

A student once asked me, after inquiring about my school experience: "Why are you teaching here if you weren't in special needs classes?" She asked, "Why would I want to?" as if she thought no one would be there who didn't have to be, as if she thought I were a special needs teacher and a teacher with special needs! No amount of more correct spelling, talking, or writing will make a special needs student feel completely valuable in school, worthy of the time of nonspecial education people, because they always know how much more they have to learn to be like "the other students." Self-esteem, knowing one's value and worth, is something best taught not from outside skills, but rather from the inside of the student. We must open at least some amount of space in our special education classrooms for this kind of learning to take place, no matter how much it may be at odds with our traditional teaching beliefs. Maybe that space will not raise test scores immediately, but with good teacher research and careful risk taking, the students will feel valued and create their own space in the world.

CHAPTER 5

(P) In Search of an Honest Response

JIM SWAIM

I am a third-grade teacher who has been teaching the writing process for a very long time. In that time, almost 20 years, I found myself becoming increasingly confused by the writing behavior of children in my classroom. In an effort to better understand what was happening in writing workshop, I turned to teacher research and in 1991 began my affiliation, which continues today, with the BTRS. Writing workshop occurs every morning for an hour. After a short, teacher-directed mini-lesson, the children write silently for 10 minutes. For the next 20 minutes they have the choice of continuing to write, working on drafts, publishing, or having a conference with a teacher or peer. In a peer conference, the author chooses a partner, then reads her/his story out-loud and decides, with the partner's input, what type of changes could be made. The last 10 minutes of the workshop is a class sharing session where an author shares his/her writing piece with the entire class.

Best described by one class member as "a shop with stories," writing workshop in my class shows authors at various stages in the writing process: wrestling with ideas, composing a draft, revising, and preparing to publish. This particular shop does not specialize in one type of product, but, instead, offers personal narratives, poems, sports stories, fantasies, adventures, mysteries, plays, and anything else that fulfills the rule, "write what you know and care about." Throughout the year authors work at their own pace and make their own decisions on whether a completed, revised draft is worthy of publication. One expectation is that authors have at least three conferences with a peer on a particular piece of writing. The hope is that by experiencing the roles of both writer and audience, the authors' decision to publish or not would be an informed one.

This chapter describes my efforts to better understand what transpires when children share their writing together. Embedded in this

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account is a description of how theory and practice changed for me and how my role as teacher researcher allowed this to happen.

Motivated by my confusion over the lack of substantive revision by writers after a conference, I first focus on the issue of peer response in conferences and class sharing sessions. Then I depict the evolution of a fictional story entitled "The Man Who Was Late for Dinner" written by a third grader named Pamela. This story occurred during a year when I made substantial changes to the way I taught writing. It represents for me the writing culture that emerged in my classroom that year and whose members, as they interacted, began to lead me toward answers to two questions that had plagued me for a long time: How can children connect through their writing? and what constitutes an honest response to this writing?

PEER RESPONSE

I began my research by recording children as they met to discuss works in progress or final drafts. We set up a designated recording area in the classroom reading loft where children were invited to tape-record conferences. In one recorded interaction, Lee and Susan discuss Lee's story, "The House on the Hill in the Night." The story is about a boy who is eaten by a monster and then reunited with his parents who had been eaten by the same monster 3 years before. The story describes how the boy slides down the monster's throat into his stomach and finds his parents playing checkers in the belly of the monster. The boy tries several times to escape and eventually does. Lee and Susan conclude their conference with a significant discussion about detail.

Lee: I don't know. I just have this feeling that I did not put enough detail into it. Do you think I put enough detail or maybe too much?

Susan: I think it was pretty good. I mean if you want to change it you can.

Lee: Yeah, I did work really hard but I have a feeling I either put too little or too much detail.

Susan: Well, I think in some parts there was too much detail and in some parts there was too little like when you said about the checker and how did they get the checkers?

Lee: I think I'm going to add and put in a page there and stuff. Do you think I should tape all my pages together so that it won't be hard?

Susan: No.

Lee: Do you like my story?

Susan: Yeah.

While the girls seemed earnest and clearly on task during this conference, they did not focus on points of confusion, challenge one another for explanations or elaboration, or even address one another by name. Words and phrases that I had taught during mini-lessons on revision permeated the conference. This led me to an unsettling hypothesis: Perhaps my attempt to predetermine and define the terms that Susan and Lee used in their conference prevented them from actually using or even inventing their own language for revising their writing.

