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Bridge across Silence: Journal Writing as a Means Towards Understanding *The Color Purple* and Addressing the Silences Around Multi-cultural Experience in a Classroom

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SUPERVISOR: ANN SMITH

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Declaration

I declare that this report is my own work which is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in English Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Thanks

I am indebted to Ann Smith, my supervisor, for her astute guidance and support and for always being willing to share her time and expertise with me.

I wish to acknowledge the support I have had from my husband, Ken, whose unfailing belief in me has kept me reasonably sane.

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INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of South Africa as a new democracy and the concomitant new constitutic here has been interesting and subtle change in the context in which I teach. The composition of my classrooms has changed and thus I have used journal writing by the students to try to deal meaningfully and transformatively with these changes. My classroom had, within a relatively short space of time, become a multi-cultural one in which silences, different from those I had previously noticed, emerged.

From being constituted predominantly from the white upper classes of South Africa, the composition of the classroom had become, to use the Canadian metaphor of diversity, a mosaic of young women from all over Africa and, indeed, all over the world. The dominant culture of this particular private school which is white, upper middle class and almost feudal in its inherent class structure, has remained the same, but the number of those trying to fit into, understand and deal with that culture had increased.

The sixteen-year-old girls in my classes were dealing with what it means to be women, and the paradoxes that that includes, while others were trying to deal with these paradoxes while simultaneously trying to assimilate themselves into a different value system - often one that contradicts or opposes their very

own culture. For example in white upper-middle-class culture, in this school, there is the belief that women should be quiet and dignified, while in many African cultures it is considered improper to speak softly. Often black students are told to behave quietly, as young ladies should. This behaviour is a contradiction of one aspect of their very culture. The natural honesty and exuberance of girls prior to adolescence is lost as they realise the contradiction that exists between their autonomous selves, and what Piper refers to as "their need to be feminine, between their status as human beings and their vocation as females" (21). Girls become what they think others want from them rather than allow themselves to be who they want to be. I believe that journals used in conjunction with literature, provide a means of getting closer to that potential autonomous self, that authentic self that wants to be, rather than the self that settles for so much less.

No longer in literature classes were references to Western archetypes or myths necessarily appropriate or even meaningful. To be steeped in one culture, and to refer to it as the only culture was to ignore the voices of a number of people I taught. I had always encouraged students to keep journals and I began to notice a tendency of the girls I teach to articulate in their writings who they were in terms of race and culture, particularly if that culture was different from the predominant one. Clearly many of the students needed a voice within the institution and the journal appeared to be a safe place in which to express who they were. Howsoever the individual perceived that difference, the journal could become the vehicle to break the silence and

acknowledge that difference, and it was this that led me to institute the journal as part of my pedagogical practice in the teaching of literature.

With the emergence of the "New South Africa" issues of race were thrown into relief. The prescribed text ***The Color Purple***, became a focus for many of the students' questions about themselves, their past, present and future. Alice Walker's novel provoked in the students questions about race, feminism and religion, which they had previously glossed over or even ignored. The journals became a place for girls to deal in a safe way with their fears and changing attitudes to the world around them. My broad research question therefore may be thus formulated: Can journal writing as part of the process of understanding ***The Color Purple*** facilitate the exploration of the self and of the value of difference in a class of adolescent girls? How are areas of difference in terms of race, gender and religion explored by the adolescents when related to this specific text and how does this provide a means towards their silences being broken?

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Framework

I believe, in the context in which I teach, that there needs to be a space in which the students can feel empowered enough to explore their experience of difference - differences which should be acknowledged by teachers and other significant authority figures or role models, and not perceived by students as some sort of deficiency or failure which dictates silence. Through the students' study of ***The Color Purple***, and their simultaneous keeping of a journal in which to record this process of understanding the novel, I hoped to provide a space for them to break the silence that can arise from the inability or unwillingness to confront, accept and/or celebrate these differences.

Through an analysis of the journals written by the girls I teach, I will demonstrate the applicability of journal writing as a means towards understanding the novel, ***The Color Purple***. I also aim to show how the activity and process of journal writing bridges the silences that arise in the students' experience at school and in society in general.

So often in schools, students in their study of literature write what they think others (particularly their peers and teachers) want to read. Their view of

themselves can become distorted by their trying to fit into a norm, sometimes even into a culture not their own. Pat Belanoff in "*The Role of Journals in the Interpretive Community*" explains this notion:

> Writing (or trying to write) what they think their teachers want them to write cuts students off from the source of their own writing strength: the impulse to express themselves.... I use journals in literature classes as a way to help students stay connected to direct expression in writing of their free interaction with a text. (101)

If the journal can articulate, give substance through words, to who they are, then they will move towards being able to bridge the silences they have assumed in order to deal with the discrepancy between their public and private selves. Writing to an interested teacher about something and knowing that it will be valued validates their own understanding of the text, in this case, ***The Color Purple*** and the "text" of the self. I believe that in multi-cultural classrooms these understandings are vital to the growth and development of the students.

The study of literature in the classroom seems to provide a space in which "life ideas" can be, and are, discussed. Literature seems to allow for an exploration of difference if this is encouraged and the use of a journal for this end seems particularly valid. Literature can be used as an area of empowerment but often the converse occurs because of the hierarchical nature of the ways in which the study of literature is so often conducted.

Often, because of canonical readings and subsequent interpretations students feel that their own ideas are invalid and their experience of grappling with literature becomes a disempowering one. Adrienne Rich writes about her experience of literature in the classroom:

> My daily life as a teacher confronts me with young men and women who have had language and literature used against them, to keep them in their place, to mystify them, to bully them, to make them powerless. (quoted in Gannett : 197)

This is indeed true of the experience of some of those whom I teach. Language has been used as a means to silence women for centuries and women frequently respond by agreeing to be silent. The very fact that so much canonically endorsed literature is written by men tends to silence women. Yet the opposite can occur in a literature classroom: interpreting literature for themselves, as its meaning emerges for them in the space where they are, in their present, can create a space in which female students can find a voice. Nevertheless this space for using that voice must be structured. It must be a space that allows the student to express a meaningful engagement with the text. Belanoff aptly explains her concerns with what occurs when this meaningful space is not created:

> What happens too often in traditional literature classrooms is that students are assigned a work to read and interpret and the first thing that they do is run to the library to see what others have said about that particular

> work...that should be the final step, not a first step....
> (107)

What happens in these traditional situations is that the teachers often deny the validity of the students' voice or students deny their own voice themselves. They become accustomed to writing about other people's thoughts and consequently they invalidate their own. By combining the use of a journal with the study of literature I believe it is possible to encourage and restore the voice of the student. This is not to deny the value of wider reading but only to locate that reading as secondary and as an adjunct to the student's own understanding and the articulation of this.

Journal writing allows for some of the restrictive structures common to much of South African classroom practice to be overcome. So often the constraints on students inhibit not only their creativity, but also their spontaneity. Rules pertaining to form and structure in relation to writing in English literature classes are subordinated in the presentation and assessment of journals and this freedom afforded the students allows them the means to express themselves. Consequently a more trusting relationship between teacher and pupil, which facilitates less formal exchanges between them, can be established.

My reason for choosing the novel ***The Color Purple*** is because it deliberately sets out to be an agent of social change. The work indicates how the bridging of silence leads to a meaningful emancipation of the human spirit in general, and in particular that of a young black woman. It deals with the silence of

being a woman, black, and also a victim of incest. Celie, an abused adolescent, initially afraid to articulate even her own name, discovers what it is to be a woman. Not only is her gender slowly defined but so also are her religion, her sexuality, her blackness and her individuality. She begins to perceive herself as an entity which is complete and acceptable in the face of overwhelming odds. The novel deals with issues pertinent to many of the students and thus it allows for the meaningful exploration of issues around gender, race and culture. Structurally, the novel is similar to a journal in that it is a series of letters through which is demonstrated the main character's development over thirty years.

There are many definitions of what a journal is. People for centuries have been keeping journals, logs or diaries for a variety of reasons. Perhaps it would be best to consider briefly what a journal encompasses, in the context of this research. It is not only a prewriting scribbler or an aide memoir to the writer's memory; it is not only a diary kept on a regular daily basis; it is not only a simple literature log. It is all these things and more. It is a battlefield which records the wins and losses in the life of its writer; it is the place to record changing, enlightening, frightening and revealing emotions as the writer encounters herself as she engages with a specific text. A journal says, "This is me, my life. Listen to my voice." It need not be a completely non-academic experience since it should indeed engage in profound and complex thinking strategies. Furthermore the journal, as Anais Nin suggests, is a "means of creating the self, of giving birth to ourselves" (quoted in Rainer: 9).

Indeed this idea of how writing in a journal could create the self can be seen through the development of Celie in ***The Color Purple***. The very fact that Celie writes to an anonymous being whom she initially refers to as God suggests that there is an incipient self in need of articulation. As she writes, Celie's nascent self burgeons into a self that is able to deal meaningfully with issues that she had previously been too afraid to articulate other than by writing to a nebulous anonymous God. These ideas of silence and the creation of the self in writing are true of Celie, the protagonist, in ***The Color Purple***. She writes herself into a newly self-created identity and this points towards the possible transformative nature of the journals kept by my students especially since they are beginning to name the world for themselves.

Journal writing is not fully recognised for its value in South African classrooms because the keeping of a journal is considered too "emotional" and "unacademic" to be taken seriously. As a result journals are associated with less important and less credible popular culture by more conservative teachers, and viewed as irrelevant to any literary culture because they do not necessarily use academic discourse. Journal writing as a means toward understanding texts is seen to be inferior to more conservative classroom practices, such as formal literary essay writing because the style is so much less formal than that associated with canonical writing. The debate around the use of journal writing as valid pedagogic practice centres on what counts as academic validity in relation to journals. Patricia Bizzell, who argues that journals have no academic worth, questions their heuristic value explicitly:

> [...the journal might be a genre that generates personal connections with classwork, such as expressing ... revulsion for genetic research, but that discourages other kinds of thinking, such as surveying ... resistance to scientific research through the ages. According to this line of argument, students would need to learn other, more academic intellectual work. (qtd in Gannett: 197)

Because diaries have long been associated with women the genre of journal writing has consequently been devalued as emotional and unscientific inquiry. Gannett argues that this narrow definition of journals "has ... to do with [journals'] noncanonical, feminized status..." (197). In agreement with Gannett's dismissal of Bizzell's view, I would argue that it is often within the "safe" confines of a journal that students feel comfortable and sufficiently secure to explore more complex ideas. Furthermore, the use of journals does not preclude other forms of academic writing. The use of the journal is an adjunct to common academic writing practices; it is not necessarily an end in itself. It is, however, a space for reflective, critical, as well as emotional, thought. Berthoff sees the value of journals for both artists and scientists. Belanoff suggests that because journals allow the journal keeper to "look carefully" at whatever is being examined, the essential skill of looking, which is arguably the "sine qua non of inquiry" for all fields of study, is honed (101). The journal allows for problems to be posed. If students are posing problems their minds are certainly being engaged in an academic manner. believe that journals have far greater value than merely to engage a students' concept

making skills: they are a space where students can try to deal with the contradictions they face in society. Journals are a space for the articulation and questioning of what is valid for the writer.

Although he is discussing specifically creative writing, rather than journal keeping, Michael Rosen valuably suggests that adherence to form "denies the existential and cultural and ideological purposes of writing" (196). Teachers, often bound by restrictions of time and by the public examination system, as well as the need to teach a prescribed syllabus ignore the students' need to express who they are. If, as teachers, we do not allow for the expression of those selves we could deny students meaningful access to the process of their own identity formation. Furthermore, we could be denying students the right to value their culture which may be different from the cultural ethos of the context in which they are studying. Journals allow the teacher to put form aside, even momentarily, and to concentrate on what and how the students feel about an issue. While an argument could be made for journals in fact sustaining silence because the issues confronting adolescent girls remain "silently articulated", I believe that giving students a safe place in which to express their identities will afford them the necessary confidence to broach concerns, contradictions and differences more publicly. In other words journals serve as intervals between the private and public selves of the students.

