excitement, the naturalness with which he exists with people. It's that people naturalness that he possesses which happens when you visit him in his house, in the staffroom, in his classroom. The behaviour doesn't change in any one of those locales. (Dave Wilson, professor)

To reproduce Pat's way of teaching would be a monumental task. I think many teachers could learn how to do it, but at the same time, their application of the same principles could be different. I'd also have to say that Pat's profoundly intelligent, and a more average person might find it hard, and a person who wasn't naturally a people person like Pat is would find it hard. (Steven, student)

Do you have to have what Pat has, and I don't know what it is that Pat has -- a genetic orientation, feeling, his own background -- to teach like he teaches? I don't know why he is what he is, but whatever he is, do you really have to be that to understand constructivist kinds of teaching? Do you have to have something intuitively there before you can connect with constructivist, transactional ways of teaching? Are there people who are as intuitively transmisional as Pat is intuitively transactional? (Dave Wilson, professor)

Dave Wilson suggests that for some student teachers, getting on board with a transactional/constructivist orientation is not easy, and for them maybe it's best that it doesn't happen because "that's what they are, that's what they'll always be, and they're not going to
The question of how much of Pat's ability to teach in a constructivist transactional way is actually attributed to personal, perhaps innate, qualities has implications for the kinds of inservice that school boards would need to provide for teachers, who may not have the qualities that Pat has, to teach a constructivist curriculum. On the other hand, one is also led to wonder if Pat would be as successful were he using direct instruction. Recalling his comments about his first years of teaching, when he did use direct instruction, and expressed success in his ability to do so, it is apparent that making the change from direct instruction to transactional constructivist instruction was a process for Pat that other teachers could possibly undertake as well. Perhaps reading about Pat's journey in becoming a constructivist teacher may be an appropriate inservice for some teachers, at least in helping them to understand the kinds of changes that they would need to make. Sikes (1992) reports that "teachers interpret and give changes meanings which make sense for them" (p. 49). Sikes reports that teachers perceive change in terms of what it means for their ideologies and philosophies, for the kind of teacher they want to be and be seen as being, for their career aspirations, and for what they are required to
do in their jobs. Imposed change is often resisted because it implies criticism, and "carries with it official authority which challenges professional experience, judgement, and expertise" (Sikes, p. 49). Pat's discussion of the meaning that constructivism has for him in terms of his classroom situation and his philosophy may assist teachers in making connections to their own classrooms and philosophies.

Cuban (1993) offers a number of explanations for stability in teaching practices and instances of teacher-adopted changes. One explanation is deeply rooted professional, personal and cultural beliefs about the nature of knowledge, and about teaching and learning. These beliefs influence policy makers, teachers, students, parents, and the general public towards certain forms of instruction. Another explanation is the organizational structure of districts, schools, and classrooms which shape teachers' dominant instructional practice.

While some teachers resist change, Pat thrives on it. It is clearly evident that the classroom experimentation with new ideas in which he was so involved in his early years of teaching has continued even to the present time. There is no easy answer to the question of why Pat has continued to be experimental and innovative
in the classroom, his practice evolving to a sophisticated level of constructivist teaching, while so many others, after a few exploratory years early in their careers, pursue, with little deviation, a way of teaching with which they have become comfortable.

Super (1957; 1985) defines a number of the stages that characterize the careers of individuals. In his definition, an exploration stage at the beginning of one's career is followed by a stabilization phase during which time one makes a commitment to her or his chosen profession. Super (1985) reports, however, that all people do not follow the same pattern, some people stabilizing early, some later, some never, and some destabilizing only to restabilize later.

Huberman (1993), investigating the life cycle of secondary school teachers, concludes that the development of the profession is "a process rather than a successive series of punctual events" (p. 4). He further notes that "[f]or some, this process may appear to be linear, but for others, there are stages, regressions, dead-ends and unpredictable changes of direction sparked by new realizations" (p. 4). Huberman also notes that there are some people who never stop exploring, who never stabilize, or who destabilize for intrinsic
reasons such as a sudden awareness, a change of interest or values, or for extrinsic reasons such as accidents, or political or economic events. While recognizing that such sequences characterize a large number of cases but never a whole population, Huberman delineates specific phases in the teaching career that include an entry phase of survival and discovery; a stabilization phase of commitment and responsibility in which pedagogy is experienced positively and consolidated; a period of experimentation and diversification where one attempts to increase one's impact in the classroom by embarking on a series of personal experiments to diversify instructional methods and materials; a reassessment phase, a period of self-doubt, monotony, and cynicism, although sometimes this stage emerges gradually from the stabilization phase without any intervening innovative stage; serenity and distance; conservatism and complaints; and, finally, disengagement. Like Super, Huberman's investigation led him to conclude that professional career journeys are not linear, predictable, or identical, and are often unexplainable. In view of Huberman's findings and conclusions, Pat's career journey from survival and exploration to commitment, and then to ongoing experimentation and diversification makes sense. Pat seems to have never left the experimentation stage, and perhaps it is the challenge
and constant renewal inherent in experimentation that has allowed him to maintain a strong interest and satisfaction in his career.

