

# “We felt that electricity”: writing-as-becoming in a high school writing class

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## Abstract

Drawing from data generated in a high school creative writing class, this article presents experiences and moments from a classroom-sited research project that were considered through the theoretical perspective of response-able pedagogies. Using postqualitative methods, this analysis addresses two framing questions: How does turning attention towards the unfolding relations in a writing class illuminate some possibilities of response-able pedagogies? What becomes possible when the teaching of writing emphasises ‘becoming’ (rather than products/achievement)? In response to the first question, turning attention towards the unfolding relations in the class context made new ways of conceptualising writing possible: writing as following energies; writing as making; and writing as producing/traversing boundaries. Considered together, these interwoven practices contributed to the response-able pedagogy of writing-as-becoming. In response to question two, the response-able pedagogy of writing-as-becoming shifted the teaching emphasis from controlled outcomes to the affective experience of connection. This study shows the potential in reconsidering our commitment to teaching writing as (only) a process and to (also) imagine it as a means by which students can experience the vitality and joy of being present with others.

**Key words:** classroom-sited research, creativity, posthuman approaches, secondary language arts, writing, postqualitative approaches, response-able pedagogies, affect theory, adolescent literacy

*“Today was one of those days when what happened was so far beyond what I could have imagined. We felt that electricity, that connection, when everyone is in it together even when we are not sure what ‘it’ is” (Casey Parker, high school writing teacher)*

In the statement above, Casey described how experiences of connection in a high school writing class exceeded learning outcomes, student behaviours and curricular products. Her description reflected awareness of the affective intensities that developed and

circulated in the class. Her language avoided, even, the representation of powerful classroom experiences as saturated with emotions, which are often mediated through personal and sociocultural understandings (Lewis and Tierney, 2011). What Casey (all names are pseudonyms) called ‘electricity’ was the invisible, tangible current flowing among those intensities. Electricity blurs boundaries, demands attention and produces presence. Here, it is a metaphor for the affective experience of liveliness, excitement and connection.

Literacy learning in the writing class described by Casey was produced by a lively classroom assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) or constellation of humans, objects, practices and ideas present in relation with one another. Members included people (like students, teacher, researcher), material things (like notebooks) and invisible elements (like practices and values) that were connected in shifting ways. Over the course of the study that forms the basis of this analysis, the unfolding of pedagogies and intra-actions (Barad, 2007) produced learning in many ways, including in/through affective connections across the time/space of the classroom context. Entanglements among writers, materials and ideas were also already intertwined with their teacher’s learning, her writing and the morphing curriculum. These entanglements are charged with energy, like the vitality that Boldt (2021) described as “aliveness of the classroom, the something more that cannot be reduced to parts or their sum” (p. 211).

Drawing from data generated in a high school creative writing (CW) class, this article presents experiences and moments considered through the theoretical perspective of response-able pedagogies (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017). As ‘ethico-political practices’ (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 64), response-able pedagogies go beyond instructional activities and expand the already transformative potential of teaching and learning by focusing on relations among members of an assemblage. Response-ability refers to the capacity to respond, an ability afforded to all members, human and more-than-human (Barad, 2007). Not to be mistaken for a statement of value, the inclusive term “more-than-human” (Whatmore, 2006) represents

everything in an assemblage that exceeds the human, including materials, discourses, practices and affects. Everything and everyone present in any way are in relation with everything and everyone else. As a researcher, I was witness to and entangled with the literacy learning and 'becoming' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) in the class, prompting the questions that guide this analysis: How does turning attention towards the unfolding relations in a writing class illuminate some possibilities of response-able pedagogies? What becomes possible when the teaching of writing emphasises 'becoming'?

## Affect and literacy teaching/learning

*Affect* is a way of thinking about energy and corporeal interconnection (Spinoza, 2001); it is the capacity of things to affect (and be affected by) each other (Massumi, 1987). In education research, a focus on affect signals a departure from considering literacy learning to be a controllable process taking place within a predictable social context. Scholars have explored affective dimensions of literacy learning, often with a focus on response and meaning-making as readers. For example, in a study of middle schoolers' learning in Tasmania, Cole (2008) positioned affective literacy as a part of the repertoire of practices that comprise contemporary literacy. Johnston (2020) found students' affective responses to multimodal texts to be moments "charged with embodied feeling" (p. 195), drawing on ways that meaning and affect are intertwined in all literate practices. Similarly, an orientation towards literacy activities as always-already saturated with affective ways of knowing informed this analysis and the focal participant's perspective on teaching.

