

# Toward a Theory of Genre in Teacher Research: Contributions from a Reflective Practitioner

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*Theoretical formulations hover so low over the interpretations they govern that they don't make much sense or hold much interest apart from them.*

—Geertz (1973, p. 25)

## The Anecdote

As students in 10C headed to their next classes, I made my way toward Gordon, who was waiting at my desk with his eyes fixed on the paper in his hand. Perhaps because he was one of 180 young men and women in the six classes I taught each day, perhaps because he was attentive and polite, perhaps because he always completed the work I assigned him, Gordon was not one of the students whose behavior, learning, or lack thereof followed me home each day after school that first year that I taught. This day—the day that Gordon waited at my desk after class with paper in hand—would change that.

“Mrs. Stock,” he asked for my attention.

“Yes, Gordon, what can I do for you?”

He passed the paper toward me. “You circled a word here on my paper. It’s spelled right.” I looked at the word as he continued, “*Customized*. I spelled it right. See.”

Red ink flowed around and through Gordon’s ball-point letters, words, sentences. Concentrating to keep my eye on the word in question, I explained, “It isn’t a word, Gordon. *Customized* isn’t a word.”

“Oh, yes. It *is*, Mrs. Stock. I . . .”

I reached for the dog-eared *Webster’s* on my desk, opened to the *Cs*, and moved to the spot where *customized* should have been. Pointing to the

place, I handed the book to the tenth-grader who stood fully a foot taller before me, “Umm, I don’t see any *customized* here.”

He studied the spot carefully, nodded, turned and left the room. Thinking I’d provided Gordon a response that satisfied him, I didn’t give the exchange another thought until the next day when I found Gordon once again waiting at my desk after class. This time he was holding a magazine in his hand. “What have you got there?” I smiled.

He directed me to a circled word on the opened page. “Look. *Customized*.”

I focused on the word and then let my eyes travel the text on a page filled with print: complex syntax, lengthy paragraphs, vocabulary mostly—but not completely—familiar to me. “What’s this about?” I wondered as I thumbed to the cover of *Car and Driver*. Fanning back to the *customized* page Gordon had presented me, I began to read, carefully this time. “Gordon, you read this?”

He nodded.

“This is hard stuff.”

“No.”

“Yes. Yes. It *is*, to me.”

He smiled.

In words that raced ahead of the reflections, deliberations, and considerations that would follow them later that day and on many other days to come, I asked, “Gordon, will you teach me to read this magazine? I don’t know much about cars. I never know if mechanics are telling me the right thing about my car when I go to get it serviced. Will you teach me about cars?”

Tipping his head slightly, Gordon smiled a question in return, “Are you kidding?”

“I’m serious. Will you teach me to read *Car and Driver*? Teach me to read *Car and Driver*, and I’ll teach you how to read *A Tale of Two Cities*. Deal?”

In a response that was short and to the point, Gordon sealed the compact, “Deal.” He did not say what he might have, what he must have thought. He did not say, “We’ll see. But if this is for real, you’re getting the better of this deal.”

In after school sessions, Gordon taught me to read *Car and Driver*. He pronounced words I did not know, sketched objects that were new to me, gestured and diagrammed automotive dynamics. I was fascinated. If the truth be known, he knew more about automobiles and their workings than

I knew about *A Tale of Two Cities*. But I kept my part of the bargain. I taught him what I did know. He read aloud to me. I read aloud to him. We paused frequently to talk, ask and answer questions, explain the unfamiliar. And we learned. Among other things, we learned that if you know something about a subject before you read about it, reading is easier than if you don't know anything about the subject. We learned that if you have already talked and written about a topic, talking and writing about the topic are easier than if you have not already talked or written about it.

I learned these important lessons about literacy teaching and learning from Gordon, the work we did together, my reflections on that work, and the conversations I had about it with colleagues years before the scholars I read in graduate school conducted their research on the relationships that exist among prior knowledge, lived experience, meaning making, and literacy learning (e.g., Bransford, 1979; Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, & Klausner, 1985; Halliday, 1975; Harste, 1984; Heath, 1983; Kintsch, 1977; Rumelhart & Ortney, 1977). I learned these lessons years before scholarship was published in the United States that addressed—more and less directly—the relationships that exist among language learning and use and participation in discourse communities (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Fish, 1980; Foucault, 1972; Radway, 1984; Robinson, 1987; Smith, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978; White, 1983).