Henry Thoreau, America's most quoted journal keeper believes that journals are "[o]f myself for myself" and this highlights the point that I wish to make that

journals enable the writers to move towards exploring difference, and towards understanding themselves in relation to issues raised in the study of novels. If there is no outlet for these discoveries they either lie dormant or they disappear and valuable information about the self in relation to a novel is lost. Journals provide the space for making connections between ideas that initially might appear too disparate for association. Journals give value to the thoughts being expressed in them and thus accord value to the writer and her ideas.

Fulwiler suggests that journals are:

> a place to practise personal expressive writing; a place to keep a record of an educational experience; a place to record intellectual growth in the ongoing connections between talking, listening, reading and writing. Most of all, the journal is a place where the writer can reflect upon the relationships between the self and the world and explore the implication of those relationships. (130)

Clearly this idea is a variation on Thoreau's notion about the journal being a place to explore the self in its recognition that it is also a place to acknowledge that the self is a shifting, changing entity.

In a journal, the writer is able to explore how she is different from others in the universe. It is these differences that make the individual special and unique and therefore valuable. By writing these ideas to a teacher the student is able to engage in a written dialogue with another interested person. Before doing

so in more formal writing the journal writer can use this form as a way into exploring ideas while also investigating ideas of the self. Geoffrey Summerfield expresses this notion when he writes that:

> [j]ournals are, willy-nilly, directly or indirectly "speaking" to others, are ways of preparing for conversation, are fragments of work in progress, accountable and answerable – part of a tribal enterprise. In such a tribe, we talk to ourselves primarily in order to talk more effectively to others; the alternative is to end up talking only to ourselves. (37)

The problem is that if a learner talks to herself only, in a private diary, she may lose sight of her value in relation to others and may thus be effectively silenced. The adolescent who has no way of articulating that self to others, because she feels she is not valued or heard by them, can begin to negate those very points that make her unique, different and interesting in the world: journals enable that difference to be explored and valued through mutual exchanges between teacher and pupil. According to Lowenstein, "[t]he history of personal journal writing is akin to tracing the development of self-consciousness [and] throughout history journal keeping will shift back and forth over the public and private domains" (87). Her analysis of the history of the journal indicates that journals are valid areas for bridging silences and transforming the journal writer's ideas.

Because this research deals with young women on the verge of adulthood it is appropriate to examine the value of journals particularly for female

adolescents. I have suggested that there are silences that surround many of my students. An analysis of why this is so is pertinent at this juncture. The institution in which my students find themselves studying is steeped in tradition. While the institution tries to move forward in terms of technology it is bound to the past by these traditions.[1] Female teachers, at this school, are all addressed as "Madam". For some black students this is difficult because the term has connotations of "maids and madams". In South Africa, until recently, madams were white and maids were black. Inappropriate power structures are thus silently perpetuated. The authoritarian nature of discipline and decision-making processes makes it difficult for students to articulate themselves honestly. In order to advance, or obtain recognition in the school, students must avoid pushing barriers, must avoid questioning existing structures for fear of being seen to be "bucking the system". Furthermore, because the institution is steeped in what is considered correct in polite society a certain reticence around taboo subjects, such as sexuality, exists. Because many of the students are from privileged backgrounds the purpose of their education is paradoxical. They must be educated at an educationally superior institution, but if they move back into the class structure from which many of them come, then that education which prepares them for tertiary education and professional careers is undermined for they will be in a position not to have to engage in waged work outside of their homes. Indeed if they marry men who are in corporate arenas they will not be expected to work and

[1] Tradition can be a valuable part of education when it serves to create a sense of heritage for students, but when one abides by tradition for the sake of it and ignores progression and diversity within the broader context adherence to traditions can, I believe, become destructive.

fulfil their own needs. One would hope that we would be training these girls to be the corporate decision makers but I believe that the very structure in which they are educated prevents them from articulating themselves in such a way that will enable them to become these decision makers. Many believe that a school of this nature has the sole purpose of producing "trophy wives" suitable to be shown off in high society.

Language is another source of silence for the students because often they do not have the words to describe their experiences. Women have been marginalized by language: Dale Spender, as Gannett points out elucidates these notions:

> Because women have not been involved in the production of the legitimated language, they have been unable to give weight to their own symbolic meanings...they have been unable to pass on a tradition of women's meanings of the world.
>
> Both sexes have the capacity to generate meanings, but women have not been in a position to have their meanings taken up and incorporated in the society. They have not been in the public arena, they have not been the "culture"-makers, with the result that any meanings they may wish to encode, but which are different from or at odds with those that have been generated by men, have been tenuous and transitory: they have been cut off from the mainstream of meanings and therefore have frequently been lost. (59)

Because women have been marginalized by language the journal has proved to be a place where women can go "to be 'alone' with language, beyond the scrutiny of the 'namers'" (60). The journal thus becomes a space for a woman to record her lived experience as it is for her. To this end journals are vital for the expression of the self of the adolescent girl. I expressly emphasise gender here for it has been argued that males do not grow up with this need to write themselves into their own understandings because they, unlike females, usually have strongly defined boundaries of the self.[2]

The loss of the well-defined sense of self between childhood and adolescence is a current concern amongst psychologists and educationalists who work with adolescent girls. Mary Piper, in ***Reviving Ophelia***, documents a series of case studies of adolescent selves in crisis. She asks the question: what inhibits the once natural and spontaneous curiosity? To this question I respond with another: to what extent can literature in conjunction with a literature log or journal allow a space for this curiosity and creativity to emerge?

Gilligan's study involves adolescent girls who attend a school in an "atmosphere of privilege and promise in an intensely female community housed in the architecture of high Western culture" (5). This notion of "high Western culture" reflects the structure in which my subjects find themselves

[2] Gilligan, In ***Gender and the Journal*** argues that males learn that they are not like their mothers and thus develop a primary sense of self as autonomous. They also learn that females are less powerful in the culture than males are, which encourages active dissociation from the mother. Sons ultimately inherit the linguistic power of the father while females inherit a public language that is often misogynistic (49).

studying, yet, for many of the girls, her own environment reflects a different culture.

The mono-cultural positioning of teachers in multi-cultural classrooms also points to a need for students to address their own culture in spite of the various cultures encountered in the classroom. The journal provides a space for the student to articulate and address her difference. Dealing appropriately with cultural diversity as it is offered within the journal is vital for students to value and deal with their own difference. This is particularly important to address because the class, with whom this research was undertaken, is a multi-cultural one.[3] Terry Dean in *Multi-cultural Classrooms, Mono Cultural Teachers* in **The Writing Teacher's Source Book,** states that "the further a child's culture is from school the less chance for success" (106). Thus, by providing a space for that articulation of cultural difference the gap between the culture of the school and the home is narrowed. The difference, through articulation in a journal, does not remain a silence but instead, by being acknowledged can be afforded value and meaning in the environment of the classroom.

Learning in a multi-cultural context should be a broadening and exciting experience, but when one culture is dominant, those from non-dominant cultures are often marginalized. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that all the girls are dealing with the cultural issues of womanhood regardless of

[3] The school includes 52 different nationalities and 26 home languages that are not English. The subjects are Grade 11 students at an all-girls private school in Johannesburg. They have different cultural backgrounds but come from a relatively privileged economic group.

the culture to which they belong. There exists a contradiction for those au fait and comfortable with other aspects of their own culture because how they feel about their gender and its role within that culture is often different from that to which the school subscribes. For example, how they sit, speak, interact is often prescribed by the "high Western culture" of the school yet how they do these things within their own cultures may be very different. Likewise, girls who are part of the dominant culture often have to deal with contradictory messages about their gender from that culture. For example, girls must avoid exuberance, be non-confrontational, self-composed yet self-effacing, but to achieve in the broader spectrum of that culture these are the very qualities that may preclude them from being anything more than well educated young women. Gilligan (quoted in Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan 1997) suggests that these contradictions result in pressure on the students as they choose between silence and acceptance or voice and rejection:

> Girls are under pressure from without and within to shape themselves in accordance with dominant cultural ideals of femininity and womanhood or of maturity and adulthood. This creates a tension when the ideals of womanhood and femininity are those of "selflessness", and the ideals of maturity and adulthood are those of separation and independence. Girls experiencing this initiation into dominant cultural ideals and values often perceive that, either way they will lose relationship: either way they will give up their voices to others, learning to think, feel and say, or they will give up their

> relationships with others and learn to be self-sufficient, entire unto themselves. (111)

If adolescent girls are struggling to find a voice within the dominant culture of an institution, and that culture is one to which they belong then those adolescent girls who belong to a culture different from the dominant one must be bearing the burden of a double silence. Not only do they have to break the code of what it is to be a woman in their own culture, but they also have to understand the contradictions and nuances of a dominant, but different, culture. I believe that journals, particularly in conjunction with a text such as ***The Color Purple*** provide a space for questioning and dealing with the contradictions that hitherto have been ignored.

Piper also addresses these contradictions in Western society where adolescents discover that it is impossible to be both female and adult. Girls who speak up, who address the contradictions in their world are labeled in pejorative terms. To survive, girls turn away from the thoughts that disturb them. Piper explains this phenomenon clearly:

> ...generally girls are inarticulate about the trauma of [society's contradictions]. The issues that adolescent girls struggle with are barely discussed in the culture. Language doesn't fit their experiences. Protest is called delinquency, frustration is called bitchiness, withdrawal is called depression and despair is labeled hormonal. (40)

To survive the girls must often relinquish who they *really* are. Their selves are lost in an attempt to come to terms with their predetermined female role. If girls within the dominant culture are "inarticulate" about these contradictions the silence of those who are "othered" is by implication more disturbing. One of my own students who is the only black girl in her class, wrote in her journal, "I am so used to not talking that I have forgotten how to think." Her words are painfully telling: how many women on the verge of adulthood find it easier to lose their sense of self, and to stop thinking in order to survive?

It is necessary to investigate the silences found amongst women which have to do with their survival in the world – such as that around the trauma of incest. This is explored by Gannett in ***Gender and the Journal*** and her research is particularly relevant to my work on ***The Color Purple*** with my students. Garret quotes Carol Barringer and her work on this silence of inces victims and how this affects the self. She makes the connection between the silencing of victims and the need for educators to deal with that silencing:

> It seems to me that, as scholars and educators, those of us who deal with students on a regular basis must start to acknowledge the ways in which insidious forms of muting and silencing affect our students and our own sense of self as speakers, writers, and as knowers....(83)

As "knowers", then, or teachers, there is a need for us to find ways of bridging such silences and I believe, as does Gannett, that journals go some way towards doing this.

In the 1960s Gestalt therapists used, as Rainer calls it, "imaginary dialogue to help people become aware of various aspects of their personalities" (100). Writing imaginary dialogues is not vastly different from writing a journal to a teacher or interested person. Writing to a teacher about relevant issues that a text raises for the journal writer allows for an exploration of the self. Carl Rogers' theory of personality is useful to my study since from his emphasis on the individual's unique moment to moment reality it can be argued that the journal is a valid place for addressing that reality as perceived by the adolescent at any one given time. Rogers (quoted in Smith et al 1978) suggests that:

> [t]he self, or self-concept, is an organized, consistent, conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of the relationships of the "I" or "me" to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions. (421)

While Rogers' emphasis on perception is important to my research I need also to emphasize my belief in the validity of the postmodernist notion of the shifting nature of identity - that the self is a construct subject to change. As one student quoted so aptly in her journal:

> *We are not ourselves; actually there is nothing we can call a self anymore; we are manifold, we have as many selves as there are groups to which we belong*...(source unknown)

If the self is indeed a construct which changes, the journal is a place where that changing self can be articulated. The journal provides a "safe-house" for exploring and growing the self. Rainer suggests that writing in a journal (or a new diary as she terms a journal) results in a discovery of self:

> It is a sanctuary where all the disparate elements of a life - feelings, thoughts, dreams, hopes, fears, fantasies, practicalities, worries, facts, and intuitions - can merge to give you a sense of wholeness and coherence. It can help you understand your past, discover joy in the present, and create your own future. (18)

CHAPTER TWO

Building the "safe house"

All the journals to which I refer are from a Grade 11 class of students at a single sex girls' private school in Johannesburg. All the girls gave permission for their work to be used in this research and, as is customary, their names have been changed. I have quoted from their writing as it appears and I have not made any adjustments to grammar or style, since I believe that to do so would be contrary to the very point of my argument. For too long female voices have been silenced or altered. The voice must be heard as it is. (The writings of the students have been italicized to distinguish them from other material in this report. I also standardised their spelling and punctuation.) Although there was no emphasis placed on grammatical accuracy the writers were encouraged at the outset to pay some attention to style.

