

Hand-I Coordination: Interpreting Student Writings and Drawings as Expressions of Identity

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In schools where curricular constraints and testing pressures narrow the ways in which students can take up identities as writers, longterm enrichment programs offer opportunities for the meaningful design of compositions. This paper, which presents the work of four elementary student participants in a writing workshop, shows how qualitative inquiry--in particular critical multimodal analysis--can enable a teacher researcher to see, interpret, and explain what might be going on in the writings and drawings of students, and how these illuminations help establish and expand the identities of students as writers. I focus especially on the work of one student over three years, and share the methodological procedures I drew upon in order to generate claims about his writing identity. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Teacher Research, literacy, Identity, Arts Enrichment, New Literacy, Multimodal Analysis

From 2005 to 2008, I taught an enrichment writing program in an urban public school in the Midwest United States. Students in primary grades two, three, and four came to a designated room once a week in order to read, talk, think, play, and write. Over that time, in my role as a teacher researcher, I interpreted what they put on paper across multiple dimensions. Viewing writing as an embodied act of personal expression for my students, particularly since their regular classroom curriculum and experience was constrained by the effects of high-pressure measurement and high-stakes testing prevalent in U.S. public schools at this time, I was interested in drawing upon the tools and methods of qualitative inquiry in order to understand and interpret the nature of their writing experience holistically. Specifically, I adopted the stance of the educational connoisseur and critic described by Eisner (1998), and understood my analytic task to be one that took up a particular heuristic for regarding compositions, and then interpreting and explaining what I saw (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001) with respect to expression of identity/ies. In situ, therefore, I noticed the way students sat, held their pencils, treated their paper, and positioned their bodies in relation to their desks and paper (closed, open, clenched, intense, relaxed). I paid attention to their gaze, the pace of their writing, their apparent degree of concentration, the general feeling (or affect) in which they wrote what they wrote (Norris, 2004). What might these behaviors and habits have to with their identities as writers, as students, as people with something to say? How did the workshop environment we co-constructed contribute to development of my students as writers?

Post facto, after collecting papers and projects week after week, I read the words and tried to understand what they meant. Content analysis came first: What were my students saying? But apart from this basic act of linguistic meaning-making and interpreting on my part, I undertook a form of critical multimodal analysis in order to attend to the qualities of the marks they had made across different expressive variables or modes (Bortoluzzi, 2009; Wohlwend, 2011). Like an art critic, I observed the density of the lines, the seeming urgency

of the movement across the page, the colors chosen for illustration. Was the writing cursive or print, and what might that mean? How much text was generated? What was the meaning of the page design? In the sense of wanting to open up possibilities of meaningmaking, of unfixing the seemingly rigid forms of writing and writerliness available to my students outside of the workshop, I was engaging in this process from a critical stance. Because I am a writing teacher deeply engaged by the scholarship around semiotics, multimodal discourse, and New Literacies, I apply a wide-angle interpretive lens to the qualitative analysis of handmade texts in order to make the most of them, so to speak; that is to say, in order to more fully consider these texts as artifacts designed by complex, socially situated people who happen to be young students. (Gee, 1996; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Norris, 2004; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001; Wohlwend, 2011). The texts I take up in this paper were made in a particular context, a socially situated place for literacy learning characterized by a culture which I aimed to understand and interpret ethnographically (Goffman, 1964; Heath & Street, 2008; Rogers, 2003). In order to suggest some of the rich and meaningful ways in-service teachers and literacy enrichment specialists can orient their assessment of student work, this paper shares interpretations of select texts I analyzed as part of a larger longitudinal study of the writing workshop as a whole (Schaenen, 2010). Today, as a university-based teacher educator, I find that a more flexible, responsive, multimodally sensitive approach to writing assessment liberates and benefits teachers and students alike, and ultimately leads to more accomplished levels of performance in print.

An "At-Risk" Third Grader's Text

Mohammed was a bright third grader. He was orally quick, and astute about the relationship between African American English and Mainstream American English. He was able to shift dialects as he pleased and did so with humor. With respect to handwriting and composition, however, Mohammed was far behind his classmates. Although he liked to draw, he seldom wrote more than a phrase or two on his paper. If I crouched down, spent minutes drawing him out, and offered to take dictation, Mohammed might tell a story. If I interviewed him on tape he would talk. But the light in his eyes came and went. Mohammed was frequently sullen. His clothes were often unwashed or torn; he seemed to be shunned by his peers, and only felt comfortable at home among family. By the spring, Mohammed had received two in-school suspensions and one out-of-school suspension.¹ His standardized tests measured him at least two years below grade level. I could tell that he had settled on a numb, affectless demeanor to get him through his day; Mohammed seemed to me to be a hair's breadth away from throwing in his lot with those who have been given up on. In September, Mohammed had told me that he was proud of "nothing," and that "books are boring." But on January 16 he wrote about going out for pizza with his family. And a week later, Mohammed wrote more than he ever had before. We were working in the genre of biography, and I had passed out information cards of great African Americans. Mohammed picked Richard Wright. But he did not simply copy the information on the card; he integrated the words that he found into a letter to his mother, then added a few thoughts of his own for good measure:

¹ He had slapped a girl in retaliation for her touching his face. He fought a boy in music class. He disrupted his regular classroom by calling everyone "crackheads."