Both girls were versed in the language of revision, but not in the actual knowledge of how to revise. Bloome (1987) refers to this as "procedural display." It occurs when both teacher and student are most concerned with displaying a set of procedures or routines in a lesson. Although I was not present during the conference, my voice and expectations clearly were. Lee's and Susan's sole goal in this conference was to converse using the terms I had taught them in the mini-lessons. The conference itself had a hollow, unnatural quality to it as though the girls were following a script and could deliver their lines but didn't understand the meaning of what they were saying. The central issue of how to revise Lee's story was lost amid the display of terms. In the end, revision was reduced to adding one small detail about how the checkers came to be in the belly of the monster. By stressing the need to use these terms in scripted conversations, I prevented children from responding on their own terms with their own language to the real content of stories.

If procedural display was hindering natural conversation and an honest response to writing during peer conferences, then was the same thing happening in the larger context of class sharing sessions? Had my role as a teacher of the language of revision so conditioned me that I, like the children, was most concerned with the display of routine and procedure? I decided to focus on class sharing as I had on peer conferences by listening carefully and slowly to what children said to each other.

CLASS SHARING

One day in February, Diane and Lee sat in the author's chair and shared the first draft of a picture book entitled "The Sun and the Little Girl." They prefaced their reading by noting that Diane had written

the story specifically for kindergartners and that she had recruited Lee as her illustrator.

The story recounts the adventures of a little girl named Judy who has just moved into a new house. On the first day she unsuccessfully scours the neighborhood for new friends. On the second day, lonely and forlorn, she finally looks up in the sky and sees the sun smiling down on her. The sun, whose name is Jimmy, can communicate with Judy, but cannot move from his position in the sky. Judy suggests that they play a game together. Mindful that the sun cannot leave his position, they finally decide that the only game they are physically able to play together is Hide-and-Go-Seek. The sun is "it" first and finds Judy hiding under a tree. Judy goes next and discovers the sun hiding behind a cloud. The story ends when three of Judy's friends arrive. Judy tells her friends, "Let's go play. I have a new friend. His name is Jimmy." "Where is your friend?" asks one of the friends. "Up there," replies Judy.

Mark begins the response part of the share with a question about the number of words on each page of the story, "Aren't there too little words on each page? Are there five on each page?" "It's a rough draft," says Lee, "and we want to draw pictures underneath it because we are doing it for kindergartners." Next David asks how the sun, given its position in the sky, is able to see Judy.

David: How could the sun see down on the earth and like the sun is as high as anything?

Lee: It's fantasy, David.

Danny: It's only for kindergartners.

Stuart: David, David, if you see, your sight never ends. You will see forever unless something blocks it.

Susan: The higher you are, the more you can see.

Stuart: Let's say you are here, and there's a hill down like that and you're over here. You can't see. Your sight never ends. It goes on forever.

Susan: But the higher you are the more you can see because you can see over things.

Diane: Well, you guys, it's not all the way up in the sky. It's low down.

Perhaps if the authors had read this story to a kindergarten class as originally intended, the audience might have responded differently to the playful personification and issues of friendship in the story. That kind of authentic, personalized response would have affirmed the authors' intentions and focused on content, rather than on scientific

accuracy. Instead, in a vivid example of talk being shaped by its own momentum, a vocal minority, either consciously or unconsciously, shunned the stated intentions of the authors and chose instead to engage in science talk. Their response focused on what the text ought to have been rather than what it really was. Because the class did not respond to the real intentions of the story, the authors came away from this interaction feeling diminished and excluded.

By analyzing these two interactions, I gained insight into the ways that children in my class responded to one another's writing. In both cases children had a difficult time reacting to the content and intentions of the writing. In the case of the peer conference, the need for procedural displays made attending to the text impossible. Instead of examining real issues like loss of parents or the experience of being trapped, both girls felt compelled to talk like the teacher. In class sharing, children examined the scientific basis for Diane's story instead of responding reflectively to a fantasy written for kindergartners. The response of the audience in both cases did little to motivate the writer to write more. Lee and Susan felt successful and complacent because they had performed well, not because they had revised Lee's story. Diane and Lee felt misinterpreted and defensive and only wanted to read their story to a more receptive audience.

That year I was forced to look more closely at my role in creating a writing culture that rarely responded to content, and to seek an answer to what I meant by "honest response and natural connection through writing." Ironically, the answer emerged in a book written primarily for children.