The lessons that I learned from my work with Gordon and other students whose literacy also improved when I asked them to use reading and writing to teach me about subjects that interested them, taught me that tapping into students' prior experiences, knowledge, and interests positions students to invest themselves in their learning and that students who are invested in their learning are often successful learners. Although I didn't use the expression *investment strategies* at the time to describe the teaching activities I was designing to invite students' interests into my classroom, to integrate the study of students' prior texts into the curriculum, and to encourage students to take responsibility for becoming my teachers, I did develop and refine *investment strategies* as I shaped, shared, and swapped anecdotes about them with colleagues.

## Forms and Forums

I have told the anecdote that preserves this surprising moment in my teaching practice many times in the years since Gordon first taught me that I—his teacher—was not a competent speaker, reader, or writer in a discourse community in which he—a student assigned to the “remedial” section of tenth-

grade English—was an effective speaker, reader, and writer. At first, I reviewed it in my thoughts, shared it with my husband, explored it with my colleagues in occasional talk over lunch or after school. Although I didn't realize it at the time, as I first shaped the anecdote, I collected, selected, deleted, organized, and analyzed data about teaching and learning for the purpose of developing effective instructional materials and practices for Gordon and his classmates; and I began what has been career-long work: researching, theorizing, and publishing for review and criticism my developing understandings of literacy, teaching, and learning.

Sometime later, when I had the good fortune to team teach two twelfth-grade English classes in the City of Saginaw Public Schools and to participate for six years in the Saginaw–University of Michigan Teacher Research Group, I had the opportunity within a community of teacher researchers to do more systematically what I had been doing informally as a reflective practitioner throughout my teaching career. I had the opportunity to share and study with colleagues perplexing teaching-learning moments in our practice for the dual purposes of better understanding the dynamics of teaching and learning and of planning effective instructional materials and activities for students in our classes. In that context of regularly scheduled team-teaching, co-planning, and teacher research group meetings, I was able to observe what I had not recognized earlier: There is both system and purpose in reflective practitioners' shaping and sharing of anecdotes (Stock, 1993).

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Another thing that I did not realize at the time that I first shaped the anecdote that introduces this essay is that as I did so I was composing what the ethnographer Clifford Geertz (1973) has described as “quoted raw, a note in a bottle,” (p. 9). Geertz used the description “quoted raw, a note in a bottle” to distinguish an anecdote that he, while working as an ethnographer in Morocco, recorded in a field notebook, from the anecdotes that philosophers construct to illustrate concepts and proposed or hypothetical realities. Reflecting on Geertz's description of the anecdote in which he documented a sheep-stealing incident in Morocco, the literary critics and new historicists Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt (2000) observe that the anecdote as Geertz tells it and describes it “is meant not only to convey the idea of the ‘empirical’ (as distinct from the philosopher's ‘artificial’ stories)” but also to arouse surprise, bafflement, intense curiosity, and in doing so, to require interpretation (p. 22).

For Gallagher and Greenblatt the interpretive social science movement of the mid-1970s for which Geertz has been such a brilliant theorist

and eloquent spokesman invited literary critics to see their own professional skills, their skills as interpreters of textually-shaped human dramas, as “more important, more vital, and illuminating” than they themselves grasped (p. 20). It led them to reconsider “the tools in [their] disciplinary kit and in so doing to renew” their sense of the value of those tools (p. 20). As an English educator, a teacher who had been prepared in English studies and in the field of education, what I did not realize when I first began to shape and share anecdotes about surprising, baffling moments in my teaching practice, was that in shaping anecdotes, “empirical” stories, I was conducting research in a genre that allowed me to bring the professional tools I had learned in my interdisciplinary education to bear on my professional work as a teacher. Like Geertz, I was conducting research in a genre that allowed me to collect “empirical” phenomena about teaching and learning for study, a genre that allowed me to give textual shape to those phenomena, a genre that not only allowed but, in fact, required me to interpret and re-interpret those phenomena, personally and in community, a genre that enabled me to develop effective instructional materials and practices not for the “artificial” students whom I was asked to imagine in my teacher education classes but for students I was meeting in my classrooms, then and there, here and now.