Besides obtaining the approval of the journal writers themselves, prior to initiating this research, permission was obtained from the principal of the school in which I teach, to carry out such research. Parents were asked to give approval for their daughters' entries being used in this report and the academic ethical requirements for using human subjects were thus met. (Appendix 1)

All the students read the novel, ***The Color Purple***, and lessons were structured around it. The students were invited to keep a journal to record their responses to the lessons, and to their process of understanding ***The Color Purple*** and the issues the novel raised for them as individuals.

Because journals are by nature intensely personal I indicated to the students that I was neither a therapist nor a counsellor. I felt that it was necessary to acknowledge this at the outset of the procedure so that the journals were more focused on ***The Color Purple*** as a means towards articulating the self rather than being journals simply to express adolescent angst. However, in spite of this insistence it was my aim to create a safe space in which the students as writers could explore their ideas and themselves.

A lesson (Appendix 2) on gendered language was used as an introduction to some basic ideological notions of feminism. Concepts of patriarchy were taught. Many of the girls did not initially align themselves with feminist thinking since they had preconceived stereotypical notions of feminists as hard, strident, unkempt, placard-yielding women. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie suggests that particularly in Africa "[m]ale ridicule, aggression and backlash have resulted in making women apologetic and have given the term 'feminist' a bad name" (11).

This denial of a feminist sensibility is typical of adolescent girls who have had much of their world defined for them by men. Piper writes that to adolescent girls "feminism is a dirty word" yet they "believe that men and women should

have equal rights" (41). The cognitive dissonance is obvious. While denying any association with feminism my students found the analysis of gendered language a revelation about their world. I found it disturbing that they had never acknowledged or questioned how they, as young women, were named in society. Their fascination was recorded in their journals. This exploration of gendered language served to encourage many of them to recognise how their world, as women, has been described for them, more often than not, in negative terms as they realised how often the dominant language names women as sexual objects or as commodities.

In small groups the students discussed the meanings of words and their binary opposites such as "sir" and "madam"; "master" and "mistress" and "bachelor" and "spinster". The examination of parallel terms for men and women, as indicated on the worksheet, allowed the students to come to an understanding of how their female world has been frequently described in pejorative, misogynistic terms. We then looked at how words which describe female body parts, particularly sexual organs, are marked down while those that refer to male body parts are marked up in gendered language. Through these lessons feminism came to be seen no longer simply as synonymous with the bra-burning spectacles of the 1970s pejoratively painted by their parents, but rather part of the attempt to name the world adequately and positively for women. The fact that many of the students were unaware of how their world has been described for them in male terms showed them how, in turn, many of their voices had been silenced in various ways even though

they themselves were unaware of this silencing. The journals allowed for an exploration of these issues.

This proved to be an interesting precursor to the introduction of the keeping of a journal on ***The Color Purple*** since the students were encouraged to understand how their own worlds are constructed linguistically and from this, they could approach Celie's world better informed. Gannett succinctly explains the potential value of journals in relation to these issues when she suggests that:

> ...[t]here have been very few places women could go to be "alone" with language , beyond the scrutiny of the "namers." Certain forms of the journal might be suited to this purpose, especially when we begin to realise that the muting or silencing of women has not been restricted to the internal workings of language alone. For, just as they have more rights to the formulation of meaning in the language as a system, so it seems that men have more rights when it comes to using that system. (60)

This notion of language is important to the students' understanding of themselves as individuals and as readers of ***The Color Purple***. Through their hegemonic control of language men have been able to stereotype women and consequently alter their perception of who they are and this is seen to be true in the case of Celie in this novel. The male characters stereotype Celie: Alphonso, who is trying to marry Celie off to Albert says: "She ugly....But she'll make the better wife"(10). Women who do not keep silent are powerful and

feared: Alphonso tries to denigrate the schoolteacher who is educated when he says, "[w]hoever listen to anything Addie Beasley have to say. She run off at the mouth so much no man would have her" (11). Students found this interesting since they could see how women are afforded status only if they are married and how, because Addie Beasley has a voice, she is ridiculed. While this analysis of gendered language pointed students to a clearer understanding of the text it also allowed them to explore, in relation to Celie's experience, their own processes of linguistic socialization through these journals.

As an introduction to the novel itself, a summary of Alice Walker's life was offered and the historical setting of the novel discussed with the students. A thematic overview of the novel (Appendix 5) was undertaken in class. Notes were given to the students and issues such as racism and spirituality were also examined briefly.

Students were asked to keep a journal over a six-week period and to write in it at least once a week. I promised to respond to each entry and students were encouraged to explore further areas of interest as they became relevant.

Journal entries were not restricted to prose entries and a number of students responded by drawing pictures and writing poetry inspired by issues in the novel.

One of the seven entries was to be written to a peer. The students, instead of addressing their thoughts to the teacher, were instructed to write to a friend.

The friend then had to respond to the entry in the journal. This technique was included because I wanted to provide the students with another listener and the person responding was given another platform to articulate her ideas. However, the response to this idea was interesting since some students indicated that they felt more secure writing to me than they did to a friend. Some students felt that friends were too close to their constructed realities. This reluctance to let their friends read their ideas points to another area of cognitive dissonance often typical of female adolescents: they say that they believe something but in order to remain popular or acceptable in terms of a group identity, they are prepared to deny this in another context. This points to another silence that may be broken in the journals because the student feels safer exploring her ideas with a teacher, who is somewhat distanced from her, than she is articulating her ideas to a friend who ironically may be more judgmental than a teacher. If the students are not comfortable expressing themselves to their peers over issues that deal with their lives then another self-imposed silence operates -a silence maintained for the sake of popularity. Girls learn quickly that to be silent about contentious issues is safer and easier, nevertheless they need a place in which to express along with all the contradictions they experience, the ideas they are exploring.

At the end of the six-week period the writers were asked to evaluate their own efforts in terms of demonstrable evidence of their personal growth in their journal entries. (Appendix 3)

I then collated data and assessed it for common and different features, which indicated ways in which ideas of difference are articulated and silences are broken in the journals. Similarly, I assessed data in terms of how the process of understanding the novel had contributed to this exploration of the self. I chose to follow seven students' entries particularly closely and selected them because they represented aspects of the multi-cultural nature of the class. Thus the journal writers picked for specific analysis in this report include a young Chinese woman, a Spaniard, a Cypriot, a baPedi, a Muslim, a student of both Jewish and Christian parentage and a white middle class student.

Clearly one of the limitations of this research is that I represent the dominant culture of the institution in which I teach. I had to be aware that my white, heterosexual middle class voice might in fact be part of the torrent across which I was trying to have my students build a bridge. Obviously I do not claim to speak for the voices I read/heard. I offer some observations of what was shared with me and I am grateful for the enthusiasm with which my students involved themselves in this research.

I began to colour code my responses to students' observations so as to make the later analysis of data easier. Interestingly, the students then began to use different colours in their writing and thus pointed to the fact that they were eager to please, and that just as they are keen to write what they think I want to hear so they wish to present work, not as they would choose to present it, but as they perceive it should be presented. In other words, they tend to deny their own selves in order to please those in authority. I believe that their use

of colour coding in their responses was indicative of this feature which manifests itself in the form of another kind of silence – that of conformity. In their journals I wanted them to please themselves as well as fulfil the requirements I had originally set out so I stopped my own use of colour coding in order to prevent them trying to anticipate what I wanted them to write and how they should write it.

The analysis of the journals written by my students on their understanding of ***The Color Purple*** thus provides the data for my inquiry into the value of journals.

CHAPTER THREE

Analysis of Data: Crossing the Bridge to the "safe house"

In this chapter I want to give an authoritative voice to those who are trying to express themselves. Not all students enjoyed the journal writing exercise, but the fact that this was expressed indicated an emergent dissenting voice. Here the voice that was prepared to question the teacher, the methodology and the prescribed text was being heard. A few students began their journals by indicating their discomfort at writing down their experiences of reading the novel. The distance afforded by a literary essay appealed to these students more than did the keeping of a journal. Once they realised that articulating in words their dissatisfaction with the task did not lead to any negative feedback they began to feel comfortable and safe and some even began to enjoy the writing process. I believe that all the journal writers moved toward a meaningful understanding of the novel, ***The Color Purple***, as they wrote themselves into an understanding of the text. My responses to their ideas also served to guide this understanding of the text and, because each voice was given credit, their confidence in expressing ideas grew.

As mentioned at the beginning of this research report the South African context of this inquiry is of much significance. The novel ***The Color Purple*** is set in a social context not dissimilar to that experienced by some South Africans during the apartheid regime, and Lin's first journal entry indicates this.

> *The racism portrayed in **The Color Purple** is quite frightening and I think that it can be compared to the era that South Africa experienced. In the novel the black people were oppressed so badly that they began to accept their place in society. They were limited to manual labour for the whites. This is especially evident when Sofia is asked to work as a maid for Miss Millie.*

Lin has understood that experience is often determined by how people learn to perceive themselves. She then continues the entry to relate the novel very specifically to her own circumstances as a Chinese person living in South Africa:

> *I, however, as a Chinese girl living in South Africa, have not had to face any really "harsh" racism, as in the novel. My parents have told me when they were younger, they experienced the humiliation of the oppression against the Chinese people of that time. (APARTHEID) There were limited numbers of schools they were permitted to attend. But times have changed and I*

am grateful that I am attending a multi-racial school. In the novel multiraciality was unheard of.

I cannot say that I have experienced such cruel racism before, but can in a way relate to the feeling of being embarrassed. The reason for saying "harsh" racism, is because I feel that there is a type of racism which I am faced with from other people of my same race. I particularly feel it from Taiwanese immigrants at school, who think that I am too westernized and lack culture. I can probably understand why they think this, as I cannot speak much of the Chinese language, but they do not understand that my parents too, were raised in South Africa. I strongly feel that although I cannot speak the language, I definitely have culture and my family and I still follow Chinese traditions.

Here the student feels safe to express the value of her culture. She shares with me, her reader and her teacher, the importance of that culture and at the same time reflects an understanding of the novel. As a listener and a knower I am for the first time in my teaching of her, made aware of how she perceives herself within the broader Chinese context of the school. There are a number of Chinese students so her comments are particularly interesting. In being Chinese she is different but she feels comfortable with the dominant culture of the school. Interestingly it is representatives of her own nationality that exclude her and make her feel inadequate. In the pages of the journal she is able both to assert her difference and to value it by breaking a silence about

her experience of the culture to which she belongs. In my experience of this student her being Chinese has never been addressed. The remainder of her journal reflects her burgeoning awareness of feminism and she leaves the notion of her own culture aside except in one further entry. I quote extracts from the next entry, which indicate her interpretation of feminism within the novel and how she then relates it to herself.