This study contributes to conversations gaining momentum as some literacy researchers consider affective dimensions of teaching writing. Recent studies have examined writing in schools through frameworks and methodologies inspired by posthumanism and feminist new materialisms, many of which guard space, implicitly or explicitly, for affective experiences (Kuby, 2017; Lemieux and Rowsell, 2020; Niccolini and Pindyck, 2015; Rowsell, 2020; Zapata, Kuby, and Thiel, 2018). In their recent editorial on affect and literacy, Ehret and Rowsell (2021) invited readers to consider the new directions that literacy research informed by posthumanism and affect might lead, past the boundaries inscribed by the New Literacy Studies of the 20th century. Moving beyond the sense of control offered by our collective "nostalgia for structures" (Ehret and Rowsell, 2021, p. 205), this study engages a framework of response-able pedagogies.

## Response-able pedagogies

Response-able pedagogies (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017) are practices that acknowledge the ability of all members of an assemblage to respond (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1992) and define teaching as inherently ethical and political. These aspects of teaching and learning are amplified through the foundation of response-able pedagogies in a relational ontology. So, response-able pedagogies consider the *relation between* entities, human and more-than-human, to form the basis of being (Wildman, 2010, p. 55), whereas more individualistic theories of existence elementally position entities as separable and discretely definable. This ontological difference distances response-able pedagogies from critical pedagogies, even those that acknowledge power relations, materiality and entanglement (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017). Drawing from feminist new materialist scholars (Barad, 2007, 2014; Haraway, 2016; Lenz Taguchi, 2012), Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) posed four enactments that support response-able pedagogies. The ethico-political practices they describe are attentiveness, curiosity, responsibility and being rendered capable.

The ability to respond is preceded by activating attentiveness with care and sensitivity, making it possible to engage across difference. Curiosity is not simply about the rational or imaginative, but about finding space for possibilities through all encounters and letting all those present (human and more-than-human) intra-actively shape what unfolds (Haraway, 2016). The practice of responsibility refers to showing our understanding of the multidirectional relationships that shape contexts, and our noninnocent existence and entanglement with the world (Barad, 2007). Finally, by rendering all actors capable of responding to what matters (Davis and Turpin, 2015), practising response-able pedagogy in a classroom casts teaching and learning as "a collective process of potentiality and becoming" (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 69).

## Becoming

Becoming is a process of shifting and changing and is itself a shifting and changing process, evading description and exceeding static definition (Massumi, 1992, p. 103). Since their relations are always in motion, participants in an assemblage are part of an ongoing process of becoming, "ever-emerging, continually transforming" as they respond to new associations (Lenters, 2016, p. 284). Rather than a focus on what *is* or even on what *will be*, a focus on becoming invites us to "think the world differently" (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 653). A focus on becoming draws the analytical gaze

to the shifting relations of an impermanent assemblage, which, in this analysis, took place within the context of a class about writing. (The word 'writing' represents a process/activity and the thing produced; considering writing as becoming includes either/both.) As an ongoing process of multidimensional unfolding, shifting and changing, becoming should not be mistaken for a clear path between two points. Considering writing as a process of becoming moves purposefully away from the product-focused models or linear process-focused models often used in classrooms.

## Methodology

This analysis draws from a collaborative inquiry (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009) with Casey Parker, a white woman in her early 30s who had been teaching literacy for 5 years in a Southwestern US city. Before this research, Casey and I knew each other as members of the local National Writing Project chapter, which was affiliated with the university where I was a doctoral student. This classroom research was also connected with a project that began the preceding summer, about an immersive programme in India for US teachers (including Casey) learning about practical nonviolence (see Rubin, 2020). In the school year discussed here, Immediately following the summer programme in India, Casey's thinking about teaching was infused with concerns about equity, care, freedom and other facets of her expression of nonviolence in/through literacy teaching.

### *The classroom assemblage: Participants and context*

Casey is noticeably centred in this work, a choice that is perhaps in tension with the positioning of writing experiences as produced by assemblages rather than the effects of only-human, and only-teacher, agency. While teachers are far from the only important actors in any classroom encounter, highlighting Casey maintains alignment with the initial framing of the research, and is meant to stir consideration of what might become possible when teachers invite affective ways of knowing and learning into pedagogical spaces.