HONEST RESPONSE AND NATURAL CONNECTION

In *The Bat-Poet*, Randall Jarrell (1964) tackles the issues of connection and response for early writers. It is the story of a bat who, unable to sleep during the day, begins writing poetry about the mysterious new world of daylight. He models his poems after the songs of the mockingbird whom he greatly admires. Finally he gets up enough courage to share with the mockingbird his first poem, which is about his own night world and the predatory owl. The mockingbird responds, "Why, I like it. Technically, it's quite accomplished. The way you change the rhyme-scheme's particularly effective." The mockingbird goes on to applaud "the next-to-last line's iambic pentameter and the last line's iambic trimeter" (p. 14). The bat returns home, thinking about the mockingbird's response.

Partly he felt very good—the mockingbird had liked his poem—and partly he felt just terrible. He thought, "Why, I must just as well have said it to the bats. What do I care about how many feet it has? The owl nearly kills me, and he says he likes the rhyme-scheme. . . . The trouble isn't making the poems, the trouble is finding somebody that will listen to them." (pp. 14–15)

The bat seeks another audience, this time with the chipmunk. The chipmunk's response is decidedly different. He finds the poem disturbing. "It's terrible, just terrible! Is there really something like that at night? I'm going to bed earlier. Sometimes when there're lots of nuts I stay out till it's pretty dark, believe me, I'm never going to again" (p. 17). Upon a second reading, the chipmunk says, "It makes me shiver. Why do I like it if it makes me shiver?" (p. 22). The poet is so pleased with this authentic response that he offers to write a poem for the chipmunk.

My response to this wonderfully allegorical tale was similar to the chipmunk's. It made me shiver. The world created by Jarrell might just as well have been my classroom, with the response of the mockingbird the norm, rather than the exception. It seemed that the bat's dilemma of finding someone to "listen" to his poems was similar to Diane's and Lee's. Like the mockingbird, my class had fixated on the form of the story, and Diane had come away from the interaction discouraged and defensive and, like the bat, feeling "just terrible."

Most teachers of the writing process will acknowledge the importance of social interaction in the language-learning process. Teachers and peers need to talk to one another about writing and their reaction to that writing. Yet, there are some kinds of talk or modes of response that are more helpful than others to the writer. *The Bat-Poet* highlighted two types of response that affected the bat quite differently. The mockingbird's response gives the appearance of being sensitive, polite, and instructive. Such a response often is modeled by the teacher so that it is part of the explicit curriculum. It is designed to help beginning writers see what works in their writing. Appearances in the classroom, however, are sometimes deceiving, and when we listen carefully to the voices of writers in writing workshop, or get inside their heads as Jarrell allows us to do with the bat, we find that the effect of the response is quite the opposite of its initial aim. The bat has no use for the mockingbird's comments about the metric structure in his poem because that was not his intention in the first place. Through the poem, he wanted to show the pure terror of his nearly fatal experience with the dreaded owl. When the response does not acknowledge the writer's intentions,

it can have a very discouraging effect on the writer and his/her desire to write more.

The second mode of response embodies what I would call the honest response. It is honest because the response honors the intentions of the writer and the reasons for writing. When the chipmunk heard the bat's poem a second time, he responded in a profoundly human way: "It makes me shiver. Why do I like it if it makes me shiver?" Perplexed as he was, the chipmunk had shown the bat the affective power of his writing. It was the response of the chipmunk, not the mockingbird, that convinced the bat to keep writing poetry. The chipmunk had shown the bat that his writing was meaningful, real, and socially embedded in the culture of the woods. No wonder the bat offered to write his next poem about and for the chipmunk. It was a natural connection.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

My research had shown me that I too had adopted the voice of the mockingbird when I responded to children's fiction. The transcripts of peer conferences and class sharing indicated that Diane, Susan, and the rest of the class had embraced this voice also. For next year's class I was determined to change my practice and reconstruct writing workshop so that the honest response and natural connection could happen more frequently.

In mini-lessons I limited my use of words associated with revision (pruning, expanding, revising, editing, etc.). I was less dogmatic about the purposes of a conference. Children no longer had to meet in pairs. They were encouraged to meet in larger groups and to use the time to read their stories out-loud and react to them. The job of the author no longer was to come away from the conference with something to change in the draft. Instead they were asked only to acknowledge and remember the audience's reaction. Conversely, the job of the audience was to find something in the draft that evoked an emotional response in them and to articulate this reaction as best they could to the author—a tall order for third graders!