Scholars who have spoken most eloquently and most persuasively for the teacher research movement in K-12 education, the scholarship of teaching movement in higher education, and for the value of inquiry-based, local teaching communities speak in one voice when they insist that teachers who would develop and contribute to a body of knowledge that stands to advance effective teaching and learning must make their research public for peer review and communal use. Arguing for the conduct and development of teacher research, the late Lawrence Stenhouse (1985) put it this way: “Private research for our purpose does not count as research. Partly, this is because unpublished research does not profit by criticism. Partly, it is because we see research as a community effort and unpublished research is of little use to others” (p. 17). Arguing for the development of a scholarship of teaching from his influential position as President of the Carnegie Institute for the Advancement of Teaching, Lee S. Shulman (1995) put it this way: “. . . [S]cholarship entails an artifact, a product, some form of community property that can be shared, discussed, critiqued, exchanged, built upon” (p. 7). Arguing that teaching depends for its richness on reflective practitioners sharing and interrogating their work in community for the purpose of constructing curriculum, Louise Wetherbee Phelps (1991) compares the kind of community she has in mind to what Gramsci calls a “deliberative col-

lege,” a cultural circle in which members discuss and criticize constructively one another’s work (p. 879).

One of the most frequently voiced concerns about the usefulness of teacher research conducted by reflective practitioners is that it has little impact beyond the locality in which it is conducted. The criticism goes like this: While the work of theorists, historians, and critics who write about teacher research is broadly disseminated for peer review and use, the research of reflective practitioners is not. Because with few exceptions,<sup>1</sup> teacher research produces knowledge that is available only in limited contexts, it is not subject to the kind of review and criticism that encourages the growth and development of good work and the deletion from circulation of work that does not hold up under scrutiny.<sup>2</sup>

Assuming that the work of reflective practitioners does produce local knowledge, Louise Wetherbee Phelps argues for the value of such knowledge. In her influential article, “Practical Wisdom and the Geography of Knowledge in Composition” (1991), Phelps joins others who are less convinced of the value of teacher research in her acceptance of the classical distinction between propositional knowledge (knowing-that) and procedural knowledge (knowing-how). Where Phelps departs from critics of the teacher-research movement who distinguish between formal, scientific knowledge which they value more and practical knowledge which they value less (e.g., Fenstermacher, 1994; Huberman, 1996) is in her appreciation of practical wisdom. For Phelps, the noble end of practitioner research—to act wisely in particular situations—makes the knowledge it produces especially valuable and worthy of recognition. Acknowledging her indebtedness to Donald Schon’s (1987) notion of “reflective practice,” Lawrence Stenhouse’s (1985) “congenial and profound concept of teaching as a form of research,” and Aristotle’s treatment of practical wisdom (*Ethics*), Phelps claims that locally generated knowledge is made and put to right use precisely because practitioner researchers’ understandings cannot be separated from the pragmatic goals that those understandings construct and serve. When she argues that practitioner research “is very different from the professional practice of discovery through disciplined inquiry where, by convention, the purpose of inquiry insulates the inquirer from responsibility for action in a situation as a consequence of observing and interpreting phenomena” (pp. 874–875), Phelps draws attention not only to the rich intellectual possibilities for this research but also to its promise to serve the purpose for which it is conducted: to make better educational opportunities available to students.<sup>3</sup>

I could not agree with Phelps more. Had she and other advocates for the local knowledge that teacher researchers develop (e.g., Goswami &

Stillman, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998, 1999a, 1999b) not already made the case for this aspect of the work of teacher researchers so persuasively as they have, I would be moved to make it here. Instead, I wish to make another case, one that has yet to be made.

The gifts of a sound education, broad reading, and most especially the opportunity to become involved in teacher research communities—first in the Saginaw–University of Michigan Teacher Research Group and subsequently in the Syracuse Writing Program and the Writing Center in Michi-

gan State University—prepared and enabled me to recognize what I had not recognized initially:

The workshop, the favored and logical forum for the publication of teacher research, is also the venue in which that research reveals its intertextuality, undergoes broad peer review, and becomes widely available for communal use.

As a reflective practitioner I was using the anecdote to conduct productive research systematically (Stock, 1993). In turn, my study of the anecdote as a research genre prepared and enabled me to recognize that the workshop, the venue in which teachers share and swap anecdotes and the practices born of their anecdotal knowledge, is the forum in which reflective practitioners typically publish the teacher research

they conduct individually or with colleagues in local settings. In the course of my study of the anecdote as genre, I began to recognize that the workshop, the favored and logical forum for the publication of teacher research, is also the venue in which that research reveals its intertextuality, undergoes broad peer review, and becomes widely available for communal use.