Inspired by her own writing life and her newfound commitment to nonviolence, Casey's teaching veered from the achievement-focused priorities prevalent where she worked, a public magnet school-within-a-school for high-achieving secondary students in a large urban district. The differences between priorities were especially evident in CW, an elective in which Casey

had more autonomy than in her other classes (i.e. English II). Students from any year could opt to take CW, or a different elective, to fulfil a graduation requirement.

Other human members of the class included myself (a white woman, researcher and former secondary literacy teacher), and 27 students, all of whom agreed to participate in this research (parent permission was also required for students under the age of consent). Due to the nature of the class and school, the students all had applied and been accepted to the magnet school based mainly on previous academic success, and all had chosen to take CW with Ms Parker. Students were mostly in upper classes (years 11 and 12), with five in year 10. Seventeen students identified as women, eight as men, and two students did not identify with binary descriptions of gender. Most of the students (16) identified as white or European, with others identifying as Asian, South Asian, Black or Latina.

More-than-human members were material and non-material. The materials in the class included notebooks, which were often highlighted as agentive collaborators in writing. The arrangement of the classroom invited the visibility and agency of other materials as well, like a classroom library and 'care corner' with a tea kettle and armchairs. At the front of the room, two Pride flags were always visible, intra-acting with human members of the assemblage, inviting and restricting certain actions, discourses and ways of being. (Casey said she realised they belonged at the front of the room when the teacher in the adjacent classroom put a sticker on his door supporting the 45th US President.) The pedagogical practices that circulated in the class, some of which are explained below, also contributed to what was produced through intra-actions in this context.

*Writing workshop and writers' notebooks.* The writing workshop model and ethos (e.g., Graves, 2003) was part of the CW class assemblage. In the workshop structure that Casey drew from, two associated practices were especially significant. First, teaching towards the use of notebooks as tools for living as writers (Bomer, 2011) was a means of building writing stamina and supporting students to use writing to notice the world and their own thoughts. Also significant was Casey's belief that teachers of writing should be writers themselves and that their writing lives are opportunities for developing curriculum (Locke, 2014). During the summer programme, I learned Casey was a disciplined and joyful near-daily notebook keeper, using writing in her life in ways she hoped her students might take on and go beyond. Notebook keeping and other aspects of Casey's practice as a writer often served as inspiration and support for teaching.

## Data generation and analysis

After the summer programme, Casey opened her classroom as a space to continue thinking together. She saw her participation as part of how she was “seeking wholeness and harmony” across the spheres of her life. This article brings together moments and experiences from data that include interviews/discussions/conversations (over 20 hours), classroom observation (over 60 hours) and student materials. In order to produce the data associated with this analysis, over a full school year, I attended the CW class each class day as an ‘observant participant’ (Erickson, 2006), and met with Casey before and after classes to discuss and develop ideas, reflections and impressions.

*Diffraction analysis of data.* Diffraction is a theoretical tool that considers how patterns and differences emerge through encounters between different entities, like what we might call data and what we might call theory. The definitions and delineations of entities are less significant than what their collisions and encounters might produce. Diffraction is a way to consider data and theory together, to read them through one another and notice the patterns, differences and potentialities that emerge. Rather than fixing processes of data generation and analysis with data as “a methodic set of steps” (Davies, 2014), diffraction invites us to consider these activities as opportunities to open possibility.

Diffraction methodology insists that researchers acknowledge being part of the “world’s differential becoming” (Barad, 2007, p. 91) and recognise all research as composed of noninnocent agential cuts (Barad, 2007, p. 148). So, diffractive analysis does not start and stop neatly; there is no clear ‘before’ the analysis. Even in phases of data generation, as a researcher I made ‘noninnocent cuts’ as I produced materials, organised them, labelled and grouped them. These activities were then followed by a phase of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), which did not directly produce the insights offered here, but supported the development of the questions that guide this article: How does turning attention towards the unfolding relations in a writing class illuminate some possibilities of response-able pedagogies? What becomes possible when the teaching of writing emphasises ‘becoming’?