Dear Mom Richard was born on a Mississippi plantation. Richard Wrigh was the son of a farmworker, And he was born on 1908. And I am [he spelled out his own full name] and I am in Room for Wrigh. and this is Ms. Schaenen class. She helps me with my wrigh. from your son [he spelled his full name]²

Mohammed used the published text to scaffold his own composition and render it meaningful for his own discursive purpose: writing a letter to his mother. He begins with sentences and facts from the card I passed out, but then the new text moves away from the old. Mohammed used the spelling of Richard Wright's last name to suggest the word "write." And with declarative dignity he asserts who he is, where he is, and what I do with him in what context. He signs off with equal formality. Below the signature he drew a picture of Richard Wright. I have no doubt that the opportunity to copy was at the root of Mohammed's successful performance that day. And when he was finished, Mohammed felt so proud of what he had done that he asked me to make a copy of his paper so he could take it home to give his mother. Which I did. A year later, as the program drew to a close, Mohammed wrote the longest paragraph he had since I had known him, all in his own, heavy-lined print:

I used to speak ebonics wen I was in frist grade. Wen I got home I would speak Standard english. So I was cod swiching. Wen I was six I got into a lot of fights. I am different form five year ago because I don't get into as many fights. I like to play football an eat shrimp.

From the first moment I knew him, Mohammed's intelligence and aptitude were obvious to me. In contradiction to everything formal schooling "said" about him, Mohammed's mind was lively, responsive, and retentive, and this final piece of writing told me so.

Writing in Different Genres

Mindful of the need for my students to practice writing in multiple forms and for multiple audiences (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, 2000), I initiated a unit on the crafting of legal arguments. One memorable set of fourth grade debates turned into a kind of legal hearing, with me playing the role of judge. Some of the boys argued over which were the better types of sneakers. Others made cases for bicycles with no brakes versus those with brakes. Because the students had chosen their own topics, I often found myself knowing next to nothing about the case; my prior knowledge was sketchy and minimal. This left me, as a judge, with a mind open to the arguments. Angel and Cheryl wrote on behalf of certain hair styles. By Angel:

Curls are better than flatiron because when flatiron gets wet they fall but when curls get wet sometimes when curls get wet they fall but it's much easier to put them back up. Also curls are really useful for when your trying to look perfect and flat-iron is very semple so they don't really shine. Also some people hair is not very long and flat-iron looks better with people who has long hair but curls you could just curl the bottom and they look very pretty. So judge that's why I think curls are better than flat iron.

² The text as written can be seen in Appendix A.

As evident in Appendix B, Angel began her composition using cursive for the first four lines, then apparently found it easier to express her ideas into print. It is also evident that Angel is using the opportunity to write as an opportunity to *think*. In the first sentence, she begins to write an absolute statement about curls before evidently realizing that there are exceptions to this generalization and she must make discursive room for the exceptions ("when curls get wet sometimes when curls get wet . . ."). Interestingly, the very moment she amends her absolute stance is also the moment when she switches from cursive to print. Her hand seems to be responding to the flow of the moment: as the idea sorts itself out in her mind, her hand accommodates the onrush of thought by getting the words written in the swiftest way she can. The only two African American English features in this text occur toward the end ('some people hair' show the absence of possessive *-s*; and "people who has long hair" show a generalizing of the verb to *has* from *have*). My sense is that because Angel is thinking intently about supporting her argument, the inner pressure to write in Standard English eases. What this writing shows me is that Angel acted upon an authentic sense of expressive purpose within the genre. She has privileged the making of an argument over (in this case) less important matters of orthography and dialect.

Meanwhile, Cheryl argued the other side of the case:

Flatirons are better than curls because they last longer. Also you can do many hairstyles with them. Then you can put all kinds of head bands in your hair but with curls they would get messed up at the top of your head. When it rains and you get caught outside flat-irons don't fall they just stay the way they is but curls would fall and get ragidy [raggedy].

While it is not strictly the voice of a legal document, I do admire Cheryl's charming use of the second person as a subject. The *you* managing her hair in this composition is a person the reader can easily picture. The images of this person putting in "all kinds of head bands" and getting caught in the rain are interesting and well-rendered. The image of fallen wet curls going raggedy is poetic. The only African American English feature is Cheryl's generalization of *is* with the third person plural subject *they* ("they just stay the way they is . . .") This says to me that, like Angel, Cheryl was at that moment writing for the overriding purpose of expressing her ideas; the ideas came first, the schoolishness of the performance was secondary. It happened not to matter to see these arguments made in Mainstream American English (composing an argument to use in a debate can happen in any dialect or language); but if it had, I might have asked her to shift the feature to MAE upon revision because of the institutional expectations of a particular context in which she would be presenting her argument, namely a court of law.

Interpreting Student Writing/Drawing Across Years

Now I will present an overview of a single student's work across the three years he participated in my program (see Appendix C). My procedures for approaching this extraordinarily large amount of data were as follows. First, I listened several times to the audiotape of my conversation with Kayode in July 2009, a conversation we had as he himself reviewed all of the compositions he made during the three years in the workshop. I transcribed