The notion of collaboration was introduced early in the year. As defined in mini-lessons, collaboration meant two things. First, two or three people could compose a story together, but each student was expected to write his/her own copy of the collaborative story. Second, children were asked to be more conscious of what classmates were working on in writing workshop. Once a week in class sharing each

author gave a brief, 2-minute retelling of her/his work in progress. Children in this session were encouraged to borrow ideas from classmates and to use them in their own writing. They began to see this as one way of collaborating, and the pejorative refrain, "that's copying!" vanished from the classroom. By honoring and legitimizing collaboration in writing workshop, I was giving in to what, in the past, had been a clearly stated need for many young writers. I realized that collaboration allowed writers time to talk about writing as they composed and that, for some, this was a valuable alternative to rehearsal and planning. It also provided a social context for the creation of texts in a jargon-free spontaneous manner.

I also re-examined the purpose of class sharing. I had thought of it as a time when an author could read a draft in progress or finished story to an audience of peers and get feedback in the form of questions from that audience. Yet, my research had indicated that authors in this context often felt like the bat reading his story to a bunch of mockingbirds. How to restructure class-sharing sessions remained a dilemma for me until Pamela finally shared her story.

"THE MAN WHO WAS LATE FOR DINNER"

Writing workshop was proceeding along nicely when Pamela, who had been working on her story for almost 3 months, first took the author's chair. The story describes the adventures of Bob Pomerance. Bob decided to have a party for the entire neighborhood, including both children and adults. For some reason, Bob did not tell the adults that children were invited. He wanted to keep this a secret so he spent most of the party shuttling back and forth between the children's and adults' rooms. He was forced to make an excuse each time he needed to leave a room. In a sense, Bob's party was really two secret parties going on at once. As the party was concluding, one of the parents asked Bob to come to dinner in 2 weeks. Bob accepted. On the appointed day he set out for his destination.

Bob was outside walking to Ms. Karput's house. He walked for a very long time. Then he stopped. He said, "This isn't the right way." He turned around and started back. But that did no good either. Bob was lost. He tried every way to go, but he was still lost. It was starting to get dark. The wind blew lightly against his face. The sky stood still. It looked like all there was in the

world was darkness. The sky seemed close to Bob. Bob rested against a stone. Then you know it! Bob fell asleep.

Bob woke up and walked into a small town and saw store signs lining both sides of the street. He began to visit each store. What was significant about each visit was that each store was owned or managed by an actual member of the class. Here are two of Bob's most notable visits: one to Alice's, who happened to be the most frequently consulted speller in the class, and the other to Christopher's, who had at that time published the most in writing workshop.

He was walking down the street and he saw another store called Alice's Super Spelling. Bob went in. H-E-L-L-O," said Alice who was spelling her words. "Hello," said Bob.

"W-H-A-T D-O Y-O-U W-A-N-T?"

"Nothing. I am just looking around."

"O-K-A-Y," said Alice.

Bob said, "Do you have level nine?" [This is a reference to the 18-level spelling program used by the children in this class.]

"Y-E-S W-E D-O. L-O-O-K I-N T-H-E B-A-C-K B-A-R-R-E-L."

"Thank you," said Bob.

"Y-O-U A-R-E W-E-L-C-O-M-E!" said Alice.

Bob paid and left. Then he saw another store called Christopher's Books. Bob went inside. He looked at one of Christopher's books. He looked at the dedication page and saw that it was dedicated to Christopher. "Wait a minute," said Bob. "Didn't Christopher make this book? Yes. He did. It said on the cover." Bob asked Christopher, "Why did you dedicate this book to yourself?"

"Oh, baycause deybee oar sew special!" (Oh, because they are so special!) said Christopher. Bob looked in all the books and the books were all dedicated to Christopher and they were all by Christopher. Bob decided to buy a book called *The Man Who Was Late for Dinner*.

With an intimate knowledge of her classmates, Pamela had created stores that had a certain ambiance or sold a particular product that was strangely appropriate to its owner. She had constructed places that legitimized even the most marginal members of the class, including her teachers! In all, Bob visited 24 stores. Finally, he reached the last one.

Suddenly he felt very tired and fell asleep. When he woke up, Bob was in his own house or what looked like his own house. It was his house. Bob thought that this was another weird thing that was happening to him again. He looked at the clock. It was 5:45. "I'd better hurry up or I'll be late." Because he had to go to dinner at 6:00. So he got ready and left. The end . . . but stay tuned for "The Man Who Was Late for Dinner, Part Two."