> *Feminism has never really been an issue that I have thought very much about. It is only after reading and studying the novel* ***The Color Purple****, in class, that I have realized that women were and still are being oppressed. The majority of black women especially are badly oppressed. They are treated as objects for men's enjoyment.*
>
> *Celie is abused both physically and verbally by Albert. This is an illustration of the enormous power men have over women.... Sexual intercourse is supposed to be an act of love, but Celie explains sex with Albert as "business" and he shows his disregard for women by saying "All women good for –". This really horrifies me as I strongly feel that sex should be between two people who really love each other. I feel sorry for Celie, as she is oblivious to the experience of what sex should be.*

Lin expresses her outrage at the lack of respect for women in the Olinka tribe in the novel and then relates such female oppression to her own circumstances:

> *In my family I am also a slight victim of oppression, where the women of the family are supposed to do all the "female chores". A simple example is of the family dinner where we the younger women have to serve the food, clean up and in other words "do the dirty work". Although this is seen as a sign of respect I find it unfair and why can't men share these chores as well? How do they show their respect? I do not consider these to be jobs that only women can do, males are perfectly capable of doing them too.*

Lin's questions are valid. Her question: "*How do men show their respect?*" is an indictment of the structure of her society. This journal writer is breaking a silence and questioning practices common to many societies. These are issues that she has not raised before in class discussions. By posing her question about the lack of mutual respect the student moves towards the possibility of interrogating other discrepancies within her own society more competently, and the articulation of the self is also more apparent.

> *Nettie plays a vital role in the novel as she acts, in many ways, as the symbol of hope. She is the only person who cares for Celie and shows her love; she leaves 'Pa' for Celie. She has*

more advantages than Celie because she remains in school and is more attractive. It is her attractiveness together with her strong mindedness that enable her to have a better life.

It still amazes me as to what an advantage it is to be good looking. I think it is superficial and in many cases, false judgements are made. Nettie's advantages in being attractive and educated is seen when 'Pa' does not allow Mr.___, who is attracted to her, to marry her because he wants to keep her or in other words he wants to rape her like he did Celie. Although Nettie possesses such advantages, she still looks up to Celie as her older sister.

Nettie shows her devotion by constantly writing to Celie from Africa and it is these letters, once Celie finds them, that give her hope and the strength in believing in herself. Unlike Celie, Nettie is strong minded. She has the ability to put her beliefs into action. An example of this courage is evident when she stands up to Mr.__ and hurts him, "bad enough to make him let me alone."

I believe that it is from Nettie's character that builds up Celie's hope and encourages her determination.

From the above entry it is evident that Lin's journal explores Celie and Nettie's relationship. Interestingly she explores the idea of how advantageous "good

looks" can be for a girl. In Nettie's case they save her from an abusive relationship and her looks afford her an education. So often girls pay lip service to the fact that looks are not important but society insists otherwise. Here Lin acknowledges amazement at the advantage of beauty.

An interesting interpretation of the "hope" Shug brings to the novel indicates a student engaging independently and relevantly with the text. The journal also contains interesting, germane articles on issues of feminism by Naomi Wolf. These in turn lead the student to engage in a dialogue with me. It is interesting to note that the feminist issues she expressed earlier and those she raises at this juncture are in strong contrast with the ideas about her position in a Chinese family. She quotes the following from the article:

> *Rape and domestic violence are no longer marginal women's issues. I can remember when it was difficult to write on these topics, except as human interests, because they were regarded as unsexy and not of general interest. (Elle Magazine, August 1998)*

This extract angers her and she expresses her outrage at a society which could ever marginalize such concerns. She goes on to explore another thorny issue about working women and she quotes from the same magazine and then works with the quoted extract:

> *Too many women end up in some kind of compromise between work and children, feeling that they were only fulfilling half of their potential at both, being distracted by*

unfinished things of the home while at work, and distracted by unfinished work while at home.

I wonder if you feel the same way, Madam, and how you deal with it? But it's true. Why should women have to compromise dividing their lives for work and home, if men aren't really faced with such a task? It is unfair.

These questions indicate that Lin is considering the double bind faced by many women who choose to, or have to, work outside of their homes. On one hand this student is being educated, at great expense, so that she can further her education - presumably to obtain a good job. The purpose behind this education is questionable if it is expected that she will stay at home to mind her children. Piper, who suggests that adolescent girls often ignore these issues as a matter of survival, addresses this contradiction:

> Girls have long been trained to be feminine at considerable cost to their humanity. They have long been evaluated on the basis of appearance and caught in myriad double binds: achieve, but not too much; be polite but be yourself; be feminine and adult; be aware of cultural heritage, but don't comment on sexism. Another way to describe this femininity training is to call it false self-training. Girls are trained to be less than who they really are. They are trained to be what the culture wants of its young women, not what they themselves want to become. (44)

Frighteningly what survives is often a false sense of self. At least by articulating this problem Lin is entering into a dialogue about the contradictions in society: she is not remaining silent and accepting the potential double bind of work and home as being inevitable. Her reference to this contradiction as "it" is also interesting. She is unable to define the contradiction she has noticed because there is no official name for the burden working-mothers experience. Men have not named "it" because they do not experience the double shift of home and work. Thus this experience remains an "it", an undetermined reality in the perception of her future and in her vocabulary. Whether this recognition will make her cope with these contradictions better is beyond the scope of this report. At the very least there is a recognition and an acknowledgement of that which she has previously been unable to articulate or even to recognise. This recognition of woman's role as both homemaker and a provider of income is a significant move towards exploring a self aware of the contradictions which she faces now and will do in the future.

In her penultimate entry Lin deals with how language defines women. She writes:

> *It really angers me when girls who are attractive, wear make-up and tight fitting clothes are labeled as SLUTS! Do they not have the right to wear or dress anyway they please? Why is an attractive and muscular man labeled as a stud or hunk? I find it very unfair and disagree with the different judgments made for*

the different sexes. Girls who are virgins, but are attractive, sexy and popular are called sluts. Being called a slut is derogatory to women whereas being called a stud or hunk is seen as possessing strength. In ***The Color Purple****, Shug Avery possesses these so-called sluttish characteristics. Shug wasn't a slut. She just took pride in and appreciated the female body.*

Once more the student identifies that things are not the same for both sexes – not even in the ways they are named. By being aware of how society defines women and articulating these differences the student is already approaching her self differently and more powerfully. She explores how language marks men up and women down even though the actions or attitudes being described are similar. She articulates an understanding of how the language of sexuality is constructed in terms of gender. Her defence of Shug also indicates a newly expressed understanding about homosexuality. Besides defending Shug's behaviour and manners (which are certainly contrary to those encouraged at the school and different from her own culture) she condones Shug's lesbian behaviour quite comfortably. This is significant because lesbianism was not addressed in any depth in the classroom. In her journal Lin is happy to broach new areas of understandings and issues which she has not previously articulated in class. Indeed the poem she writes in her final entry points to a meaningful personal growth:

After completing this reflective journal I have become more aware of issues concerning racism and especially feminism. I

have learnt more about myself in seeing how strongly I personally feel towards such topics. It has been a wonderful opportunity to express my feelings and I have learnt some interesting facts along the way.

Through these eyes...

Through his eyes he sees an object

Through these eyes I see beauty

Through his eyes he sees physical pleasure

Through these eyes I see emotional pain

Through his eyes he sees vulnerability

Through these eyes I see strength

Through his eyes he is blinded from my potential

Through these eyes I see my capabilities

Through these...I feel powerfull

In her poem Lin articulates the difference she experiences as a female and how, through her study of ***The Color Purple***, she is able to articulate this difference meaningfully. She sees that she is perceived differently by men but is able to define herself in spite of this. This realization points to the value of the journal as a means not only of understanding a text, in this instance ***The Color Purple***, but also as a means of coming to terms with a greater sense of self.

The next journal that I have chosen to focus on is one written by Fatima, an Indian student of the Islamic faith. Her experience in the school and classroom mirrors that of many of the students. She is from neither the dominant race and culture nor the dominant religion. At home she is subjected to a strict religious code and at school she is required to attend Anglican chapel services once a week and Communion Services twice a term. Because there are numerous students of her persuasion she is not isolated; nevertheless her journal addresses a number of issues about her religion and her status as a woman within that religion and culture. The contradictions in her thoughts and questions point to the tension she feels, but cannot name, between the two worlds she experiences. The structure of her journal differs from other journals, in that she uses ***The Color Purple*** as a springboard for introspection. Her journal is basically an exploration of her religious beliefs. She writes:

> *...During a **The Color Purple** lesson I was forced to think about religion and spirituality. Isn't it funny how just when I was going to discard these thoughts for new ones fate steps in and leads me to think about it more... This was the beginning of my questioning religion and spirituality...I realised that the only stable thing in my life now (apart from my family) is religion. Perhaps that is why I am so reluctant and scared to question. I know that my religion will provide all the answers, but I am scared to lose my stability. I want to know that some things are*

sacred...I want to have faith in faith. I want the sense of mystery and wonder to remain and thus I refrain from asking too much. Religion is our comfort, our stability, after all, it will always be there, it is up to us to accept or reject it. We should not question our enrichment.

From this first entry it is clear that the student wishes to question her religion but she is scared to do so. That she realises this silence is clear when she writes, "*we should not question our enrichment.*" She keeps justifying why she must not question. She is afraid of loss and chooses to ignore questions she obviously has about her religion. I asked her in my response if she thought that we run from that which we most fear. Her reply was interesting:

I do think that we run away from our thoughts. I think that it is a guard we put on to protect ourselves from our own disappointment. I think we do this because we are afraid we won't please ourselves and if we can't do this, who can we please? It's a mock against self-disappointment, self-rejection. We can't face up to ourselves.

Take Celie in ***The Color Purple*** *for example, She writes her thoughts down. This is a way of blocking her fear and ultimately her self-evaluation out.... Eventually she overcomes her fear.*

The contradictions are overwhelming. The student is in agreement that we run from ourselves – in fact almost avoid ourselves and then she suggests that Celie writes to avoid herself and then through this very writing ultimately rescues herself. She has understood the text, but the text of self is too complicated, too frightening for her to deal with. In her next entry she recognises Celie's relationship with Shug in a realistic manner even though it contradicts the very religion she is afraid to question because she is unsure of what this will expose about herself to herself.

> *I must admit I used to be very biased against lesbians and gays, thinking them to be abnormal, even inferior. I was disgusted at first to read about the explicit love scenes portrayed in* ***The Color Purple.*** *I now realize that love transcends gender.*

This entry shows maturity about an attitude contrary to that which she thinks she holds dear. It also shows a meaningful and sympathetic understanding of Shug and Celie's relationship while at the same time she addresses the silence about lesbian sexuality that exists at this school and within her perceptions of her religion. Writing her thoughts moves her toward an understanding of the novel and I believe that this student, through continued writing, could write herself into a new understanding of herself and her religion. She could become brave enough to explore the areas she feels safer being silent about at this point. Because this student is particularly defensive about her religion in class the articulation of her fear at what she

might discover if she were to question safe perimeters is the beginning of a silence being broken in order to discover the self.

Fatima's entries are long and convoluted. She felt that she had a lot to say and I never insisted she keep her entries to one page since I felt that this would deny her the voice she clearly needed. Because of these lengthy entries it is necessary that I quote only brief excerpts from them. Fatima examines Alice Walker's attitude to the Olinka and her views on female circumcision. She questions the *"Westerners right to impose their beliefs on tribes in Africa."* :

> *Walker makes references to female initiation and scarification in the novel. This has raised many views in my mind. Do the westernized people have any right to go into 'uncivilized' lands and teach them what is right according to their standards? Is this arrogance or is it an inch of knowledge in their work? Is it their responsibility... to force their religion, their beliefs, their culture to a land who has its own. Do I ever have a right to intrude on their ways like a westerner does who thinks she knows better....*

Here Fatima examines not only the impact of colonisation on African tribes but she speaks also of her own perceived colonisation and how she is unable to question the dominant culture. Here she breaks the silence explicitly about

not having a voice amongst those who belong to the dominant culture of the school.