what seemed to me to be the most telling exchanges, when Kayode was commenting on a piece of writing, or recalling a feeling or experience he had that struck me as contextually relevant. Next I reviewed my fieldnotes and journals over three years. I noted interesting remarks, comments, or questions, culling data about about Kayode specifically. Next I reviewed the scanty but interesting "official" documents I had on Kayode: his school progress report from third grade and a few of his standardized test results. I laid out all the photographs I had of him, alone and with his classmates, to refresh my memory of how he looked in the room, how and where he put himself, the expression on his face through the years. And finally, using two very large tables, I laid out the entire contents of his writing folders from second, third, and fourth grades. In a row from left to right, and in chronological order, I laid out every page he produced in 2005-2006. Under that, I laid the work from 2006-2007; and below that I spread the work from 2007-2008. In this way I could see the sweep of his progress week to week for three years. I could compare something he wrote in November 2006 with something right below that he had produced exactly one year later. As described in the introduction above, I attended to content, page design and layout, use of illustrations, handwriting, length of response, and the feelings and attitude evident (or missing) in the response. During every one of these steps, I made analytic notes and observations. Three themes were most salient in Kayode's work: pride in and affection for his family and personal culture; an awareness of and responsiveness to ideas about God; and his own identity as a responsible and cooperative student and member of the workshop's community of practice. I will discuss these themes one by one.

Pride in Family/Culture

Of the 26 writing samples in Kayode's second-grade folder, eight of them feature an aspect of his family, his home life, or his relationship with his family members individually or collectively. He writes about how much he loves going to work with his grandmother at Burlington Coat Factory. He writes about going swimming with his family during the summertime. He writes about going trick-or-treating with his family, and about a special couch his family bought. When assembling randomly selected words into a sentence (a game I developed out of magnetic words) Kayode managed to work "support" and "coffee" into a sentence that featured his grandpa supporting Kayode's mother in her attempt to quit drinking too much coffee. In another activity, I introduced the idea of an "identity molecule," a concept map that shows how different aspects of who we are relate to each other. At the very heart of Kayode's identity molecule, he wrote out the social roles most important to him: grandson, friend, son, student, brother. In completing his Lifeline, among items like "learned to ride bike" and "learned to swim. very good swimmer" he made a note of the year his parents divorced (when he was two years old) and the year his father went to jail (when he was four).

Kayode wrote 16 papers in third grade (much of the work that year was collaborative, oral, on the chalkboard, or done in small groups). Of these texts, five of them feature experiences or thoughts about family. On his first day with me that year, he wrote, "One thing that makes me angry is when my uncle and mom won't let me ride my bike on a great day . . ." On another day, he mentioned in a letter to a former principal that back at his house, "ever one" [everyone] wanted to see the video made of a dance performance he had participated in. "I want them to see all of us do it," he wrote. Later that fall, the class was looking at photographs that a classmate brought from home. In writing about these pictures, Kayode

wrote that his classmate, when she was a baby, looked like his own baby brother. In January, after discussing the genre of biography, Kayode wrote that his hero was his grandma. And toward the end of that year, Kayode wrote a small but touching paragraph that he titled, "I Remember."

I remember when I was three we was living in a apartment and my mom would be in the restroom. And we all came in and, my mom set us in a dry tub and, I would stand at the door and, read a small book I found.

The

End

This example brings together Kayode's fond feelings about the care he received from his mother, and how that care is bound up with a literacy event. It is interesting to me to see that AAE feature in his writing ("we was living. . .") because in general, although his spoken language featured many of the phonological and some of the syntactic features of AAE, Kayode wrote nearly everything in MAE. I believe that the shift happened on account of the content of the writing: such a cozy, homey memory may have called upon Kayode's more comfortable form of English. In July 2009, when Kayode read this sample aloud in livingroom, his mother chuckled at the memory. She well remembered her need to keep her children safe while she took a few necessary moments for herself. She also said that the only reason Kayode knew this story was because she used to tell him about setting him in the laundry basket. In fact, what Kayode had called his memory of the experience was actually his memory of a story his mother used to tell him about the experience. He was recording in writing an important piece of family oral history.

In fourth grade, nearly half of everything Kayode wrote (10 of the 21 texts in his folder) included something about his family. He wrote out an argument with his mother regarding how she ought to let him go by himself to meet his friends. He wrote a piece of fiction about an uncle who liked drag racing. He wrote an angry jeremiad about the needless shooting of his cousin. He designed an advertisement for a Soul Food Seasoning Store that happened to be located at his family's address (see Appendix D). He wrote biographies of his two grandmothers. Other writing mentioned how he had felt homesick at camp (but only at first); how comfortable he felt at church with his grandma and at home with his family. On other occasions he wrote about taking a trip over spring break with his family, how good it feels to speak Ebonics, and how his family can sometimes be embarrassing.

Meaningful Relationship with God and Church

Week in and week out for three years, the depth of Kayode's affection for his family came through in his writing. Entwined in these feelings were his feelings about God and going to church, both of which were clearly associated with family. In second grade Kayode dictated to me a lengthy letter to God. After I printed this letter out I gave the copy to Kayode. In pencil, he then handwrote a few more lines on the bottom of the page:

I Love. you god
and I wish when I die that
I will become a angel.

He surrounded the entire text (printed and written) with a heart. He also drew a cross: interlocking planks of wood, complete with two nails poking up at each of the four ends of the planks. He colored in the cross with purple crayon. For nearly three and a half years, this piece of paper lay in a folder. In July 2009, Kayode looked it over for the first time since second grade.

"When you said we was writing these to Jesus I thought you was going to send it to him."

"I didn't really know how to do that," I said. "What should I have done?"

"You should have tied them to a balloon."

"Oh," I said, "yeah."