It is not clear just how late the man was or whether he ever reached his destination. It is clear, however, that he visited and shopped in each and every store. His journey was inclusive, leaving no one out. His quest seemed to be to participate, either by buying or just browsing in the world of each store, metaphorically in the world of each member of the class.

A Different Response

As Pamela read her story, the class listened with rapt attention. They then responded with questions and suggestions. I was struck by the intense laughter and playful energy that permeated the entire session:

Joe: What is that last store going to be?

Pamela: I haven't made it up. Jacob?

Jacob: I have an idea what it could be. It could be like Tutu's Tutu Store, YO-yo's YO-yo Store.

Darlene: I like being in your story and the part when Bob, he sees all the signs. I like that part.

Jacob: I think, like, the woman should say when he finally gets there, "Well, WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG!" and that will be the end.

Pamela: Yeah, he'll get there and knock on the door and she'll say, "Well, Bob, what took you so long?"

Clyde: Then it will be like 10 minutes late.

Pamela: No, 10 minutes early.

Josh: It should all be a dream.

Clyde: Oh, yeah. Time has stopped.

Alice: Well, you could just make him think it was a dream, but then he reaches in his pocket and finds that diamond.

Pamela: Yeah, yeah. That's a good idea.

Alice: And he's gonna say, "What?"

Darlene: I have an idea. Everything that happens after the nap could be his dream, and then he could hear some noise, like

a telephone call that canceled dinner till the next day. So . . . then the next day he could go to dinner and not get lost. Then that could be the end.

Pamela: No, I'll make him get lost again, "The Man Who Was Late for Dinner, Part Two."

Early in the share, Darlene set an interesting tone by indicating that she liked being in Pamela's story. Her response affirmed at least one of Pamela's intentions for writing the piece in the first place: to include all members of the class. At this point, the class response mode changed dramatically. Instead of being outside the story and responding passively, members of the class actually got inside Pamela's story and responded to it like they were the actual writers. Nor was Pamela left out of this process of co-construction. In all, seven children, including Pamela, offered suggestions on how to change or end the story. Pamela came away from this class sharing feeling neither defensive nor misunderstood. Like the bat after he read his poem to the chipmunk, Pamela returned to her writing with the incentive to revise and compose more.

Understandings

In "The Man Who Was Late for Dinner" Pamela constructed a world that legitimized every member of a writing community. In the sharing session, the class acknowledged this and responded in a way that sustained Pamela and showed her the power of creating worlds through writing. The metaphor that Pamela had created, that of a world that included everyone, was embraced by other writers in the class. Clyde began to write a story entitled "The Man Who Was Late for Lunch," while Arthur and Nat collaborated on a tale about an imaginary land called "Slime World." Darlene, in her fictional story "I Hate Teachers and They Hate Me," used a setting much like the world of her own classroom, with characters who were undeniably her own classmates. Martin and Jacob began to write a story called "The Comedians," a comedy sketch that poked fun at the foibles of each member of the class.

In an end-of-the-year interview, Pamela described one way students collaborated on ideas and how these ideas propagated and spread in this writing workshop.

Well, it sort of came back and forth because when I started my story, he was making a story called "The Man Who Was Five

Minutes Late" so I got some ideas from that and then he got another idea from me and then he just did another version except he was late for lunch.

Frank Smith (1988) contends that the metaphors we use in our lives as teachers often shape the way we perceive children in the classroom. In his view, metaphors are a way of structuring reality. Consequently, using archaic or outdated metaphors in the classroom can in some instances confine and limit our thinking about children and learning. As I re-read Pamela's story and the transcript of her class sharing for the tenth time, I realized that as a teacher I was not prepared to recognize new and important metaphors. Like the mockingbird, I was mired in an expert point of view that prevented me from grasping not only the metaphors in children's writings, but the intentions behind those metaphors. Pamela had used fiction to create an inclusive world and, by doing so, had invited the class to live in that world during sharing sessions. Her metaphor, that of the mind as creator of worlds, was powerful enough to be utilized by others in the classroom. As world creators, the class brought a much more constructivistic attitude to the writing process and to most response situations.