In the wave of diffractive analysis that contributed to shaping and addressing these questions, the process was recursive and multidirectional (MacLure, 2003). Through multiple immersions into thinking with theory and data together (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), diffractive analysis provided the opportunity to reread moments through lenses (in)formed by theories to notice what patterns and possibilities emerged, and to explore and consider differences in various rereadings (Lenz Taguchi and Palmer, 2013). Data produced in

the context of the CW class were read through theories of affect and affective literacies (Ahmed, 2010; Ehret, 2018; Lenters, 2016), becoming and assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Jackson, 2010) and response-able pedagogies (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017). In addition to reading data and theory through one another, reading different data through each other, as Zapata et al. (2018) described, also produced new patterns to observe and explore.

For example, Maple, a student in the CW class, talked about her process of writing with her notebook while looking through it for ideas and patterns. This contributed to the generation of various data-texts like the recording of our discussion, my notes from this day, still images of the class in progress and photos of Maple’s work. However, diffractive analysis brings to the forefront that all data-texts, even the defining boundary of the literacy learning experiences they represent, are produced by a researcher. The data generated were never conceived as, or intended to be, objectively rendered reflections of a single representable reality (Haraway, 1988). Later, the activities of reading these data-texts through one another and through other texts – like theories of response-able pedagogies, affective ways of knowing and becoming – produced new patterns and new possibilities for understanding writing in a way that let “something different come to matter” (Davies, 2014, p. 3). These emerging patterns invited different ideas and texts into subsequent rereadings, producing a continually expanding understanding about the dynamic relations in the class and newly unfolding ways of conceptualising writing.

## New understandings: writing-as-becoming

In response to the first question that shapes this analysis, turning attention towards the unfolding relations in the writing class made new ways of conceptualising (teaching) writing possible. These new ways of conceptualising writing supported a pedagogy that emerged in/through the process of its own becoming. This unfolding process could not be predicted or planned, and was (in)formed by affective knowledges and ways of being in the world, in the classroom, and in experiences of creation. Through the moments and experiences described here and the process of their description, a response-able approach to writing pedagogy was produced, *writing-as-becoming*. As a response-able pedagogy, writing-as-becoming was activated by the four ethico-political practices that comprise response-able pedagogies: attentiveness, curiosity, responsibility and being rendered capable. These enactments were not only about the teacher’s individual actions; they were expressions that emerged across the assemblage.

This section explains three major conceptual threads that wove through the CW class, animating and informing the response-able pedagogy of writing-as-becoming. These are: writing as following energies, writing as making and writing as producing/traversing boundaries. Next, each concept is presented first through an explanation with references to classroom data, then brought into deeper discussion with other texts and ideas.

### *Writing as following energies*

Notebooking was ongoing throughout the school year, and notebooks were both a means of paying attention and a space where ideas gathered. After a few weeks in the class, students were at a place in a writing cycle where they would be looking back in their own notebook writing and making decisions about a topic or idea to pursue; they would then 'collect' ideas around that topic before moving into drafting and crafting a piece of writing to share/publish.

At this stage, Casey invited students first to notice what had been happening in their notebooks, interrupting any urge they might have had to define the 'thing' they would eventually make. Instead, her teaching supported students' sense of attentiveness to patterns or insights, which were viewable with the notebook as a record of their previous attentiveness and curiosity. In her instruction, she used her writing life as an example; she shared that she had been thinking about one of her teachers in India that summer who said he would go into new spaces, new experiences and "feel the energies". She said she heard this person's voice as she looked back in her notebook, since this felt like entering a new space and a new experience. Casey invited students to enter their notebooks as spaces where they could first just "feel the energies". In her instruction, she explained it would be helpful to both "be open to what your past-self had to say but also notice what your present-self is feeling". The co-consideration of past and present became a way to notice layers of (sometimes inharmonious) affective responses (Ahmed, 2010). After stepping aside so students had time to explore their notebooks and notice what was already there, she talked about how, as writers, the next step would also be about noticing "what idea you might like to follow".

Here students were invited into a way of conceptualising and experiencing writing that did not prioritise a product or impose a mechanistic, linear and exclusively rational process. In addition to encouraging students to work with one another, Casey also positioned the notebook as an active more-than-human collaborator, advising them to not just reread

what they had written but also listen to their notebooks' voices, which might sound different from their own. Maple, a year 11 student, explained her process one day as "just sitting with" her notebook, writing and "being ready to see what happens", suggesting she saw herself as being in collaboration with, not pursuit of, the ideas she would write about. Maple's understanding of "feeling the energies" with the notebook was about openness rather than seeking something specific. "Doing this helps me to listen to my notebook in a more authentic way, like, not just listening for something in particular and tuning everything else out. Really listening to everything possible that could be coming through."