Then he unfolded a large, 12-inch by 15-inch letter to Jesus for which he had used pencil, black marker, and red marker. On the front, in a symmetrical pattern, he had written the word "god" ten times. At the top he wrote "Jesus" in bubble letters. At the center of the page he made a huge solid red heart with a navy blue core. In the center of the blue core he wrote "god." Under that, he wrote "Love me!!!!!!" I am not sure whether he meant these words as a sign-off—"Love, me"—or as an imperative, a command to God: "Love me!" The entire page has a border, and each of the "gods" in the top corners are inside clouds. On the back of the page, Kayode wrote: "to: Jesus" and "from: Kayode." Kayode admired this work, which like the other letter, he had expected me to send.

Kayode's third grade written work made no mention of God. In fourth grade, however, God came back. One day in early October, Kayode was not feeling too well. He had a stomach ache and felt sleepy. We began the class by talking about the herbs and vegetables I had brought in from my garden. We talked about how fresh herbs looked compared to the dried herbs people shook out of little bottles while cooking. After this I asked the students to put their heads down and close their eyes. I asked them to imagine that they were all sound asleep in their beds, but that in the morning, instead of waking up as themselves, they had turned into their favorite animal. What would they be and what would they do? Kayode wrote this:

When I Wake Up!!!

When I wake up I would rather be god. I would want to be god because when god was born he was the one to be chosen to be the sky god. When he grew up the devil was born and tried to take over. But god didn't let him take over. God didn't let the devil take over because god was trying to keep us safe. And to make sure we would have great lives. Until one day the devil killed most of god people includin his son and him. And now he's in heaven looking over me as I am reading!!!

I read the passage but did not make too much of it. I did not report it in the blog, nor mention it in my field notes. I think I registered that on that day, for whatever reason, Kayode needed to retell a story he had heard in church. He begins by making use of the prompt and seems to get going like his classmates, but by the second clause of the second sentence, his text is

clearly going in an entirely different direction. By the final line, Kayode feels safe and looked over as he's reading (although I wonder why he wrote "reading" and not "writing," which was actually what he was doing).

Much later in the year, Kayode drew upon the language and pragmatics of church rhetoric. At the end of February he wrote a lengthy description of his family. After everyone had written that day, the students took turns reading aloud. Kenneth played emcee, and announced each reader by name. Called to the stage, Kayode put on a big grin and said, "Hello, my fellow worshippers." Then he read his paper. There was nothing particularly worshipful or religious in the text; Kayode was simply playing with the oral genre of the church sermon.

The only other time Kayode wrote explicitly about church was about a week later, in a paper entitled, "My Two Comfortable Places!!!" Kayode had had a rough start to the writing portion of the class, crying about the level of noise and distraction in the room. I invited him to sit at my big desk to write, and imposed a strict silence during the writing time for everyone. He wrote:

I have two comfortable places. One, is a church. Two, is a hotel. The reason I think church is a comfortable place is because my grandma goes with me, there's lot of people and the people in the church are safe. The reason I think a hotel is comfortable place because it has a swimming pool, security, and lot of rooms and workers. I think if you feel comfortable in these two place then you feel comfortable at home with your family.

The End.

From his playful introductory "hello, my fellow worshippers" and this passage written so soon afterwards, I infer that Kayode's experience in church during those weeks of fourth grade were saturated in good feeling.

With respect to expressions of religious faith in public school, I came to be of two minds. As federal policy, I believe in the formal separation of church and state. But in part as a consequence of engaging in fine-grained qualitative analysis, at the interpersonal level where teaching and learning take place, I am less certain. Kayode's writing was private. His God-informed texts were composed wholeheartedly, for himself and sometimes to God directly, presumably through me playing the role of mail carrier. In this case, the no-faith-in-school was a rule that (in my opinion) needed to be broken. Kayode's material as a writer and an individual encompassed his belief. His belief was part of his identity. Given my hybrid role in the school as an enrichment specialist and teacher researcher, I made the decision not to cut my students off from this rich source of ideas and inspiration. Experiences at home, at church, and at hotels, all among family, are those that made Kayode feel both safe and part of a larger social web. There was every reason for a meaningful writing program to make room for these ways of being.

Identity as Good Student and Writer

From his earliest days in the program, Kayode was very much aware of constructing himself as a writer, and an attentive participant in the school community. In second grade, nearly a third of his writing (eight out of 26 texts) contained a reference to or outright

description of his identity as a schooled person and a member of the *Writing to Connect* community of practice. "I never get use to talking," he complained at the bottom of a small paragraph about going to work with his grandma. He wanted me to know that his classmates were distracting him. Actually, this piece of paper also has three torn holes at the bottom, places where Kayode's tears fell and soaked through the paper. "I fill [feel] like I am sad because I cannot concentrate," he wrote in November. On the same day, he took another piece of paper to write, "I am cry because I cannot finish my work." In a journal entry he titled, "The Best Day I Ever Had," he wrote, "When I first came to writeing class an talked about writeing class that was the best day I ever had." Around Christmas, he recalled that a long time ago, when his report card "was good," his family gave him "a special couch." In another assignment, his identity molecule featured bubbles for writer and reader, both of which connected to the center bubble and also to each other. Kayode drew a wide bar between his writer and reader bubbles, filling it in with heavy squiggles which suggested to me his understanding of the solid relationship between reading and writing. Earlier I mentioned Kayode's end-of-second-grade ambition to become a firefighter. The complete paper that taught me this was called, "The reason I want to stay in Writing Class."

Mrs. Schaenen The reason I want to stay in Writing class because I want to learn how to be a writer for when I grow up and will be a firefire[firefighter].