Celie's attitude to motherhood and her children is the focus of the rest of her journal, and, once more, meaningful but contradictory ideas are raised. A number of magazine and newspaper articles on motherhood are included and she examines how this has an impact on her own culture. Fatima writes of motherhood as she observes it in her own life:

> *In many cultures, especially the Indian culture, a woman's worth as a wife and even a woman is judged by how many children she has and how she brings them up. If a woman has a few children she is looked down on as a woman who cannot cope. The way her children behave is a reflection of her morals and beliefs. This often leads to emotional breakdowns. In Indian culture when a girl marries, her mother-in-law will treat her really badly, making her cook and clean to "test" whether she is a good daughter. Once again her worth is determined by other people's attitudes and beliefs.*

This is a fascinating observation about the pressures placed on women to perform in the home. The cruelty of the "testing" is examined. While this student is comfortable with the idea that this will not happen to her she asks to what extent is she "safe enough" to question religious practices which may marginalize her. When she makes the distinction between lived experience

and the fantasy that surrounds the notion of the perfect woman she is articulating her sense of self and moving towards an interpretation of what she observes. Implicit in these observations are criticisms of her culture and its treatment of women. Because she is usually so defensive about this I believe that she is beginning to cross the bridge and thus move toward a better understanding of herself in relation to her culture. When she can articulate her concerns and realise that criticism is not necessarily destructive she will be making progress toward understanding more about herself.

Another journal I have chosen to comment on, however briefly, in this research report is that of a Spanish student who is very quiet and withdrawn in school and who never contributes to class discussions. Because she belongs to the Junior Symphony Orchestra and plays, by invitation, in visiting orchestras from around the world I would have expected her to be more confident but she chooses to set herself apart during lessons. The standard of her work has always been average. I understand that silence in class is a choice made by a student and that this should be respected. I do not want to suggest that every silence is symptomatic of ills, but I had hoped that her journal would address the reasons behind her silence more overtly than it did. But in spite of her not acknowledging her own self-created silences, her journal was interesting for other reasons. Her interpretation of ***The Color Purple*** was outstanding. Certainly the observations she made in her journal were far better than I would expect from an "average" student. This speaks to the possibility of academic progress being facilitated through journal writing.

She compares Celie's situation with her own only to find joy in her relationships. Her self-assessment explains what happened to her during the process of writing her reflective journal on ***The Color Purple***:

> *I felt that in this way I didn't feel that I could not answer, I found it to be a lot better than dealing with it in class because like this, my ideas are not in the least bit modified by what others may say. This has helped me to think for myself, without anyone's help.*
>
> *I liked the journal because we worked one-on-one, just you and me. And I felt that I could be honest, and it would be fine. I found something in English that I enjoy doing. I am grateful in every way.*

Clearly this student felt empowered by the freedom she was afforded in being encouraged to express herself. From this self-assessment Valencia acknowledges her self-imposed silence and articulates how the journal provides her with a voice. The journal is a space where she feels safe enough to express her views. Her idea that others may "modify" her thoughts is interesting and indicates a desire for her ideas to be autonomous and valued. Her journal writing continued after the exercise was over and she submits an interesting journal at least once a week and her general academic progress is astonishing. Although Spanish, Valencia is not that different culturally from the dominant culture but she uses the journal to celebrate her

difference as an individual. The journal is a "safe house" for her to explore ideas in her own time, in a manner that affords those ideas meaning and value for herself. I am also able to give worth to those ideas because they have been given a voice.

Angel, (a self-chosen pseudonym) whose journal is analysed below, suggests far reaching implications for journals as a valid means of articulation and subsequent evaluation. Regular conservative, traditional assessment in the style of formal tests and essay writing does not work in Angel's favour and I believe that journals provide another route to assist those students who do not do well in assessment based on modes such as formal examinations. Angela is frequently absent from school and teachers, without exception, struggle to form any helpful relationship with her. Some have tried, failed and given up. Indeed, she is an enigma. Her academic results are far below the average of the class. Her examination results are poor and often she does not submit term papers. The submission of her journal, however, was regular, interesting and enlightening. She tapped into a variety of issues that interested her because she felt that she could explore what was of value to her. For example, her journal included a variety of tables that she had constructed to make sense of the novel. One such table explores what appeared to her as "Symbols of the Novel". I have included the table to indicate how this student is indeed engaging with the novel and how she subsequently explores her own ideas in her journal. This first table is specific to ***The Color Purple*** while the second table explores her voice, her symbols, and her ideas. Her

observations are valid and clear and they show a relevant and fairly structured personal reading of the novel. This is a clear example of a student using a journal to make meaning from a text in a manner which is relevant to her.

SYMBOL	MEANING	REFERENCE from the text
Purple	Royal colour, religious colour, bright, vibrant surprising. Almost a symbol for Celie herself.	"Everything in my room purple and red cept the floor." "Us look and look but no purple". I think it pisses God of when you walk by the colour purple in the field somewhere and don't notice it"
Clothing	Clothes used to be very gender specific. Celie expresses her independence through her pants	Men and women not 'sposed to wear the same thing" "Finally I made the perfect pair of pants
Rootleaf	Destruction of African culture by the Europeans. The plant of the Olinka is vital for the building of their huts	"There was no longer any rootleaf to be found" The thatched roofs of the English reminded her of the rootleaf huts of the Olinka

Immediately after this table Angel creates another one where she explores symbols which are personal. Through these personal symbols Angel makes observations about herself, as a result of her study of ***The Color Purple*** and she gives a voice to those ideas by expressing them in her journal. In other words she indicates her understanding of the text in an unconventional manner. Furthermore the student is making meanings for herself.

SYMBOL	MY PERCEPTION	COMMENTS
Stars and darkness	Sacred place of escape, mystical	
Purple	Warm, mystical, passionate	
Water	Smooth/soft/ cleanliness/purity depth, tranquil	
Fire	Passion [illegible]e. Roughness and heat.	
Music	Life emotion, soul heart	

Unlike more structured essay or contextual questions Angel has explored ***The Color Purple*** in a way that [illegible]s engaged with no other text that I have previously taught her. She submitted her journal and wrote coherently in seven fairly substantial entries. Previous tasks set this student had often been ignored or poorly presented. The tables are obviously a very different format from formal essays in which, prior to this journal exercise, Angel struggled to write. This inabillty to express herself in a specific style pointed to a silence around being formal. Interestingly though, after being told that her journal was very successful she wrote a formal essay for my colleague with whom I co-teach and Angel achieved seventy five percent – a mark at least thirty percent higher than her usual average! (If I had marked it I may have been subjective in my marking but the fact that it was assessed by a colleague establishes the objectivity necessary for the validity of this comparison.) From my enquiry thus far I would like to suggest that this is a result of this student being able to use her own ways of understanding a text

for the first time in her school life through her journal. By making this journey the student feels safe enough to explore whatever she feels has value. In her first entry she breaks the silence of being of a minority culture and being a victim of incest:

> *I am reading* ***The Language of Letting Go****.... It is a book the author describes as meditations for "Stopping the pain and gaining control of your life." When thinking about* ***The Color Purple****_I realised there was a connection between the book I was reading and Celie's character in* ***The Color Purple****. It is as if the book was written just for her. While reading* ***The Color Purple*** *I was amazed to notice how much I could relate to Celie's character. Not because I am black or American but because I am Cypriot and have suffered racial antagonism. I have shared a similar childhood, happy with sisterhood. Celie had to learn to deal with the abuse from her father. I've had to deal with the same abuse and the consequences of losing a father as a result. Though the time period between Celie and I is extreme, I believe that thoughts and emotions are similar between people who have experienced similar lessons. I have had to realise that life goes on after every problematic situation.*

It may be argued that this student simply found a connection in ***The Color Purple*** because of the parallels between her character and that of the protagonist and hence her enthusiastic and thorough engagement with the

novel. If however, there were no journal to record this response, the silences she had observed as a result of her experiences would remain unbroken. Not only is she the victim of cultural racism but also a victim of incest and rape. Because Angel has broken these silences I can begin to understand the problems faced by this young woman as she tries to make meaning of her life. Angel's journal was clearly a place where the novel was explored and understood and the self articulated meaningfully.

Another of Angel's journal entries is given the title *"Not a Victim"* and it deals with victimization and how women do not have to be victims.

> *Last night while speaking to J on the phone, we got onto the subject of victims. Talking about herself she said how deeply ingrained our self-image as a victim can be! How habitual our feelings of misery and helplessness! We both agreed that victimization can be like a grey cloak that we may feel victimized even by the good things that happen to us!....*
>
> *I have learnt that if we set our mind to it we have an incredible, almost awesome ability to find misery in any situation, even the most wonderful of circumstances. Shoulders down, head bent we shuffle through life taking our blows. I say let's be done with it, Take off the grey cloak of despair, negativity and victimization. Let it blow in the wind. We are not victims although we may have been victimized. We may have allowed ourselves to be*

victimized. We may have sought out, created or recreated situations that victimized us. But we are not victims... The reason I found this topic interesting was because Celie's character comes to mind. She was a victim who was victimized in every sense of the word but she also took a stand and showed responsibility. I believe if Celie were living today she would be enjoying what is good and right in life! Another reason for this is that she would have let go of the past.

This journal entry shows a definite awakening of who she is and that she will be answerable only to herself. Her attitude is strong and she asserts not only her desire but also her right to take responsibility for her own life. She explores her own reaction to the processes of victimization and then she writes of how she and Celie deal with this issue:

Since I've been a child I've been in an antagonistic relationship with an important emotional part of myself: my feelings. I have consistently tried to either ignore, repress or force my feelings way. I have tried to force my feelings away. I tried to force anger away when it was a reasonable and logical response. I have told myself that things didn't hurt when they hurt very much. I have told myself stories such as "That person didn't mean to hurt me", "He doesn't know any better". The problem is I've always been too understanding of the other person and not compassionate with myself... I now understand that we are

meant to feel. Part of our dysfunction is trying to deny or change that. We are responsible for our behaviour but we do not have to change our feelings. In ***The Color Purple*** *Celie also experienced an antagonistic relationship with her feelings while she was with Albert. Shug Avery helped her express some of these emotions. Celie never lost control of her emotions, when she was with Albert she suppressed her emotions, but she later used her control of her feelings to give her power to stand up to Albert, therefore easily expressing all that was suppressed in the past.*

Not only is Angel articulating herself, she is writing herself into an understanding of the character of Celie. Her writing is coherent and the points she makes about the text are valid. The silence she breaks is a significant one that I believe affects a vast number of women. Women, and adolescent girls in particular, often believe that to repress emotions and to understand others' actions against them in the light of their own actions is appropriate behaviour. Women often interpret their own actions as triggers for action against them as Angel realises. In her journal she acknowledges this issue and makes the observation that she will be responsible for her own actions but not for what others do or have done to her. For Angel, an incest victim, this is obviously an important step toward accepting herself as having been a victim and wronged, rather than having provoked this herself.

It is obvious that many silences around women, difference and the self are damaging ones, but some other silences exist, not around the unspeakable, but around things students have never thought to verbalize – namely their sense of worth. Many of the journals written were celebrations of difference. They were joyous accounts of colour, culture and gender. Yet where do students go to celebrate this difference in an institution where their culture is often marginalized? I believe that journals are a vehicle for this celebration and exploration of self.

Nonhlanhla, a student from the royal baPedi tribe, begins her journal with a sense of excitement:

> *I am delighted that we are writing these journals on* ***The Color Purple****. It gives us an excellent medium in which we can express our views on this novel. After hearing all the comments at school I can come home and have my own personal exploration....For me a journal is like a journey of self-discovery. Anyway who knows. This journal is also a journey into the unknown and uncharted territories of this novel. As for being reflective, I wish us both luck on trying to tackle my limited ability to reflect.*

There is no need for this student to be so deferential: her reflection remains refreshing and relevant throughout her journal. She tackles the second entry by writing a poem and trying to relate it to Celie. I believe that there is an

attempt, through the poem, to suggest that black women, like the journal writer herself, are not all down-trodden victims:

I am Woman

I am woman

A black woman, a beautiful woman

I am your mother

The milk from my breast was your food

It made you the man you are today

I am your sister, your mother's child

I nurture you further with my sisterly love

I am your wife

I bore your children and

I love you

I am woman

The homemaker

The feeder of souls and the bearer of burdens

I am woman

I express the pain and emotion you keep hidden

I bring you joy and heartbreak

I am woman

I do all these things and many more

I am woman

The quintessential component of your world.