## The Workshop

Winter was giving way to spring when my fellow English teachers and I gathered in a colleague's classroom in Pioneer High School for a professional development workshop. Bernard Van't Hul, the workshop leader, captured our attention immediately with an anecdote, an encapsulated tale of one man's humble beginnings, unanticipated good fortune, great expectations; of another man's denied passion; of crime and its consequences. Leaving the end of the story hanging in the mid-air, Van't Hul concluded the anecdote with a question worded something like this: "As a result of the events that I have just told you, what kinds of things are going to be written?"

My colleagues and I smiled at the skillful way the professor of English and director of composition had used an anecdote to draw us into a workshop billed as an introduction to developing research and practice in writing instruction and to the University of Michigan's new composition

program. As we named the kinds of writing that would necessarily follow the intriguing events Van't Hul reported, he filled the chalkboard in the front of the room with our responses: newspaper articles, legal briefs, letters. . . . When there was no more room on the board, he distributed examples of some of the genres of writing that we had named: an autopsy surgeon's report, a legal brief, a front-page newspaper article, a magazine article. As we read excerpts from these writings and began to discuss the nature and logic of their generic features, my colleagues and I agreed that they were quite different from one another. Van't Hul had positioned us to see for ourselves that although English teachers are customarily charged with responsibility for teaching students to write effectively, English teachers are not necessarily prepared to teach students how to compose some of the genres of writing we were examining that day.

The final piece of writing that Van't Hul shared with us was Robert Browning's dramatic monologue, "Porphyria's Lover" which, as it happens, tells the tale Van't Hul used to introduce the workshop. Acknowledging his indebtedness to Cleanth Brooks, John Thibaut Purser, and Robert Penn Warren for the pieces of writing he used to support the purpose of his workshop, Van't Hul indicated that his argument—and therefore his use of the writing samples—was quite different from the argument that Brooks, Purser, and Warren (1964) wished to advance when they crafted the writing samples and published them in the "General Introduction"(pp. 1–8) to their well-known textbook *An Approach to Literature*. Their purpose was not to illustrate that what counts as effective writing differs in different discourses; their purpose was to make a distinction between *writing* and *literature* (emphasis mine here in print; Van't Hul's, in the workshop). A gifted teacher, Van't Hul used the various pieces of writing, including the one that Brooks, Purser, and Warren identified as *literature*, to argue for the set of theoretical principles he had developed to guide the teaching of writing in the University of Michigan's new writing program.

Charged with the task of transforming the university's *Freshman English* course (in which students were asked to write about British and American literature) into an *Introductory Composition* course (in which students were to be prepared to write in disciplines and fields across the curriculum), Van't Hul turned the attention of University of Michigan faculty, teaching assistants, and students and of an audience of community college and secondary school teachers across the State of Michigan from models of American and British literature and surface features of writing to classical rhetoric and effectiveness of language use. He made his message memorable with the acronym, MAPS, which he meant to serve as a reminder that

all language use (spoken and written) is more or less effective depending on how well it does the following things: fulfills the generic expectations for the **M**edium or **M**ode (genre) in which it is composed, addresses the needs of the **A**udience and **P**urpose for which it is composed, and satisfies the demands of the **S**ituation in which it is composed. Because his goal was to change teaching practices, Van't Hul chose the workshop format to demonstrate and model both the theory he was advancing and practices he was proposing. According to Van't Hul, his theoretical construct MAPS was "warmed over Aristotle," Aristotle's rhetorical theory rekindled in light of 20th century scholarship in linguistics.

I think I began to share Van't Hul's anecdote and adapted writing samples with my students the very next day. I know that when I moved from teaching secondary school English to teaching college composition and to teacher education, I shared the workshop anecdote and writing samples with countless composition students, preparing teachers, and inservice teachers who, in turn, have shared the materials with their students and colleagues. Most recently, in a workshop that I entitled "Experience to Exposition: An Exploration of Genres of Learning," I shared the anecdote and writing samples with fellows in three National Writing Project Summer Institutes. However, just as Van't Hul's purpose in telling the anecdote and exploring the genres of writing that he credited to Brooks, Purser, and Warren was not their purpose in developing and publishing the materials, mine was not Van't Hul's. Just as Van't Hul built upon Brooks, Purser, and Warren's work, revising and extending it in the light of rhetorical and linguistic theory for the purpose of improving the teaching of writing in the late 1970s, I built upon Van't Hul's work, revising and extending it in the light of lessons that I have learned from teaching, reading, and participating in other workshops.