Perhaps the most telling demonstration of Kayode's awareness of his schooled identity, and his ease with the rules and regulations that govern the behaviors expected at school, is a paper he wrote on the final day of second grade titled, "A Few Words of Advice for First Grade."

The things you do in room for writing is write and pay attention to the specker [speaker]. The things you do in the hall way is stay with the teacher and walk. Another thing you do is give respect the teacher. The last thing you do is do what the teacher tell you to do and all ways try on your work.

Apart from what it reveals about what Kayode has absorbed from our routine, this piece of writing shows me that he has also been learning the conventional writing lessons from his regular classroom. He has four points to make, and he uses transition phrases— "another thing" and "the last thing"—to guide the reader along.

In 2006, the principal retired and a new principal took her place. In third grade, Kayode wanted to write the former administrator a letter. He and his class had participated in a cultural enrichment program, and had performed a dance for the whole school (mentioned in the section above with regard to family affection). Now Kayode wanted to obtain the film in order to share this meaningful school experience with his family.

Dear Mrs. Olivieri, I want you to send me the tape of us doing the Nepal dance to my house because ever one want to see it. I still remember the dance but I want them to see all of us do it. Please thank you. Never forget me never forget me never forget me.

Thank you
Love

Kayode
Hubb

Kayode's attachment to his former principal is of course obvious. What I think is most significant here, however, is the desire Kayode clearly expresses to bridge the two worlds so meaningful to him: home and school. "Everybody" at home wants to see the film. Kayode wants them to be able to see the film. He identifies Mrs. Olivieri as the person with power to make this happen, so with *his* communicative power, he appeals to her clearly and directly: "I want you to send me . . .;" and "I want them to see all of us" Kayode has used writing to realize particular goals relating to home and school. A final example from third grade reveals Kayode's ability to re-voice the rules and expectations of school as a predictable environment, where certain things happen in certain ways. In place at school was a daily pre-dismissal practice called "Silent Reading Time." It was my intention, early in the year, to have my students write their own appreciation for books and reading, texts that they might take turns reading aloud on the loudspeaker. Kayode wrote:

The reason I like silent reading time is because doing silent reading time the principal get on the speaker and say the more you read the more you know the more you know the more you grow books can take you anywhere from new york city to county fairs so take a book and take a journey in your mine it's silent reading time. When the principal say that some of the teachers send some of their good students to the office to read with the principal for silent reading time. But before you start you must have a book to read. Having a book to read is the most important thing about silent reading time. Love,

Kayode
Hubb

Kayode has embedded the entire block of the daily announcement into his text. With only a few misconceptions ("mine" for "mind," for example) he transcribed the passage verbatim. What impresses me most about this sample, however, is the way Kayode has varied his sentence structure in the three concluding sentences. He makes use of a dependent clause "when the teacher say that . . .;" a counter . . ., "but before you start . . .;" and using a participial phrase as a subject, "Having a book to read is . . ." As evidenced in this writing sample, Kayode details this extremely prominent feature of the daily life of school with confidence and skill. He is a person who knows about school and can represent its ways.

Such commitment to his student-self continued throughout fourth grade. Six of his 21 writing samples featured Kayode's engagement with school. In "When I am Not in School!!!," written at the beginning of the year, Kayode explains that he is only *not* in school when he is sick, it is the weekend, or it is summer vacation. Kayode could advocate through writing on behalf of his school. In fourth grade, too, Kayode wrote directly to the principal to tell her what he wanted to do when he grew up. His relationships with teachers and administrators were always active, personal, and realized through writing. In February, when asked to imagine that he was 18 years old and could vote, Kayode said that he would vote for Barack Obama because, among other things, Obama "is trying to help the elementary schools in [our city]." And at the very end of year, as I have already mentioned, Kayode wrote that he would be saving money for college. The consistency of Kayode's plan-making, his way of sustaining

those three exclamation marks on every composition throughout all of fourth grade, his persistent way of reminding me to do this or that activity that may have slipped my mind, were all part of his schooled way of being. Planning for his long term educational needs was not lip service; as evidenced in his written work, Kayode's identity as a writer and a student was rooted in his attitude toward school from second through fifth grade.

It is self-evident but perhaps worth stating that the writing and drawing of children, who are at all times developing and changing, will also develop and change over time. Meaningful interpretation of children's texts happens in context, in "a human and material setting" (Goffman, 1964, p. 133). While not all teachers have the opportunity to teach the same set of students many years in a row, it is possible for schools to collect and pass along student portfolios, complete with teachers' interpretive notes, in order to more fully see the qualities of that student's compositions that are changing over time, as well as how those qualities are changing.

General Impressions About Interpretation of Student Compositions

While it is possible to establish particular criteria--content, touch, gaze, positionality, line, color, affect, perspective, and quantity--for interpreting student-made texts and drawings, what this paper has shown is that meaningful interpretation and analysis of texts can also draw upon a deep well of familiarity between teachers and students (or qualitative researchers and participants). The degree of knowledge a teacher feels she or he has about the student's identity, habits, culture, customs, personal history, background, community, institutional context, and other factors directly affects the kinds of interpretations that are possible. Thick description requires contextual connoisseurship (Ball, 1997; Ballenger, 1999; Eisner, 1998; Geertz, 1973; Heath & Street, 2008). Insider knowledge allows interpretation to shift and slide depending on purpose, gelling around what seems to matter most in the interest of the student at this or that moment in time and thus improve the quality of both teaching and learning. In my case, as a teacher interested in the relationship between social justice and multiliteracies in the context of an enrichment writing workshop, I homed in on the textual and performative qualities relating especially to these concerns. Given the effects of familiarity on interpretation, it is imperative that any qualitative researcher (an insider teacher, an outsider researcher) establish the contextual boundaries within which they will be illuminating and interpreting the compositions produced. This is not to say that insiders or researchers who know more will always "get it right." It is simply a call for candor; qualitative researchers who take up student writing and drawing need to be clear about what they do and do not know about the lifeworld of the writer/drawer. There is immense value in longterm interpersonal coordination between writers and readers, when the hands and eyes performing the writing happen to be those of students and the reading "I" happens to be a teacher.