Don't tell me it's A MAN"S WORLD.

The poem is a celebration of being black and female. Nonhlanhla then links the poem to some observations about, and comparisons with, Celie:

> *Most parts of my poem seem to be the opposite of Celie's experience. Granted Celie was a woman and a black woman at that. She was never able to breastfeed her babies and her milk did not make her son the man he was. Milk signifies something much greater than food...To me when you link this poem to Celie it has much sadder undertones. It makes me realise that she was raped of the privilege of being the strength and nourishment necessary to make her children grow in all aspects. Celie is full of sisterly love for Nettie, rescuing her from Alfonso as a mother would any of her children.*

While Nonhlanhla is sympathetic towards Celie in this entry, her next entry indicates her sense that not all black women are silenced victims. Nonhlanhla is concerned that as a black woman, Celie's victimization by implication, disempowers her, as a black woman in the school, because she fears that all black women will be perceived by other students and readers as victims:

> *I find it fascinating how everyone seems to like Celie so much and how she has so much STRENGTH TO DEAL WITH HER PAINFUL EXPERIENCES. Maybe I am not compassionate but I found Celie as a character irritating. There was this implied "I am a victim of circumstance" excuse. She should have tried to*

stop the abuse at the beginning. It may be easier for me to say this because I've never been in that situation. I know Celie was a child and the hurt and betrayal must have been difficult to deal with. Initially her response was far too stoical in a sense. I suppose I am not Celie and maybe she didn't know any different especially since there was no one to enlighten her until Shug came along. I wanted to take Celie and shake her and say "girlfriend wake up and smell the cornbread." ....I feel that Celie needed to be more selfish sometimes, but she had that debilitating need to please disease which did not help much in developing her character.

Nonhlanhla has enjoyed being different in her views. Not only has she articulated different ideas from the rest of the class about a character but she has also rejected the common idea that "girls must please". In fact she refers to this practice as a *disease*. This is an important step in her own self-articulation. Her understanding flies in the face of the school's values and the values she sees to be insisted on by black culture, which often sees the role of the woman as subservient. In my response to this entry I asked Nonhlanhla to explore this commonly felt need to please and how she perceives it to be perpetuated. Her response was interesting:

I think very few people are free from this disease even though they may have it to a lesser degree than others. I have this strange, even sad feeling than women have it worse than men.

I think this disease to please can also be somewhat selfish, because in one's desire to please one hopes for serious acknowledgement, love and kindness. We too expect something in return, be it material or otherwise. In our school this disease runs in a cycle. We as pupils do what you the teachers recommend to keep them satisfied, and then you, as the staff do as the principal recommends to keep her satisfied and she the board and then somewhere someone will consider the girls and then it starts again. Personally I am not inclined to submit to a recommendation that I do not agree with or find useful, but many are. At our school this whole disease to please is perpetuated by the prefect ship thing and the voting surrounding it. Most of us know that we are being observed therefore, as much as we like to believe that we are being true to ourselves we won't be. In our desire to please we subscribe to the demeanour/behaviour stipulated in order to receive our reward.

The prefect system at this school is another tradition which reflects "western high culture". It is a particularly rigid and stratified system that affords prestige to some and denies value to others. A head prefect is elected and is awarded gold status. A deputy headgirl and heads of houses are given silver status and ordinary prefects are simply copper prefects. Those not elected do not fit onto this metal chain of being at all. Nonhlanhla's entry continues in a reaction

to the system and she clearly articulates herself in relation to its archaic and somewhat inappropriate structure:

> *This submission to what is recommended is quite stifling to those of us who are inclined to be rather non-conformist in nature. The desire to fulfil expectations results in us being submissive in instances where we may not believe in a certain idea etc. in order to ensure that the teacher/parent/society is pleased. I guess we all have to sacrifice sometimes.*
>
> *I am not too worldly on all black culture in its entirety but I do know that most people, believe that you should do what your elders desire ultimately not to anger your ancestors. It differs from tribe to tribe but one example of this, which perpetuates this desire to please, is the Zulu custom of virginity tests for girls and boys. The Zulus strongly believe that girls in particular should remain pure until marriage. I think that this is for monetary gain though because there is higher lobola paid for virgins.*

In ***The Color Purple***, once Sophia has been arrested and put through the racist prison system she says that "White folks is a miracle of affliction" (92). Nonhlanhla's second entry focuses on these words and she explores the paradox created by the words "miracle" and "affliction." After a careful examination of the issues in the novel she engages in some dialogue with me

in the journal and writes, *"Personally I feel some black people are also a "miracle of affliction"*. Through our written dialogue we come to the conclusion that "*some folks, regardless of colour, is a miracle of affliction.*" I include this excerpt, since I believe it is a moving towards an understanding of issues beyond those based on simple colour stereotyping. While celebrating difference she is also noticing points of similarity between races and therefore moving towards a more precise articulation of her own identity.

> *I was watching the TV show "Oprah" and I found out something very interesting. Apparently white women have a worse self-image than black women. White women are more conscious about weight and size. 80% of black women feel it's better to be healthy and larger than skinny and unhealthy while only 57% of white women felt this way. It's quite interesting, but I don't know why but I've always sort of known that black women were more confident in a way than white women.*

By including this information Nonhlanhla indicates an awareness of the differences that exist between races and cultures. This student addresses a variety of issues from feminism to racism and fatherhood and what she calls "*humanhood*". She explores how she feels and how she changes as her understanding of these issues grow. She writes with joy and strength, unafraid to be different and unafraid to articulate this difference.

There are silences which surround factors other than those which have to do with cultural difference. I have indicated that adolescent girls struggle with the discrepancies they encounter between what is expected of them, as dictated by a dominant culture, and by what they experience in their day-to-day realities. Their families, peers and school all have expectations of them. Often, in an attempt to meet these multifarious expectations their own sense of self, and who they perceive themselves to be, is lost in this attempt to be what others expect them to be. A case in point is Chloe's journal. Chloe begins her journal by dedicating it to a cat because, as she writes, " *in my opinion cats exhibit the same radiant innocence that every child shows. I am in many ways still a child as I explore my emotions and thoughts on the following pages. I will turn to my exquisite companions.*" Interestingly it is the last time the writer refers to her "exquisite companions". A variety of excellent drawings – another form of non-verbal articulation - abound in her journal. I cannot say that I fully understand why she introduces this notion of cats into her journal other than to suggest that these references, and her explanation that she will turn to cats, are an attempt to distance herself from what she wishes to write. Another example of this need to distance herself is evidenced in the fact that all Chloe's entries, like Celie's in ***The Color Purple***, are addressed to *"Dear God."* Also like Celie, as she gets closer to who she really is, this distancing is no longer necessary or even appropriate. The first entry that deals with the novel itself is about child abuse and rape. The student provides a number of statistics and facts about abuse: she quotes from work on the abused child:

In reading about the effects of abuse and neglect I have found a number of physical, emotional (behavioural) signs. The child will have an extremely poor self-concept, inability to relate to others; various disorders...

She goes on to quote the signs of abuse and lauds an advertisement she read on child abuse which includes the observation that "the scars on the mind are far worse." The entry includes articles and pamphlets on abuse. She emphasizes again that "*abused children have an extremely low self – esteem*". She relates this to Celie in ***The Color Purple*** by writing:

"Dear God

Celie displays these traits after Alphonso rapes her. She has no self-respect and does not trust anybody, not even God. The reason that Celie writes to God is because he is anonymous and therefore he cannot divulge her secrets to anyone else and is not a threat to her. She does not sign her name in the first few letters because she too wants to remain anonymous to him and she does not have the self-respect to feel that her name should mean anything to God

Chloe's journal clearly indicates how the journal can be a means towards an understanding of the text The student relates her ideas closely and meaningfully to Celie's experience. In terms of writing about the self, the correlation is disturbing. Like Celie the student writes to God, like Celie her

letters are anonymous in that she uses a pseudonym, like Celie she displays a tangible lack of self-esteem. This is where the journal writer and the journal reader have to be aware of boundaries. Explicit therapy cannot be part of the journal writing process in the English classroom and there is no concrete evidence that the student is relating her own experience totally to that of Celie. But it is difficult and perhaps even wrong to step back and remain simply the reader, so in my response to the student I asked her if she knew any abused children. Although she appears to ignore the question she does, however, include a little drawing of a masked clown and a more personal response.



Dear God,

We all view reality through a mask of opinion, that mask is formed through experiences and the influence of others. The mask distorts our view of the world and causes us to form an opinion on every situation.

The text of the self is being explored more overtly albeit in a somewhat obscure manner. There are interesting issues raised in this response and drawing. Journals do not have to tell the truth. This is not to say that the self

is not accessed then in a journal, if the truth is not being adhered to strictly. It is often behind masks that many truths can be told; it is behind masks that real identifying with the self can occur because there is a distancing from the possible fear of the brutal reality that acknowledgment of the self might bring. Masking, according to Tristine Rainer could result in a "profound inner rebirth, the discovery of [the] real self behind the mask of social conventionality" (49). Is my student locating some part of herself behind a mask? Is her depiction of a clown also significant? Her attempt to distance herself by writing to a cat and then to God seems to suggest that she is dealing with distancing herself from that which troubles her and her reference to masks here seems to underscore this point.

She continues, in the next entry, to write about female oppression both within ***The Color Purple*** and in life generally. Although guarded and unrevealing of her own self at this point, Chloe makes interesting observations about female oppression and links this to an understanding of Celie:

> *The novel, **The Color Purple**, is about female oppression. I read the novel **Princess** a few weeks ago and this book has a great deal to do with the oppression of females by males in Saudi Arabia. There are very relevant topics discussed in this novel, such as female circumcision and corporal punishment for women as opposed to corporal punishment for men... Women in Saudi Arabia are treated like cattle they are bought and sold and then used for reproduction. From the time they get their first*

period they have to be covered from head to toe in thick black clothes; this in a sticky hot oppressive heat.

Female circumcision is a major subject to Alice Walker and since reading about it in ***Princess,*** *I feel that, although it is culture to some tribes, it should not be part of any tradition... Female circumcision turns sex into rape. The men of Saudi Arabia rape their women. They rape them of their independence, privacy and self. They rape their womanhood and put their spirit in chains.*

Celie's spirit is chained by men. She is only set free by her determination and eventual self-respect. Her faith and spirituality tore fee from the bonds that almost killed her.

Chloe notes how women are fettered by men and how their selves are chained as a result. If she is talking about herself here, the implications regarding her use of her journal are obvious: if she is not then she is still demonstrating an awareness of the experiences of being a woman and how self-respect is often denied through oppression.

Chloe moves on to analyse characters, such as Shug Avery, with insight:

Shug's real name is Lillie, she is called Shug cause she is very sweet and caring. Shug is sweet but when she wants something she assumes a dominant role. Shug has a very

powerful sensuality, which attracts Celie to her. She is physically attractive with a strong sexuality, but there is an air of masculinity about her. To Celie Shug is a great source of strength and to Albert she is an infatuation and physical comfort. I think Shug stands for freedom and a sense of fulfillment, she has a generosity of spirit that the men in the novel lack. Shug teaches Celie about religion and how to enjoy her sexuality.

Not only does this entry show an engagement with the novel, but Chloe also addresses silences around women's behaviour. Silences around sexuality are broken as she discusses the relationship of Celie and Shug.

Drawings and pictures typical of African wildlife accompany the next entry in an attempt to locate Walker's inclusion of Africa in her novel:

A large section of the novel is set in West Africa and Nettie's experience amongst the Olinka tribe. The Americans' interest in Africa is to do with their slave ancestors, yet the Africans resented them for coming to Africa to change them and "rob them of their culture."

Once Nettie got to know the culture she started to disapprove of some of their traditions. The Olinka do not approve of the education of women nor do they allow them any independence.

She disapproves of the tradition of female circumcision and the scarification of young people's faces.