The purpose of the workshop I offered in National Writing Project Summer Institutes was to circulate for review and community use strategies I have developed to prepare students to *enter* discipline- and field-based conversations, investment strategies designed to invite students to write about and relate their prior texts—the languages and experiences that they bring with them to school—to subjects they are beginning to study. Van't Hul's anecdote and the materials he developed to raise questions about generic expectations for effective writing serve as a generative starting place for my workshop. Building upon the foundation they provide, I pose another set of questions, among them these: Given the fact that what counts as effective writing differs remarkably in different cultures, disciplines, and fields, how can teachers best prepare students to learn, think, talk, read, write, raise questions, and participate actively in various cultural, disciplinary,

and field-based communities? How can teachers enable students to use the language, experiences, and images that they bring to new studies from their home communities and prior studies in the service of new studies?

To allow workshop participants to develop their own answers to framing questions such as these, I invite us to write in a variety of genres of learning about a subject of study, such as *Children's Play*, that will grow increasingly complex during the course of the workshop.<sup>4</sup> As participants write to (re)collect, sort, analyze, synthesize, conduct dialogues with readings, and to express their developing understandings of information about subjects like *Children's Play*, we discuss both what and how we are learning about the subject we are studying and the ways in which we might adapt the learning activities we are practicing in the workshop for our students and the subjects we teach. As we develop concepts, questions, and a vocabulary for discussing the subject at hand, we also reflect on how we are developing a language and ways of speaking and writing about it. For many of the reading, writing, and discussion activities that I introduce in this workshop designed to invite newcomers into a field of study and to dramatize how a discourse develops, I am indebted to Amherst College's legendary teacher of composition, Theodore Baird. Although I never met Baird, his practices for teaching writing and thinking, like Bernard Van't Hul's, have been circulated by his students and their students in composition classrooms, professional development workshops, and print (e.g., Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1987; Coles, 1978; White, 1975). Like Van't Hul's, Baird's theory and practice of teaching composition may well be thought of as classic in the body of knowledge that shapes teacher research workshops.

## The Genres of Reflective Practice and Teacher Research

Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt's (2000) account of why the new historicists are interested in studying cultural texts that are distant from them in time and space sheds light on why I am interested in anecdotes like the one I shaped about Gordon during the first year of my teaching and workshops like the one in which Bernard Van't Hul introduced the theory and practice underlying a new composition program. Like feminist scholars before them, new historicists are interested in studying overlooked artifacts and experiences. Seeking and studying what was previously dismissed as insignificant, new historicists document the works and lives of little or lesser known figures and in so doing reveal unnoticed connections between and among them and the work and lives of well known figures. Gallagher and Greenblatt indicate that as literary figures previously excluded from

the “proper circles of interest” (p. 9) are introduced into those circles:

The newly recovered authors are of interest in themselves, but they also inevitably change the account of those authors long treated as canonical. Achievements that have seemed like entirely isolated monuments are disclosed to have a more complex interrelation with other texts by “minor” authors. New historicism helps raise questions about originality in art and about the status of “genius” as an explanatory term, along with the status of the distinction between “major” and “minor.” The process by which certain works achieved classic status can be reexamined. (p. 10)

The new historicists’ project inspires me because I suspect that, like that group of interdisciplinary scholars, we English educators have much to learn if we look again carefully at reflective practitioners in our field who, to date, have been regarded as “minor” players in the project of building a useful base of knowledge about teaching and learning. I suspect that we have much to learn if we look again carefully at the research of reflective practitioners that has been largely overlooked because it has been deemed unsystematic, lacking rigorous tests of validity. I suspect that we have much to learn if we look again carefully at the intertextuality of the venues for publication in which reflective practitioners circulate their work for peer review and community use.

Not surprisingly, as the teacher-research movement has grown and developed over the past twenty years and particularly as it has begun to be taken seriously by professional researchers in education, the nature, relevance, impact, usefulness, and value of studies conducted in the name of teacher research have become the subject of critical discussion. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytle, who write as teacher researchers, educators of teacher researchers, historians, and theorists of the current teacher-research movement, group critiques of the movement in three categories: the knowledge critique, the methods critique, and the “ends” critique (1998, 1999a, 1999b).