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Author Note

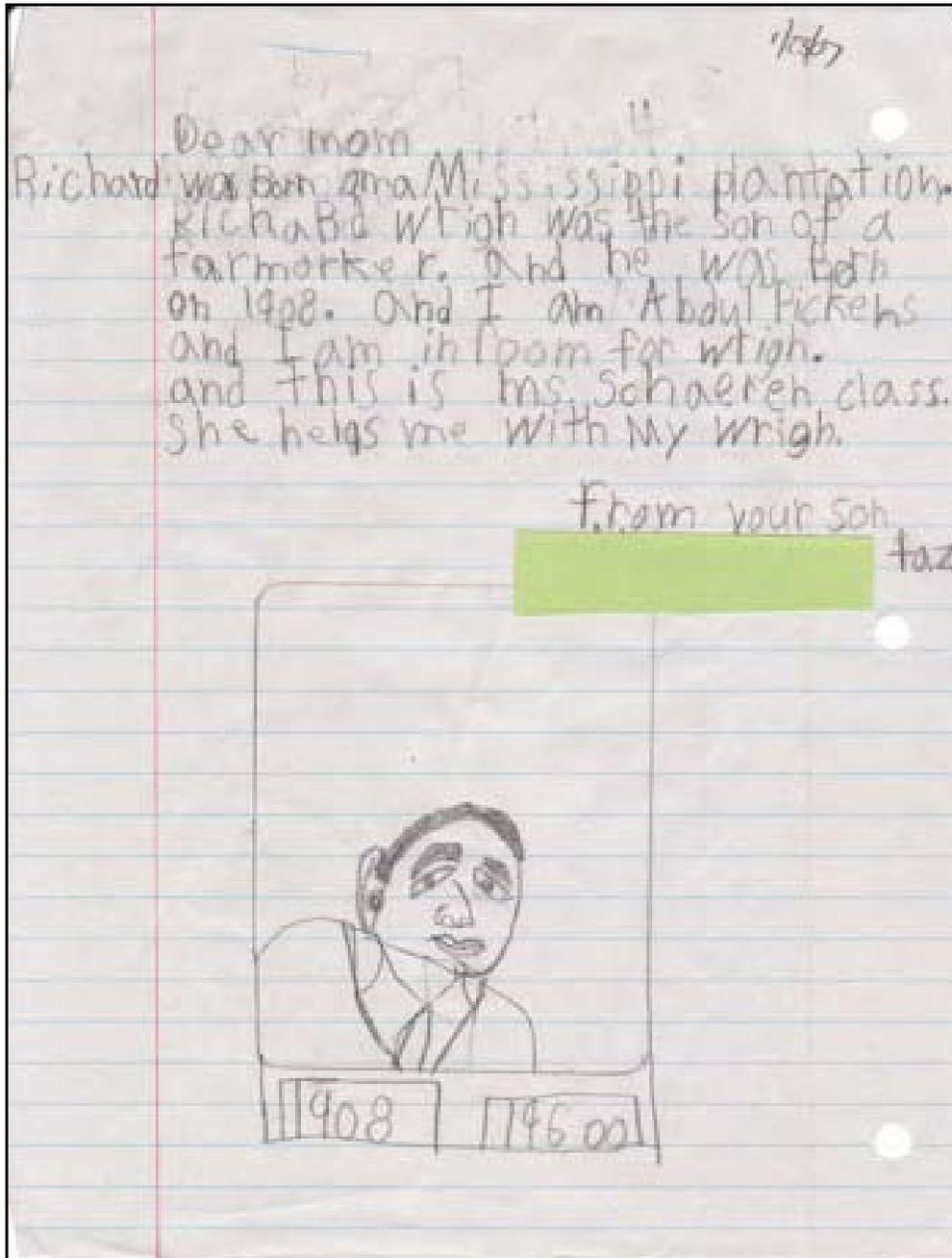
Inda Schaenen, Ph.D., is a St. Louis-based writer and teacher with a special interest in discourse analysis, sociocultural theory, and the design of learning ecologies. An adjunct assistant professor at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, Inda's book, tentatively titled "*I Do Like Zebras*": *Missouri Fourth Graders Talk About School* will be published by The New Press. Inda has published in journals such as *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, the *International Journal of Action Research*, and the *Journal of Research on Character Education*.