John MacIntyre speculates why Pat, despite his illness, has been able to teach in such an energetic fashion to a point in his career where others would have slowed down and become somewhat complacent:

I think maybe his secret is his ability to pursue a project to its conclusion and then to find something else that would interest him and pursue it. But at the same time, although he would move on to something new, you could always see the connection. He has the ability to incorporate from past experience ideas that were successful into a new project. He sees a relationship, and, of course, he makes his kids see the relationships, too.

Perhaps it is a fitting tribute to Pat and his unconventionality when Dave Wilson says that many questions about teaching have been stirred in his mind from the work that he has done with Pat. He explains that "it's been very interactive. I understand these questions through Pat. Pat has done and asked things that have made me do a lot of thinking."

Or maybe the comment's significance is that it is a tribute to our professionalism. If Pat's teaching prompts us to ask questions of ourselves and of teaching and learning, then maybe that's a good
thing. It forces us to look at and critique what we do, and imagine new possibilities. Heidegger (1977) suggests that as we become defined and confined by our technical-rational ways of thinking and behaving, questioning is the best way to move ourselves towards "the brink of possibility" (p. 307) to find a better way.

Bramwell (1993) uses the term "pedagogy of possibility" in describing the drama curriculum of Dorothy Heathcote which, in her perception, is always centered upon challenging assumptions. Ms. Heathcote creates situations in which the students will question their own and each other's assumptions. In a similar way, Pat creates situations in which he, and consequently other teachers, are able to challenge the assumptions upon which traditional teaching and learning are based.

During my interview with Steven, a student of Pat's, I happened to comment that I was familiar with some of the theory upon which Pat bases his teaching. I was thinking of constructivism, and reader response theory, and so on.

Surprised, Steven responded, "Do you? I thought it was like the eleven secret herbs and spices."

It wasn't until I was reviewing the interview transcripts of all my participants that I realized that it was Steven himself, and many
of the other participants, as well, who had actually identified some of those "secret herbs and spices" of Pat's teaching, different informants repeatedly commenting on similar traits.

And so what follows is a presentation of some of those qualities of Pat's constructivist teaching, as identified by my participants and myself, as possible explanations for, or as a way of defining, the unique experience that Pat's teaching is.

**The Eleven Secret Herbs and Spices**

1. In Pat's student-centered classroom, he gives up a lot of power and control to the students.

2. Pat doesn't take the glory for the accomplishments of his students, but rather empowers them with a feeling of competence and success.

3. Pat's classes reveal a paradigm shift in which the underlying assumptions about what knowledge is, about how people learn, and about what is important are different.

4. Pat's ability to teach is a natural gift, and what he does may be unique and inimitable.

5. Pat offers his students many options and choices. Rejecting the common practice of telling students what to do, he
engages their trust, and invites them to participate in a constructivist process that allows them to be involved in decisions about their learning.

6. Pat's classes promote personal growth and self-expression.
7. Pat builds a lot of flexibility into the structure of his classes.
8. Much of what Pat does in the classroom is intuitive.
9. Pat's classes are interactive, and involve a lot of cooperative group work.
10. Pat has a sense of humour that promotes spontaneity and fun.
11. That learning is occurring isn't immediately evident, and once you achieve a sense of autonomy and confidence from learning in the way that Pat teaches, it stays with you.

And so if we come back to the idea of what makes a teacher, which is essentially what we're asking here about Pat, perhaps John Maclntyre, friend and colleague of Pat, says it best:

I don't know if we can ever know what makes a teacher, but one thing for sure is that you bring a lot of that ability with you, maybe even most of it, and perhaps in the moment of conception, I don't know, but [Pat] has all those basic qualities.