The novel ***The Color Purple*** *deals with racial tension. Celie's low position in her community occurred because of a racial incident. Her father was lynched by white men because he was prosperous and they were envious of them. There is racism throughout the novel, from their oppression of blacks by whites to the twisted justice system. (Sofia) There is an automatic assumption that the blacks are poor, when Celie buys a house it is thought to belong to a white person living in Georgia. She is strong and spirited yet she cannot protect herself against twisted laws, which send her to hell for hitting a WHITE MAN! She is then patronised by Miss Millie...*

In her exploration of selected aspects of feminism, for instance, a clear connection between the society in Georgia and the male dominated societies of West Africa is made. Chloe has incisive valid ideas, which she expresses with relative ease in her journal. There is no doubt that writing about her ideas has helped her develop a thorough understanding of the text and the final entry points to this as she lifts the mask behind which she has hidden, so as to articulate ideas about the self. In her last entry she makes the link to herself more overtly. It has taken six long entries for her to have written herself into a place safe enough to break a silence that she has created around herself. She

compares herself with Celie more directly than in her earlier entries. She painfully explains her quietness and fear:

> *"I wish I could have the strength Celie had and not be so sensitive and weak. All my life I have been seeking respect and positive attention from people, ANYONE. I can't express my emotions to anyone because they could throw it back in my face.*

I face the world with a mask to my face,

It hides what I see and how I feel

Behind it I can feel safe

The mask is a restriction

A fear of reality

It eclipses the real spirit

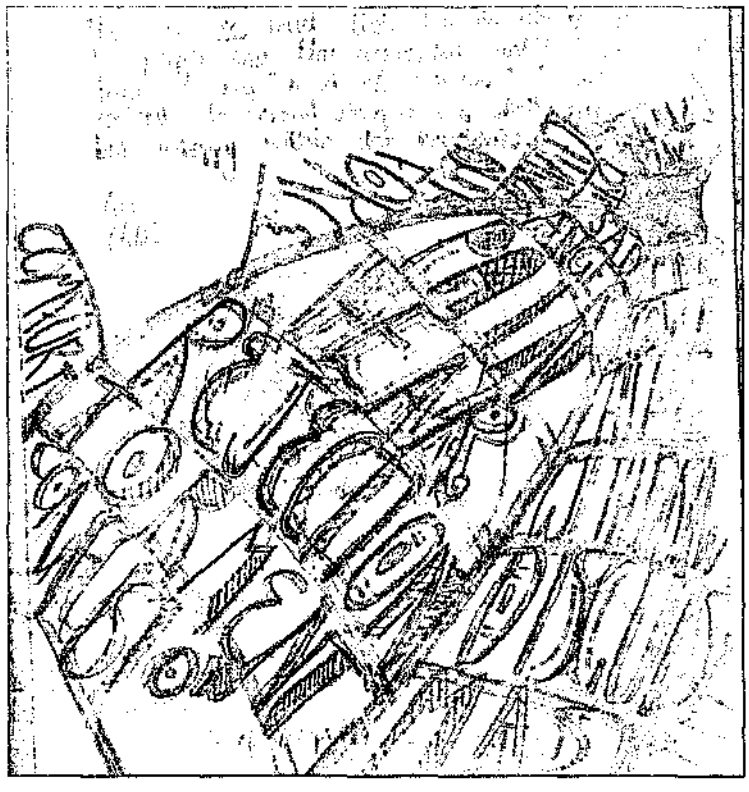
Living behind it

Yet behind it I feel safe'

I don't respect myself, no-one can respect me.

I can't respect myself.

This entry is accompanied by a drawing I would describe as reflecting her fragmented sense of self that is beginning to be expressed in this journal.



Chloe's drawing speaks volumes about the silence of perceived rejection. Rainer refers to this type of drawing as a "map of consciousness" (83), or as graphic images existing within the journal writer's mind. She argues that the drawings can take the writer into the "dynamics of ... personality. Making images of the self and coming to understand them may signal the beginning of release from confusion and conflict" (87). Thus Chloe, through use of drawing, inspired by her connection with a character in the novel being studied, moves towards an understanding of herself. She is able to articulate this inadequacy she feels, but has not yet expressed. The journal becomes the bridge, at least into if not across, this silence, where this student, who is part of the dominant culture, acknowledges her own perceived status within the system.

Positive regard has to be afforded all journal writers as they break the silences, which surround them, because by beginning to articulate themselves they can become vulnerable to the very things from which they are trying to break away. In her journal, Jane exposes her vulnerability when she explores what it is to be an adolescent in a society that demands different things from males and females. She uses her exploration of the novel to be introspective:

> *The past two weeks have been tough one's for me to deal with. Everything that ha. happened has made me judge and compare myself to others. I know it's wrong but it's the only way I can reason with myself about things that have happened. Have you ever heard the saying that the bad stuff is always easier to believe than the good? Well I reckon in* ***The Color Purple*** *Celie is always told she is ugly and she gets told it so often that she believes it. Why do you think it is so important to be beautiful and thin? I just don't understand why there is so much pressure on women to always look good. When we go out on weekends we spend one to two hours getting ready! Fixing our hair, putting on make-up dressing in the latest flattering clothes and finally having the expensive perfume sprayed on our necks to entrance the other sex. For guys they shower, dress and go! All done in three easy steps whereas we've been planning our wardrobes for ages! I just don't get it!*

In the next entry these ideas of how outside appearances are valued above other factors are again explored but even more personally. Jane writes:

> *My sister and me are alike in a lot of ways but different in others. Like Nettie , my sister is always told she is the pretty one and even though I'm not put down or anything it still hurts. I'm jealous of her and sometimes I'm glad she's gone to Cape Town because I feel more confident when she's not around. I believe it must have affected Celie to always hear how beautiful Nettie is.*

There is quite a lot of pain expressed in these entries. Jane examines how girls are obliged to titivate more than boys do because they are expected to look beautiful and to dress fashionably. The inferiority caused by not feeling as pretty as her sister is also explored and articulated. I believe that this journal breaks an important silence about looks and the vulnerability caused by being compared to someone else who may be considered prettier by society's standards.

Besides addressing her emotional vulnerability caused by the desire to be beautiful Jane also articulates in her journal how she feels different:

> *An issue, which touched me in the book, was the theme of religion and spirituality. I've always found religion a touchy subject even when I was small and it seems now, 16 years*

down the road of life, I still don't know which way to turn. You see my mother is Anglican and my father is Jewish. It's almost as bad as if they were black and white. It never really seemed to be a problem until people started asking me what religion I was. The situation just made me feel uncomfortable and the way in which people try to determine my religion really angers me

I've never been baptized or confirmed and the only answer my mother ever has for me is "You can choose your religion one day". But I don't want to have to choose.

I believe in God, I pray every night and I just feel as though someone, somewhere is listening. I've always thought that people invented religion because they needed something to believe in. Then I think to myself, if there really is a god why does he always take the good ones? My friend Leo died two weeks ago. He was only seventeen. His death hit me like a slap in the face. All over again I question religion and God and Jesus.

Celie writes to God probably because she thought he was the only one who ever listened and he probably was. I just find that nowadays everybody hears me but nobody listens.

This entry uses the novel as a bridge across this silence of her confusion about her lack of a specific religion, and she articulates her inability or lack of desire to make a choice. She prays but feels no one not even God listens to her. Without these journals I would never have known about the death of her friend, nor about the confusion she feels over her religion. She uses the journal to break silences around issues that are important to her. Jane is a good student who contributes to class discussions and she always submits her work. Without a journal, Jane is simply another student who appears to fit into, and who is happy with, the status quo in her life and school. The journal affords her a place to articulate issues which indicate that there is more to her life than first meets the eye.

In a close analysis of all seventy-seven journals I see that a place where a silence is most notable is around sexuality. Although some students did record horror at, or an understanding of, Celie's lesbian relationship with Shug, not one of them addressed her own sexual orientation. They commented on heterosexuality in general. This indicates that there remain silent places: there are still areas where students have nowhere to express this particular difference. Understandably many students of this age may not be aware of their sexual orientation but I do believe there are moments of questioning that should have arisen. Although there had been a discussion in class about sexuality most attempts to address this issue were similar to this entry from Nonhlanhla's journal:

I can't say I agree or disagree with lesbianism, it remains a personal choice. I am not comfortable with the idea of two women being intimate with each other and it does seem strange. Apparently homosexuality has been around for ages even in our black cultures where it is most condemned. I don't condemn it and who says heterosexual relationships are normal anyway?

Previous journal entries of Nonhlanhla's are quite definite in the opinions they expressed but here she deliberately remains vague. Jane also raises the issue of sexuality but leaves the idea unconcluded in her journal:

*Another issue raised in **The Color Purple** is homosexuality. Not so much the physical side but the emotional connections. Do some women become lesbians because they are scared of men, like Celie? I do not think homosexuality is right but it is the individual's personal choice and I would never discriminate against a gay person. There is pressure in our adolescent years to find our sexuality. I'm sure some people have homosexual tendencies but are too afraid to express them. What do you think?*

That is where she leaves the issue and she never raises it again even though my response to her question required an answer. I asked her: "Do you think there should be a space at school where these ideas can be discussed?" I think that my somewhat vague response to Jane's question indicates that the

silence is a result of a silence that exists within the school. Although there are teachers who are lesbian, although there are girls who may be lesbians the issue is deliberately ignored. It is a silence that exists within the school. I believe that my own silence on this subject in class has served to perpetuate the silence amongst the journal writers. There is a fear and a taboo around the subject because people in positions of authority, and I include myself in this group, are ignorant about homosexuality. Indeed I believe that if I had broached the subject overtly in my classroom it would have been met with an unfavourable response. From this observation it may be necessary to admit that unless the students feel comfortable about expressing ideas to their readers there will always remain silences. Because I am a married woman the girls may have felt that I would have judged them if they indicated that they were even potentially lesbian. The fact that I struggle to articulate my own views on this subject and that I find it difficult to find appropriate words to express myself, indicates that I, too, may have been a source of the silence I have noticed. This is something I need to redress in my own teaching practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

Implications for Further Research

The analysis of all seventy-seven journals has raised a number of questions, not only about how journals break silences but also how they can be meaningfully employed in the English classroom. I have observed that in all classrooms, but particularly multi-cultural ones, it is vital to give unconditional positive regard to every student. With a mosaic of cultural representation in a class it is often difficult to know about all their cultures and to be aware of what is special to them. It is impossible to speak to each one every day, but it is not impossible to take home a journal and read about what is important to different students at different times. The teaching of literature is often a means toward breaking the silences around students' lives and a journal, in conjunction with their experience of certain texts, allows the teacher to make explicit her respect for the students' culture. An investigation of which texts in particular would be amenable to the breaking of adolescent silences and which would provide students with the unconditional positive regard necessary for the articulation of who they are, would indeed be valuable.

Journals are also a place for articulating hopes and aspirations. Through responses to these articulated desires and ideas teachers and adults can

"hear" their students and offer the encouragement that is so often lacking in high schools. Taylor and Gilligan suggest in their study that there is an overwhelming desire in adolescent girls for moral support from adults:

> ...girls need adults who can help them make realistic assessments of their existing levels of preparation and ability. For some, this may mean confronting difficult realities; for others, it may mean uncovering previously overlooked or neglected talent. Either way, such ongoing efforts offer the best possibilities for girls to achieve a worklife that brings them a sense of both power and pleasure. (199)

I believe that all high school girls seek acknowledgement and journals provide an area for this to occur particularly because the girls will not necessarily overtly acknowledge that they need a place to be heard.

I analysed extracts from Angel's journal in the previous chapter in which she broke a variety of silences. I also indicated that this journal work was of a much higher standard than her other work. Because students "feel safe" and unpressurised when writing journals they often engage more freely with the subject matter. I believe this affords them greater freedom of expression and it removes the fear they have when they write in more formal ways. Research into why writing in this atmosphere is often more fluent and coherent in a journal needs to be investigated. In Angel's case her writing improved in work after the journal had been submitted. Her marks for essays improved dramatically. Because she has broken silences around her experience of

incest and perhaps because her voice was valued in her journal, Angel feels less distanced from what she is doing in class and is able to write in a more relaxed mood. To what extent journals in fact improve writing skills is another area for investigation.