*Following energies with notebooks.* Early in the year, notebooks were characterised as tools that writers use (Bomer, 2011), and also as lively collaborators that could reveal connections across time and space. Students were not following energies *in* their notebooks but *with* their notebooks, demonstrating the "ontological being-with materials" that inspire us to consider all that is physically present and the 'enmeshed relationships' beneath the surface (Sheridan, Lemieux, Do Nascimento, and Arnseth, 2020, p. 1285, drawing from Tsing, 2015). In addition to recognising the agentic capabilities of the notebook and other materials, she and Maple also separately gestured towards the understood agency of ideas. This was reminiscent of Mika's (2017) reminder in his work on worlding and presence, that in Indigenous thought, the idea itself is a 'material entity' (p. 2) that might decide to stop or continue revealing itself at any moment.

Conceptualising writing as following energies served to invite and cultivate the response-able pedagogical practices of attentiveness and curiosity. Paying careful and caring attention was part of Casey's approach, making space for students' differing notebooking activities rather than requiring a single process. By resisting models of writing in which students all write the same kind of thing, or different things through a standardised process, Casey was able to honour curiosity in her practice and leave space for the unexpected. This approach also supported students in deeper development of attentiveness and curiosity, encouraging them to look with sensitivity and notice possible spaces for their curiosity to draw them. Because no teacher-mandated product loomed on the horizon, students were not deputised to form a piece of writing as the sole decision-makers and only agentic participants. Instead, they could participate in writing as an expression of "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (Barad, 2007, p. 33), an intra-active becoming-with in a writer-materials-ideas-writing assemblage.

## Writing as making

Another significant thread in the response-able pedagogy of writing-as-becoming was positioning the activities of writing foundationally as *making*. In the CW class, students were encouraged to learn from and with all kinds of makers, defined broadly as anyone who makes anything through any process. For an inquiry project, all students chose a maker, interviewed and learned from them, and then presented to the class about that maker's processes, expanding the possibilities available for anyone to connect with. The conversation about (other kinds of) making stretched ideas about writing-as-making as potentially affectively informed. Casey asked if making was always a rational, logical activity, to which the class responded with a chorus of nos. Paloma, an 11th grader, spoke up, "Not at all. If you are making something, you have a connection with it, it doesn't have to be a conscious thing."

While Casey, as a more experienced writer, offered insights from her own processes, this move to expand conceptions of maker and making served meaningfully to decentre some of the authority of her position, thus rendering students capable of discerning learning that was meaningful to them, and rendering other makers capable of supporting the learning of writers. For some students, the possibility to align themselves with any maker became an invitation to think broadly about materials, a zone of connection across difference and a way to blur the boundaries between in- and out-of-school life. One student interviewed her mother, a symphony musician whom she had never thought of as a 'maker' before but said she did now. Zack learned about a musician as well, a fellow 11th grade student who 'makes beats' and had just amassed "over 20k views". "I learned a lot of really unexpected things", he said. "He doesn't just sit down and start to make beats, that's the tip of the iceberg. Like, he hears beats all around him all the time. He's always making them, finding pieces to use during the whole day." Casey posed a question about writers, and words and language as some of our materials. Zack said, "words are around us all the time, too. Like beats are to him."

Charlie, a 12th-grader, presented about his 5-year-old brother, who spent hours building and making things with Lego. Charlie was fascinated by his brother, who did not follow directions or plans like he did when he was younger. Charlie wanted to understand his brother's 'inspiration' and how he decided about the ongoing modifications of his designs. In Charlie's interview, he asked his brother questions in "two-minute sessions" ("he's only five") while sitting alongside him as he built and translated the explanations for his classmates ("we speak Russian at home"). Charlie said he found it interesting how his

brother resisted some of his questions, like how he chose what pieces to use: "I'm not choosing", he said. "I'm just doing."

Ellie, also in 12th grade, knew right away she wanted to interview her "80-something-year-old" neighbour Grace, who made ceramics in a garage studio. Ellie crafted questions that reflected an expanding sense of agency as distributed across an assemblage and a sensitivity towards the affective experience of making things with clay. For example, she asked, "How did you get pulled toward ceramics?" and, "How does it feel when you are making something?" Ellie learned that her neighbour, who started making ceramics after retiring from a long career in law, wanted to make things that helped her "see the world with fresh eyes and were not about words at all".