If I was to truly understand and respond honestly to the writing of third graders as the class had to Pamela's story, I needed to discard the metaphor on which I had relied for years and that restricted my thinking. Supported by most language theory and research, this metaphor describes the brain as a processor of information. Language and writing are methods of shunting information from one person to the next. In writing workshop emerging writers use the personal narrative as a way of communicating experience, and the primary goal is to write in a clear, concise, detailed style about experience. With this metaphor in mind, I programmed my students to respond to text from the point of view of expert critical readers concerned with clarity, detail, voice, and correctness. This point of view is what Smith complains about when he asserts that schools attempt to produce secretaries instead of authors.

A New Metaphor

Pamela and her inclusive world have led me to a different and more powerful metaphor that is much more appropriate to the writing process and, over time, to the acquisition of literacy. The true power and connective quality of writing became apparent to writers like Pamela when they were permitted to engage in the construction of real or

imaginary worlds. In the context of our writing workshop, Pamela became an artist whose work, like all works of art, suggests a different imaginative world for her audience. She created a world that included her classmates. They, in turn, discovered the power of creating worlds like hers through writing and adopted her idea, even her metaphor. The connection occurred because the audience was thinking and listening to her story like writers or world creators, not like readers concerned with information and clarity.

Wells (1991) describes a model of literacy that is based on how readers and writers engage with written text. He suggests that to be fully literate, readers and writers must experience certain modes of engagement. The re-creational mode clearly supports the metaphor of mind as world creator.

In calling this mode re-creational, I intend to capture the sense of engagement with the text as an end in itself, under-taken for the pleasure of constructing and exploring a world through words, one's own or those of another author. (p. 49)

Pamela and others in the class were clearly engaged with their writing in the re-creational mode. The playful tone and constructivist quality of recorded sharing sessions demonstrated that they took great pleasure in the creation and exploration of their worlds. More important, a writing culture had developed that used the same mode of engagement with written text, allowing its members to respond honestly and appropriately to the worlds created in those texts. Both audience and author were co-constructors in the fictive world of writing workshop.

The constructivistic and collaborative nature of conferences and class sharing also influenced those children who chose to write in genres other than fiction: personal narratives, poetry, and exposition. Recordings of these encounters show an empathetic audience willing to offer playful suggestions. Instead of deflecting them as often had happened in the past, authors were receptive. This receptivity invited even more suggestions, further strengthening the process of writer and audience composing, rather than critiquing, together.

There is an emotional component to teacher research, rarely mentioned in the expanding literature of the field, that helps explain why teachers do it. For 2 years I had been deeply embedded in the talk and the text of process writing in my classroom. My journey allowed me to listen more intently and read more carefully than ever before. It quieted the frenetic distractions of teaching and brought me much closer to the world of young writers. As my understanding of that world

grew, so did my emotional attachment to it. In that world I came to respect and admire the integrity of all the children as they wrestled with the immense task of becoming literate writers. In 24 years of teaching, I had never grown so emotionally attached to a group of children as I did to this class.

Martin used a wonderful metaphor when asked to describe writing workshop: "It is kind of like a group of people writing at the same time in the same classroom. You can team up and it is kind of like a club." I remain indebted to these children for taking me on an exciting, rigorous journey that changed my theory and practice, gave me new knowledge about the writing process, showed me a new metaphor for learning, and offered me temporary membership in a fascinating club of writers.

CHAPTER 6

What's Real About Imagination?

ROXANNE PAPPENHEIMER

The imagination has been so debased that imagination—being imaginative—rather than the lynch-pin of our existence now stands as a synonym for something outside ourselves like science fiction or some new use for tangerine slices on raw pork chops—what an imaginative summer recipe—and Star Wars! so imaginative! The imagination has moved out of the realm of being our link, our most personal link, with our inner lives and the world outside that world.

—John Guare, 1990, pp. 33–34

Everyone uses the term *imagination*, but how many of us really know what imagination is? This chapter describes a brief foray into the imaginative worlds of two of my students, Mark and Sonia. Their imaginative worlds were not easy places to be. As a special educator of adolescent students with cognitive delays, I was trained in a way that featured a deficit model that permitted me to neatly package and dismiss certain words and actions and attribute them to my students' lower levels of cognition and their concrete thinking. My students' imaginings were widely labeled unrealistic or fantasy-based thinking, especially when compared with those of "normal" high school students.

To ignore a student's imagination may seem extreme to teachers in regular education. After all, students' imaginations are supposed to be nurtured in classrooms. Most young children's imaginations are naturally evident. They strike dramatic poses, conjure up imaginary friends, unearth evidence of the tooth fairy, and fervently believe in