The development of Pat's constructivist practice was a very
active process that occurred over a period of almost twenty years during which, much of the time, practice preceded theory. Always in search of a better way, Pat was propelled by incredible energy, intuition, and a lot of caring, and while we may be able to understand Pat and the constructivist practice into which his teaching evolved, probably few, if any, of us can replicate it. Perhaps the best that many of us can do, as Cuban (1993) expects will happen, is to "modify [our] teacher-directedness and move, albeit slowly, toward a more student-centered classroom organization" (p. 277).

The importance of critical theory in qualitative research has been discussed by a number of individuals, including Peshkin (1988) and Flinders and Eisner (1994), but in research where the researcher and subject share a close relationship, as in a spousal relationship, while the application of critical theory is vitally important, there haven't been a lot of precedents, and, therefore, there has been little discussion. Peshkin (1988), arguing that subjectivity is inevitable, proposes that researchers seek out their subjectivity while their research is in progress to be aware of how their subjectivity is shaping their inquiry and its outcomes. One
would think that a spousal relationship would be an ideal researcher participant relationship for a variety of reasons: trust and honesty already exist in the relationship; the tendency to create a favourable impression isn't an issue; patterns of clear and open communication are present; and collaboration practices are already established, making it possible for spouses to be collaborative in the research process to an extent that acquaintances or even friends cannot be. But while this relationship may facilitate the research process, it doesn't eliminate the possibility of the manifestation of latent bias inherent in the relationship. And so in my research, because Pat is my spouse, I was compelled to be critically conscious at all times, although to what extent I have been successful in my attempt to manage my bias is uncertain. Although all students and some colleagues did provide both sides, I also wonder if my relationship with my subject affected my interviews with students and colleagues who may have chosen, on some occasions, not to make negative comments about Pat to avoid creating offence and thereby jeopardizing their relationship with him. I trust that they have been honest, however, since, for the most part, they have corroborated each other's evidence.
While most comments are supportive and affirming, some comments are critical, which made working with a spouse at times a problematic issue in my research. Confronted with the task of making research decisions about adverse or sensitive data, I was presented with the challenge of how to include negative evidence in my research without offending either Pat or the informant while maintaining the integrity of my research. I made a decision to try to be reasoned and dispassionate, neither necessarily sympathetic nor necessarily dissenting towards either, but to respond to the negative evidence in the context of the evidence as a whole, in the context of the situation in which negative perceptions were formed, and in the context of the theoretical framework within which what Pat does is being interpreted, for example, a constructivist theory of language arts instruction. Whether I succeeded in this is left to the reader. It was not an easy task, and I suspect I haven't always been successful.

Gambell (1995) identifies a further potential problem: a tendency on the part of the researcher to venerate participants and their environments, such as classrooms. There should be little more likelihood of veneration occurring when the research participants are family members than when they are not since
"ethnographic bonding" (Gambell, 1995, p. 2), a phenomenon in which identification and empathy with the participants are formed, develops during the course of the study regardless of the relationship of researcher to participant prior to the study. Nevertheless, veneration of Pat and his teaching practice is something I've had to be particularly vigilant about, and I wonder how successful I've been in avoiding it. A similar challenge exists in presenting a credible report when the researcher shares the philosophy of the participant, as I do with Pat. Since the potential exists for a reader to view with skepticism a report which appears to affirm the research, I have found that I have had to constantly maintain a critical stance, critiquing both my writing and my research, lest a report that is "too good to be true" is presented.

I have made an effort to keep a cautious awareness of my affection for my subject, and of my common philosophical interests with my subject, which hopefully keeps in check the blurring of vision that these biases may threaten, and allows me to present a perspective in my analysis that is as truthful as a first person narrative perspective can be. It isn't always easy to hear adverse evidence about someone with whom you have a close relationship, and the first impulse is to protect the person from it.
On the other hand, as a researcher, I am interested in obtaining a truthful picture and getting a balanced view, as opposed to a story that is "too good to be true", necessitating that I attempt to actively and constantly critique all the evidence, positive as well as negative, and, as I have done, to actually seek negating evidence. And while I asked my informants for negative impressions, most of the evidence presented has been highly favourable towards Pat, and so, even though I try to disclose, where appropriate, disconfirming evidence that has been presented, it concerns me that this story may still sound "too good to be true". I leave it to readers to respond as they will, with their own meanings, their own interpretations, and their own conclusions, as reader response theory suggests they will.