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Appendix A

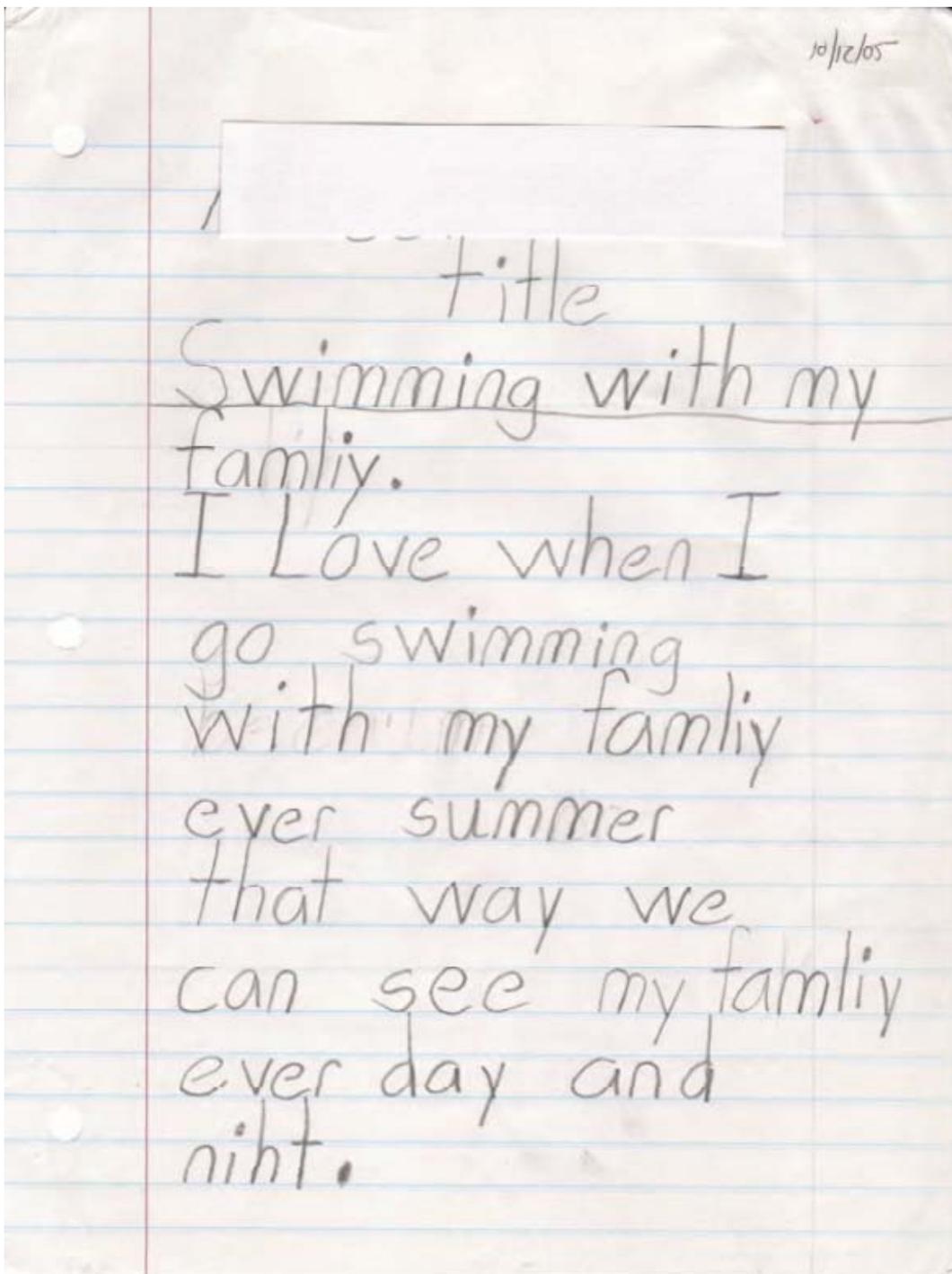


Appendix B

10-24-07
Gundlach school grade 4-201
Curls
Curls are better than flat-iron
because when flat-iron gets wet they
fall but when curls get wet
sometimes when curls get wet
they fall but it's much easier to
put them back up. Also curls are
really useful for when you trying to
look perfect and flat-iron is
very simple so they don't
really shine. Also some people hair
is not very long and flat-iron
looks better with people who has
long hair but curls you could just
cut the bottom and they look
very pretty. So judge that's why
I think curls are better
than flat-iron.

October 24, 2007
Gundlach School
Grade 4-201
Flat-irons
Flat irons are better than curls because they last longer. Also you can do many hairstyles with them. Then you can put all kinds of head bands in your hair but with curls they would get messed up at the top of your head. When it rains and you get caught outside flat irons don't fall they just stay the way they is but curls would fall and get ragdy.