Gilligan indicates that resistance to articulating perceptions leads to psychological isolation (198). How this psychological isolation affects a students' academic and social performance and how the journal not only breaks silences but decreases a sense of isolation would be valuable.

Journals, in conjunction with a novel, allow students to ask questions privately and express their ideas without fear. Journals can thus become an implicit means of remediation if in her entry it appears that a student has misunderstood an issue. How certain responses can assist in remediation without denying a student a voice requires some analysis.

In their self-assessments a number of students commented on how they enjoyed being able to express their own ideas with greater validity. A number of students in their journals on ***The Color Purple*** introduced comparisons with texts that they had read. The journal on one text provided a departure point from which to explore other non-prescribed texts so that their private reading was validated. Research is needed to determine whether journal writing subtly encourages wider reading.

With the introduction of Outcomes Based Education in South Africa there has been an emphasis on life-long learning and also on the notion of moving education towards training people as entrepreneurs. In light of this aim it is important that students sing their own songs, write their own stories and create and embrace change. They need to have a place to express ideas and have them valued if they are to create jobs and sell ideas. How the journal could be used as an aid to entrepreneurship could constitute important research.

I believe that journals could have a far-reaching impact on education, not only in English but in all subjects in terms of the assessment of and understanding in a learning area. Most importantly how journals afford a voice and thus much needed positive regard for the writer, needs further exploration.

CONCLUSION

Through the use of journals - in conjunction with literature and on their own - students can not only articulate and give worth to themselves, but can also write themselves into a new and vital understanding of themselves and their processes of understanding. They can forge new paths and sing their own songs. They can be themselves. I believe that this is particularly necessary for adolescent girls since, as Gilligan reminds us, "[g]irls' active attempts to maintain connection with others and with their own thoughts and feelings are acts of resistance and courage" (27). These acts of courage do not need to be ones of silent resistance: they can be articulated and thereby made meaningful in a journal. Often these acts of courage can be better facilitated through the study of literature that explores similar struggles, or literature that examines why these struggles arose in the first place.

Bridges are not destinations, but journals provide a space in which to begin the journey towards breaking silences. I give the last word to my student, Chloe:

> *I really enjoyed doing this journal because I could explore aspects of the book that were not explored in class and I could explore in great depth if I wanted to. As I am too shy in class to*

share my views I enjoyed writing them down instead and substantiating them with research. I was also able to use other forms of media such as drawings, which I love to do, as they express my emotions.

It was meaningful to be able to put in my own feelings and views that may be wrong and not be criticized for them because it was what I believe.

I am not a tidy person, or an organized one so it required discipline to write in my journal.

I would like to continue to write a journal as it is a safe way of stressing my point, exploring my feelings and researching interests.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Letter of Consent

Dear Ante Matric Parents

I am currently involved with writing a Research Report for an MA in English Education Degree with the University of the Witwatersrand. Part of this research requires an analysis of journal writing and I would like to include some of the work of a few of the Ante Matric pupils in this research. This journal writing is not additional in any way and forms part of the pupils' usual requirements. They are not obliged to participate in the research but the work will nevertheless still need to be submitted to me for formal assessment towards their term mark.

It is a requirement of the University's Ethics Committee that I obtain parental permission for this type of research. The work may be submitted anonymously.

The research ultimately hopes to improve pedagogical practice and assessment. I would be most grateful for your assistance in this matter. Should you not wish your daughter to participate in this research please indicate that on the attached reply slip. If you choose this route your daughter will be prejudiced in no way whatsoever.

Yours sincerely

Meg Fargher.
(H.O.D. English)

I _____ parent/guardian of _____ (daughter's name) *give/do not give permission* for my daughter to be involved in a research project for Mrs M. Fargher's MA Degree.

Signature of parent or guardian

Appendix 2

Activity 1

Use a dictionary to define the following words:

- chauvinism feminism
- patriarchy prejudice
- sexism

Activity 2

What is the difference between:

- feminine and feminism?
- conscious and unconscious and sub-conscious?

Activity 3

The following words all refer to women: honey, cherry, sugar, sweetie-pie, peaches-and-cream

- To what do these words refer?
- Why was this category chosen in relation to women?
- How do you react to these words?

Activity 4

- Think of some swears words. Have you noticed how more refer insultingly to women's body parts than to men's?
- Think of terms to describe women and men (e.g. guy and doll) Decode the origin of the words you have chosen and deduce what this says about the status of women in society

Activity 5

Look at the pair words and discuss the negative implications these words have for women. Can you think of additional or contradictory examples?

- Sir/Madam
- Master/Mistress
- Bachelor/Spinster

To which sex do battle-axe, nag, chatter and whine refer and is there a logical reason why they could not refer to the other sex as well?

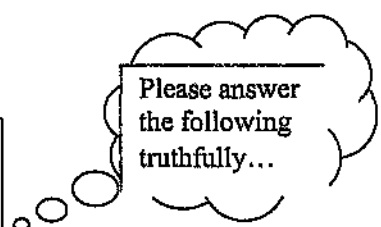
Appendix 3

Color Purple Journal: Self-assessment

This is a new opportunity for you to assess yourself. Try to be honest. Don't put yourself down. Where you have been good credit yourself; where you've been slack acknowledge the weakness. Our assessment is going to count toward your final mark so contemplate this all carefully. This form must be handed in at the end of the lesson.

Mark yourself on the following criteria:

CRITERION	MARK	COMMENT
1. Did I keep up to date with my entries?	/5	
2. Did I respond to the responses adequately?	/10	
3. Did I engage with the novel so that I thought about it in a meaningful way?	/10	
4. Did I include new ideas that I was beginning to think about in my journal?	/5	
5. Did I include any other relevant material?	/5	
6. Did I write interestingly?	/5	
7. An overall impression of what I have achieved in this journal	/10	
Total Mark	/50	



Did you enjoy this way of dealing with the novel? Was it meaningful in any way that other methods of studying a novel have been? What did you not like about the journal? Are you going to continue to keep a journal?

Appendix 4

Reflective Journal on *The Color Purple*

General Requirements: Format and Genre

There is no 'correct' way of keeping a reflective journal other than what the name suggests - there must be some reflection.

Please leave wide margins for me to respond to you.

Using the first person is customary. Please feel free to include drawings, diagrams, cartoons, photographs, pictures or any other form you feel reflects your perceptions and feelings.

While perfect grammatical expression is not vital some attention to style is required.

Use the journal to discuss in writing what you didn't get to talk about in class.

Tone:

Remember this is a reflective journal; not a personal diary. You may use the journal to initiate a discussion with me but remember that I am not a therapist. However, this does not mean that you cannot respond personally or relate some ideas to your personal experience. I am interested in how you relate to the text and issues it awakens in you.

You may choose to write under a pseudonym and record your marks on a mark sheet confidentially. If I use your work in my research I will not use your proper name but I will use a pseudonym.

Length:

You should write between half and one page at least once a week. You can write more and as much as you would like to.

Assessment:

This will be based on:
1) the handing in of weekly entries
2) your exploration of issues arising from your reactions and responses to lessons, the text, other novels, current news items, advertisements, conversations, discussions and anything you think appropriate.
3) your responses to the feedback you receive.

Your last entry should be in the last week of this term and your journal must be handed in for final assessment and feedback on 29 July 1998. If you wish to continue writing during and after the holiday about anything I would be delighted

Appendix 5

The Color Purple

Themes

Thematically this is very much a novel of the latter quarter of the twentieth century and the themes raised are both controversial and topical.

1. **Feminism** and the need for female emancipation from stereotypical roles and perverse male dominance. This includes an awareness of women's own sexuality as determined by themselves as women and not imposed on them by men

2. **Racial issues** and the need for blacks to rise above the deprivations to which they have been subject for centuries.

3. **Religion as opposed to spirituality** and the need by people to be in tune with what is around them from a spiritual perspective. Religion is imposed, spirituality is perceived.

4. **The environment** and the fact that if people were spiritually in tune the environment would not be destroyed.

5. **Bitterness** and the negative consequences of a futile emotion

In a table make a list of the themes and as you read the novel make notes of how the theme is examined in the novel. Look at the example below:

THEME	COMMENT	PAGE
Racism	In the store when Corrine buys material	Pg14
Bitterness	Samuel/Nettie/Corrine relationship causes bitterness	Pg146
Spirituality	Introduction of Alice Walker's views	preface

Structure

The entire plot is exposed through a series of letters written by Celie, to God, in the beginning and then to Celie's sister Nettie. Celie feels so bad initially about who she is and how she is treated that she is unable to verbalise her

pain. It is thus, through the letters that we share in both her pain and her joy. The letters are addressed to God initially because she is unable to find another name for the already, albeit faltering, burgeoning spirituality she feels. Furthermore God is an anonymous being to whom she can release a little of the pain. He is so anonymous he can never reach her and hurt her and so she feels safe writing to him until she finds that her sister is alive. Clearly for Celie to write to a woman - a sister not only through blood but through suffering- is far more satisfying than writing to a male who remains nebulous and noncommittal.

Notice that the first letters written to God are not signed. It is as if she cannot see herself as Celie, as a human being, as valuable in the sight of God or herself. It is through Shug Avery that Celie begins to find herself and her spirituality and her confidence.

Notice too, the introduction to this novel:

To the spirit:
Without whose assistance this book
Nor I
would have been written.

It is, however, this very structure, and the inherent style, which makes the novel different to read. The author does not tell us everything about the characters and we do not understand why they all behave as they do. Because none of the letters are dated we have to read carefully and be aware of changes in clothing, transport and social attitudes to notice that the novel in fact spans about 40 years. There are often large gaps between the letters - sometimes up to 5 years. We gather this information from clues within the letters. Walker therefore does not function as the omniscient narrator who fills in the gaps. It is thus vital for study purposes to re read the novel regularly.

Style

The style is problematic in that the diction is not standard English and thus we encounter a language problem. If one reads the letters aloud then one will get the impression of Celie's voice more easily. (This is not an easy option for the author - she was after all a very successful Latin student who made inroads into the studying of Latin poetry.) Celie's style of writing reflects her lack of education and she writes exactly as she speaks. It is through the letters that we can see the remarkable spiritual journey that Celie makes. All the odds

are against her but in the end she triumphs. She may not have a fiery temperament but her ability to endure stoically - she pretends she is a tree bending not breaking is a psychology which works to preserve her.

Celie writes letters 1-51 and Nettie begins with letter number 52. There are 90 letters all together. Another element of the style in the letters, which you should not miss, is the humour and the pain and the love and the faith which allow Celie to survive in this cruel world. Some of the words that Celie uses may be shocking but they are the only words she knows. Her intention is not to shock rather it is to show how Celie has been violated that is supposed to shock. Words like 'Mammy' serve to establish the time frame and setting.

Setting

The story is set in the deep South between the two world wars. The colonization of Africa is still being pursued by European countries. Blacks are very badly treated in the Southern states of America. They have not even been emancipated for fifty years at the time the novel is set. Thus the feelings between the racial groups are tense and problematic. Not even Martin Luther King had begun to have an influence. One can therefore imagine how deep seated racial inequality still was. Women had only recently received universal suffrage.

Characters

Walker could be accused of being a little stereotypical in her characterisation. Men are bad, women - good; whites are bad - blacks better. If one looks at the messages beyond this though Walker could almost be exonerated for this. Her characterisations are ultimately used to reinforce her themes.

The men are usually referred to by their first names or Mr___. Celie only learns that her husband's name is Albert when his lover, Shug Avery, comes to stay. This serves to show how alienated the two are from each other. Albert married Celie to mind his children and to "relieve himself" sexually in the absence of Shug. If they are not intimate with names it is hard to imagine how they could be intimate in any other way. In practice then Mr ____ rapes Celie just as her 'pa' Mr ____rapes her.

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