*Listening and making-with (material) others.* In this exploration of writing as making and making as becoming, in addition to rendering others capable as makers and learners, students were invited to consider how making can include "listening to the materials" (Keune and Peppler, 2019, p. 292). Listening to others, material and nonmaterial, is an expression of the response-able pedagogical practice of curiosity (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017). Conversations about the making-with material others, like Lego and clay, facilitated conversations about writing as also making-with words as discursive materials, and with physical materials like notebooks, pens, felt markers, magazine cuttings, drawings. When we act from a place of curiosity, we let other entities with whom we are in relation participate meaningfully, intra-actively shaping what unfolds (Barad, 2007). Alongside Casey approaching this project with curiosity and openness, students like Ellie embraced curiosity in their learning with other makers, like Grace the ceramicist. The makers themselves and their varied materials were welcome to shape students' learning in unexpected ways.

Positioning writing as (also) making supported new ways for students to talk about the things they made and their processes, processes that included materials, histories and feelings. While the basis of the maker-inquiry project was human-centred at its foundation, the processes of making that were described brought in elements of the more-than-human world – they were affectively informed and delightfully varied, inviting students to appreciate some of the various ways *things* come into being (Stewart, 2014, p. 119), like Lego creations, ceramics, beats and symphonies. Encouraging attunement to thing-making-with-others supported students to consider how they might responsibly enact their entanglements. For students like Charlie, participating in the project required a sense of responsibility as well. The ways in which he chose

to engage with his younger brother showed an understanding of the context and relationships, asking his brother questions in short sessions in their home language while being present as part of the child-material-ideas assemblage he was learning with.

### *Writing as producing/traversing boundaries*

The final concept-thread of writing-as-becoming pedagogy I explore is the positioning and exploration of writing as a process of producing and traversing boundaries. In the later part of the school year, the class participated in a project that engaged these ideas explicitly. In the first (shorter) phase, students reflected on their writing lives and produced visual

representations of their 'writing territories'. Writers worked with one another and a variety of materials (like felts, string and ribbon, photographs and sketches, collaged images) to produce maps or other representations of their writing 'worlds' as they currently existed. The process was similar to that explained in the first section, cultivating attentiveness to energies, except now students noticed patterns of energies over time, and the shapes and relationships of those patterns. In their representations of writing territories, many students also imagined what lay beyond the borders.

For example, when Aster made her map (Figure 1), she mostly saw what was beyond the territories she had noticed in her writing. She imagined the many fears that kept her from exploring further as waves on a stormy sea. She explained that the topographic