My thesis almost complete, Pat and I returned to the Windows Cafe where we reflected on the research process, the process of his telling me his story. Goodman (1995) writes that in telling our stories we learn to uncover "the implicit knowledges we have about teaching, teachers, learning, learners, and pedagogy" (p. 3). She talks of cultures who have used narrative "to story themselves into sense", and speaks of the recording and sharing of teachers' stories.
as a hermeneutic process (p. 3). Thus narrative itself may be thought of as a constructivist process of sense-making or meaning-making.

Pat explained that for him, the opportunity to look back on his career from the beginning to the present, reflecting on the process of change he has undergone, was an invigorating experience. In his reflection, he saw himself as a progressive teacher and a student-centered teacher, and was able to understand why he has been more successful in some situations, for example, when students are active, and less effective in others, for example, when using direct instruction. He believed that the meanings he perceived through narration and reflection induced him to make connections to, and changes in, his present teaching. This suggests that some sort of sense-making was taking place, that Pat was storying himself into sense, as Goodson contends happens in narration.

I, also, have experienced a type of sense-making through the narrative process of my research. Through writing this narrative, after hearing Pat's stories, and other's stories about Pat, I have come to a better understanding of Pat, of constructivism, and of Pat's journey to constructivist teaching. At the same time, I have learned about myself as a person, a writer, and a teacher,
attempting now to apprehend and envision how I will translate what I have learned into my own work in the classroom. In hearing and interpreting Pat's story, I have heard my own voice.

As I peered through the window at the park across the street, the muted colour of the sunlight, the grass no longer luxurious, and the flowers already touched by frost suggested the approach of fall, and I was prompted to think about the future -- my new teaching assignment, constructivist teaching, the new language arts curriculum, and Pat's career with respect to his illness. If he continues to teach, where else will his journey take him? If he is unable to teach, where will his journey take him? And I realized that, like the fall harvest, where we take things in to be used later and to be resown, the constructivist ideas in this thesis and the new curriculum are a beginning not an end, a new odyssey for somebody, and the story of Pat's journey to constructivism is a way to get there. Pat, himself, will never stop journeying. Whether he is in his classroom or in his living room, he will continue to be creative, inventive, constructivist, and ever evolving.
References


APPENDIX A

Ethics Contract

Consent for Participation
(copy to be retained by participant)

The academic study described in this document is conducted by Mrs. Audrey Gray under the supervision of Dr. Sam Robinson, and is undertaken to obtain data for the partial fulfillment of requirements for the researcher's Master's of Education degree in the College of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Saskatchewan.

The purpose of the study is to examine the nontraditional teaching practice of Mr. Pat Gray, and to explore how his personal and professional experiences, knowledge, and beliefs throughout his teaching career have shaped his practice.

As a means of obtaining data for this life history, the study will involve participant-observation by the researcher of one of Mr. Pat Gray's English language arts classes, interviews with Mr. Gray, and interviews with selected current and former students, administrators, colleagues, and associates of Mr. Gray.

You will be personally involved in the study through your presence and participation in the class under observation, or through your provision of information in formal or informal interviews.

Your participation in this research is valued but is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time; similarly, the researcher reserves the right to terminate the study at any time in the interest of the participants, the project, or herself.

Personal information supplied by you will be held in confidence. While you are being interviewed about the researcher's spouse, neither the results of individual interviews nor any results that may identify you, even by a pseudonym, with Mr. Gray will be shared with Mr. Gray. Raw data consisting of observation and interview notes, audio tapes of interviews, and possible videotapes of classroom activities will be stored in a locked file and destroyed upon completion of this research project. While Mr. Gray has elected to be identified by name, pseudonyms will be used in reference to all other participating individuals in the reporting of this research to protect their anonymity.

You may be interviewed on more than one occasion in order to clarify or extend your comments. A final draft copy of your comments will be submitted to you for your approval.

A copy of the final report or a brief synopsis of the final report will be made available to you should you so wish.

Please direct any inquiries regarding this research to Mrs. A. Gray (477-1586) or Dr. S. Robinson (966-7649)
APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

I have read and understood the information provided in this document, and voluntarily consent to participate in the described research study conducted by Mrs. Audrey Gray.

_________________________  ______________________  ______________________
signature of participant     signature of researcher     signature of witness

_________________________  ______________________
signature of parent/guardian  date
(if required)