Reviewing the knowledge critique, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1998) draw particular attention to the work of Gary Fenstermacher (1994) and Michael Huberman (1996) and the distinction these critics make between formal, theoretical, or scientific knowledge and practical knowledge. On epistemological and methodological grounds, Fenstermacher and Huberman question whether teacher research is the product of recognized research methods and tests of validity, whether it counts as knowledge. Drawing attention to that fact that “teacher researchers (like feminists) actually use familiar research methods in new ways as they struggle to construct research

that is designed to be for teachers and learners and not simply about them” (1998, p. 29), Cochran-Smith and Lytle do not find the distinction between formal knowledge and practical knowledge that critics like Fenstermacher and Huberman invoke particularly useful as the basis for critique of a movement that is working to interrupt the classical dualism.

While I am in complete agreement with Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s claim that teacher researchers (like feminists) use familiar research methods in new ways for the most important of reasons, I have not written this essay to make that case. I am arguing that reflective practitioners, whom I consider to be teacher researchers, use unfamiliar research methods and forums for publication, methods and forums that have not yet been recognized as legitimate or authorized to build the base of knowledge that informs their practice. In highlighting the anecdote and the workshop, two genre in which I have observed reflective practitioners shape and share their knowledge, I mean not only to draw attention to the forms and forums in which reflective practitioners work but

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also to raise questions about the nature of research that stands to benefit teachers and learners and research that is positioned to legitimate and authorize the research of the corps of reflective practitioners who are teacher researchers. It is not that I disagree with the claim that research must be intentional, systematic, purposeful, and made accessible for peer critique and community use; it is rather that I believe there has been little systematic study of the genre of research that reflective practitioners have used and are using to build the base of knowledge about teaching that they distribute for review in their professional community although the possibility for such systematic study surrounds us, if professional researchers in education are moved to undertake it. In the corps of teacher consultants of the National Writing Project, for example, there exists an extensive community of reflective practitioners who employ the genre of research and publication I have described in this essay as well as other genre yet to be identified. Might we not have much to learn from systematic study of the forms and forums of research in which these professional practitioners work?

It concerns us all that much educational research that merits respect and admiration for its “exquisite complexities of knowledge claiming and justifying” (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 41) has failed to address exquisitely the purpose for which it is conducted. While such research, without question, is informative, valuable, and highly regarded by those of us in the academic

research community, it has proven to be less informative and valuable to practicing teachers in today's classrooms in our nation's schools. Perhaps the time has come for us to look again carefully at the overlooked and to reconsider the dismissed to learn such lessons as we can from the teacher research of reflective practitioners who have a vested interest in the construction of a knowledge base that will enable them to do good work well.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. Critics are quick to point to work like Nancie Atwell's (1987, 1994) to acknowledge exceptions that prove the rule.

2. In his ground-breaking book *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* (1987), Stephen M. North makes this point when he calls the knowledge of and made by practitioners in composition studies *lore*. Defining *lore* as "the accumulated body of traditions, practices, and beliefs in terms of which Practitioners understand how writing is done, learned, and taught," (p. 22) North names what he understands to be "three important functional features" of *lore*'s pragmatic logic and experience-based structure: First, "anything can become part of *lore*"; second, "nothing can ever be dropped from it"; and third, "contributions to it have to be framed in practical terms, as knowledge about what to do; if they aren't they will be changed" (pp. 24-25). As North sees it, Practitioners tinker with things to see if they can make them work better. They feel no obligation to test the usefulness of a colleague's ideas or practices in the same form in which their colleague has used them.

3. In the field of education, Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn Herr (1999) make the same argument implicitly when they call for the development of new critical constructs to measure the rigor and value of practitioner research. Among the constructs they propose for development is outcome validity which Anderson and Herr define as "the extent to which actions occur which lead to a resolution of the problem that led to the study" (p. 15).

4. I am indebted to another gifted workshop leader, the educational phenomenologist, Loren S. Barritt, Professor of Education in the University of Michigan, for one of the most provocative and productive topics of inquiry that I have used in this workshop: Children's Play.

5. I would like to thank David Medei for his thoughtful response to an earlier version of this essay. The essay is stronger thanks to his careful reading of it.

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