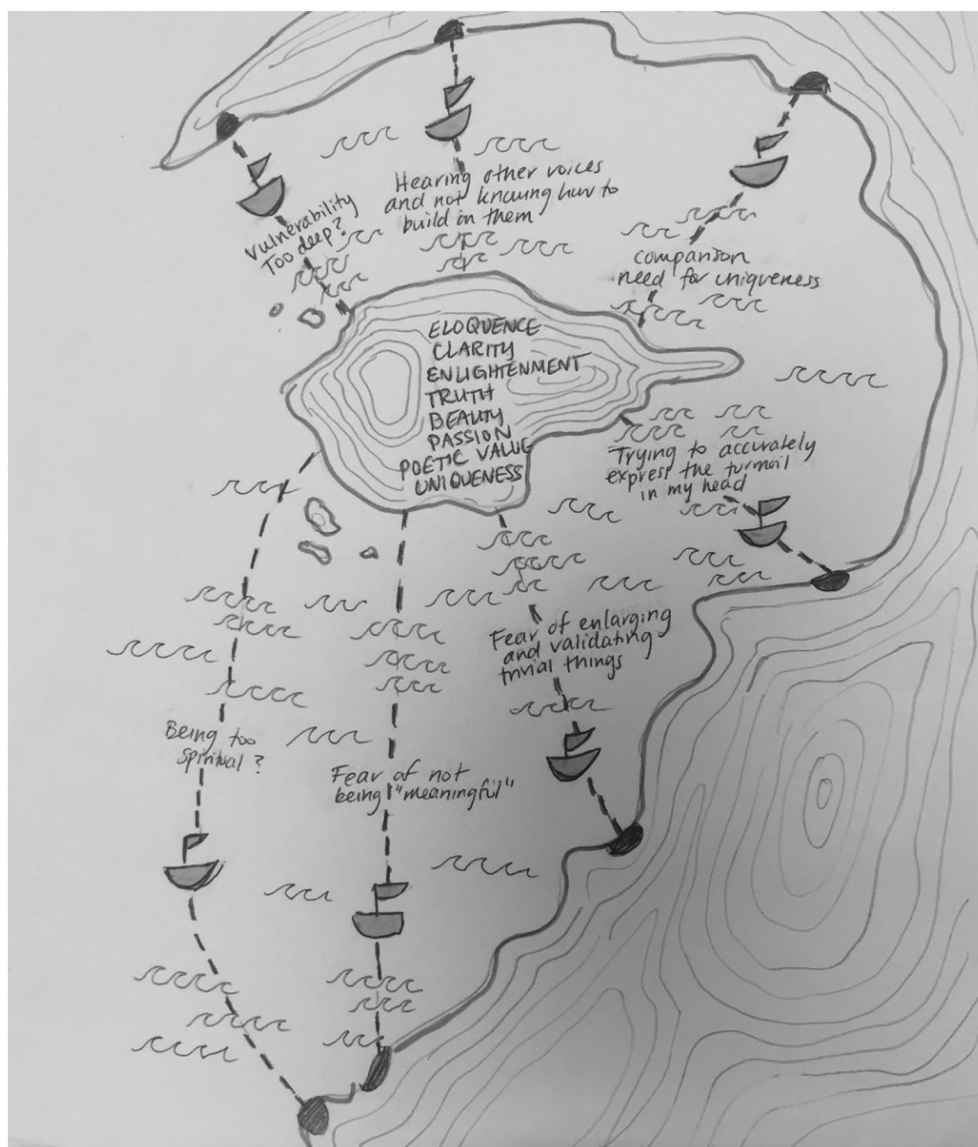


Figure 1: Student writing territory map

lines showed the terrain she was coming from, and heading towards, was uneven and steep. The island of attributes she hoped her writing would move towards was purposefully “not that far away” from familiar shores, and had many boats sailing towards many different points of access. There is more than one route, she explained.

After noticing and representing patterns in their writing lives, in the second (longer) phase of the project students were expected to expand their writing beyond one of the boundaries they had recognised. Rendered capable of “responding to what matters” (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 69), writers made their own choices about which boundaries to discuss and extend, thus determining their own degree of comfort and vulnerability. Students chose to extend boundaries related to repeated topics, length or form, genre, style and other aspects of their writing. For example, one student realised that she had been avoiding writing about her spirituality but wanted to press that boundary and “let myself put into words what my beliefs are, how I feel about God, and my faith”. Another student said “I challenged myself to write for an hour about one tree branch, connecting and squeezing everything I could out of attention to one simple thing.” Moving through this boundary was only possible through connection with – collaboration with – a material other he may have otherwise overlooked.

Casey taught from noticings about her own boundaries, starting with her notebook, which she showed the class. She said, “I’ve noticed there are things I write about in here that I don’t let out of this bounded space, and there are things I think about but do not let into it.” She said that she had been wanting to use her writing voice to be more politically engaged, in ways that she only now felt ready to try. She said she had been thinking a lot about violence and nonviolence, but did not elaborate. “Honestly”, she said, “my thoughts are still pretty swirly right now. But I think that’s okay.” Later, she reminded the group that the purpose of this writing project was to press on boundaries, but suggested they think about doing so in a ‘rubber-bandish’ way: not necessarily making a sharp turn from what they know and who they are, but aiming for growth that is ‘not painful’. Before the class ended, a student remarked, “this is making me realise everything has boundaries.” Another added, “and that boundaries aren’t permanent”. This brief collective insight about the shifting nature of boundaries and borders reflects a significant understanding about the relational nature of connections between/across entities.

*Boundaries and responsibility.* Considering writing as a process through which we (re)produce boundaries in our thinking, experiences and expressions was newly unfolding for Casey. She was not directing students

through a predictable exercise; in line with the practice of rendering others capable of responding to what matters, this project was “a collective process of potentiality and becoming” (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 69). The process of mapping can operate in many different forms, and mapping has been used in pedagogical encounters for a variety of purposes (e.g., Lemieux, Smith, McLean, and Rowsell, 2020). Here, though, before they were even created, the maps were instilled with dynamic energy and impermanence, with representations held still just long enough to be expanded. Writing tendencies were deterritorialised and reterritorialised at once, a re-inscribing of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of becoming.

As an element of writing-as-becoming, positioning writing as a means by which boundaries are produced and potentially shifted evokes a connection with the ethico-political practice of responsibility (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017). In a response-able pedagogy, “responsibility begins from the acknowledgement that we are all part of the world, and that we cannot distance ourselves from it” (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017, p. 68). Even in her ‘swirly’ modelling of this practice, it was a means by which Casey recognised that her own writing life could be, and perhaps should be, more politically engaged.

## Vitality and moving beyond writing-as-process

By practising the ethico-political enactments that Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) described – attentiveness, curiosity, responsibility and being rendered capable – Casey facilitated literacy learning that created space for the energy, the electricity, to flow among all members of the classroom assemblage. This ‘energised flow’ is akin to Boldt’s (2021) theorisation of vitality, which “brings classrooms to life [and] empowers the potential for learning” (p. 210). Like what Jackson (2010) called the ‘tiny explosions’ (p. 583) created by the connections of a becoming, experiences of vitality or ‘electricity’ might exceed linguistic description, making (re)presenting them a challenge. In the CW class, after sharing their boundary-pushing work, Maple said, “I feel so ... I don’t know ... understood? I just want to keep doing this.” Later, Casey said it was the pauses in Maple’s statement that had stayed with her; Casey said she did not ‘have the words’ for what happened either. Words may never be able to fully represent the tiny explosions, the vitality or the ‘electricity’ of being in relation in/through writing.

The pedagogy of writing-as-becoming emerged through exploring questions about enacting response-able pedagogies in a writing class, and

through following possibilities that surfaced when the experience of becoming was valued beyond production and achievement. Response-able pedagogies like this one shift the teaching emphasis from controlled outcomes to the affective experience of being-with, connecting with human and more-than-human others in and through writing. Positioning the activity of writing as a 'becoming' defers the certainty of knowing, indefinitely. It dissolves the illusion of control over students and other actors, and commits instead to being with them in the unpredictability of an ever-unfolding present. Writing-as-becoming also makes space to consider and honour the human and more-than-human others who are alongside us, actively contributing to what these moments and experiences produce.

This conceptualisation of writing could be unnerving for teachers, who have often been socialised and even directly instructed to use writing as a means by which to produce control. For Casey, despite teaching at a magnet school with academically high-achieving students, the institutional pressure was immense to make her class 'rigorous' and to keep students 'in line' through more traditional activities. The 'electricity', the feeling of being "in it together", came from resisting that pressure and looking instead to enact attentiveness, curiosity, responsibility and render others capable. After expanding her understanding of violence to include the effects of some of the structures she participated in maintaining, Casey was ready to see her teaching as an ethico-political practice. The response-able pedagogy of writing-as-becoming produced moments of harmony between her shifting beliefs and her teaching, while also maintaining space for her continuing growth as a teacher and writer.

While it focused on one class context, I hope this analysis serves as a humble recognition of the complex and brilliant potentialities of all classroom assemblages. Now, in the shadow of the upheaval of a global pandemic, we might be more attentive than ever to the relations that connect us across great distances, and the vitality and possibility of being present together. There are important considerations here about teacher learning as well. Casey's ongoing professional development and other learning did not lead to certainty or rigorous and duplicatable instructional activities. Instead, it facilitated approaching her teaching with an appreciation of rhizomatic possibilities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and more tolerance for uncertainty.

As this study shows, there is possibility in reconsidering our commitment to teaching writing as (only) a process and to (also) imagine it as a means by which students can experience the electricity and joy of being present and in-relation with others. If we are going to make space for change, for new pathways in literacy research and teaching (Ehret and Rowsell,

2021), we must loosen our collective grasp on what we think we know, including our attachment to the structures, purposes and contexts of sociocultural frameworks. While existing process-focused writing models can be expressions of student-centred and thoughtfully critical pedagogies, the response-able pedagogy of writing-as-becoming shifts our gaze somewhere new, towards the continually unfolding potential of honouring our connections with each other.

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