Appendix C



Name - _____

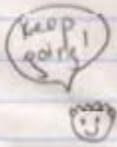
5/3/66

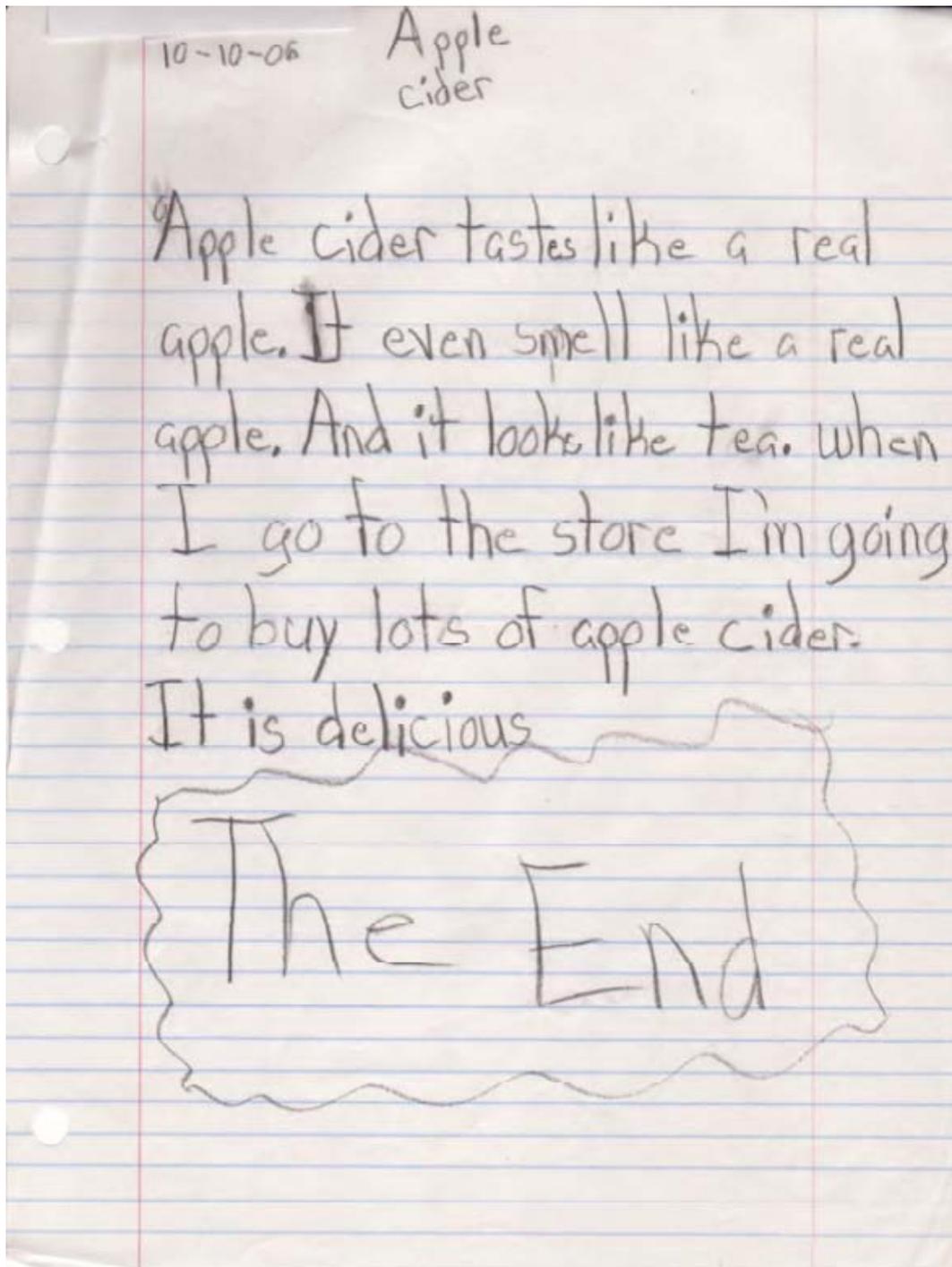
A Few Words of Advice for First Grade.

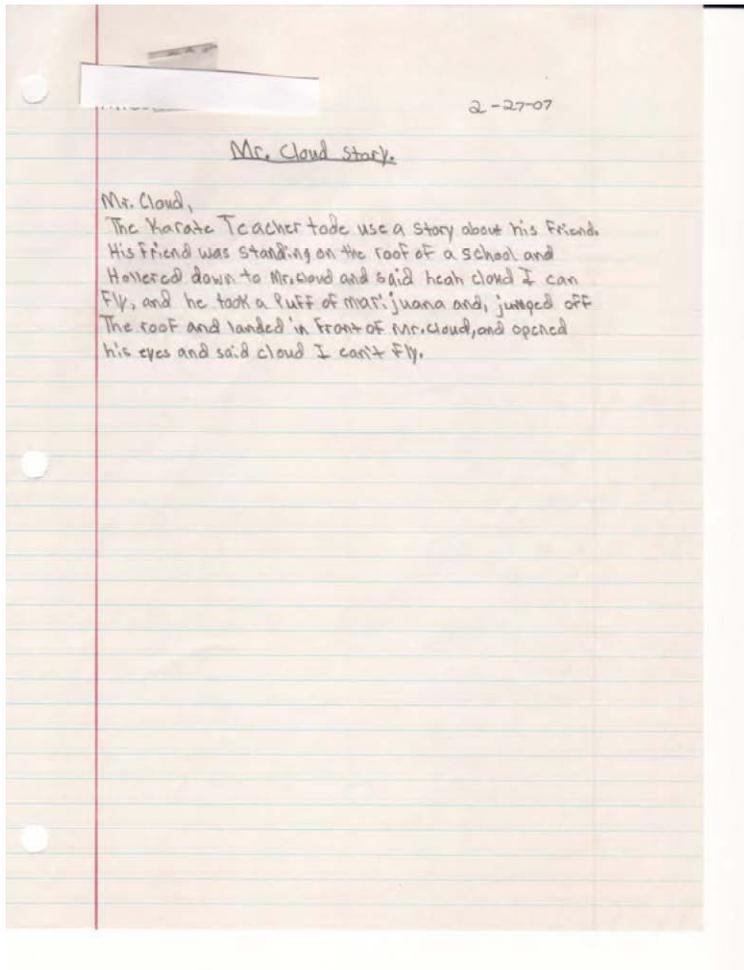
The things you do in room for writing is write and pay attention to the speaker.

The things you do in the hall way is stay with the the teacher and walk.

Another thing you do is give respect the teacher.



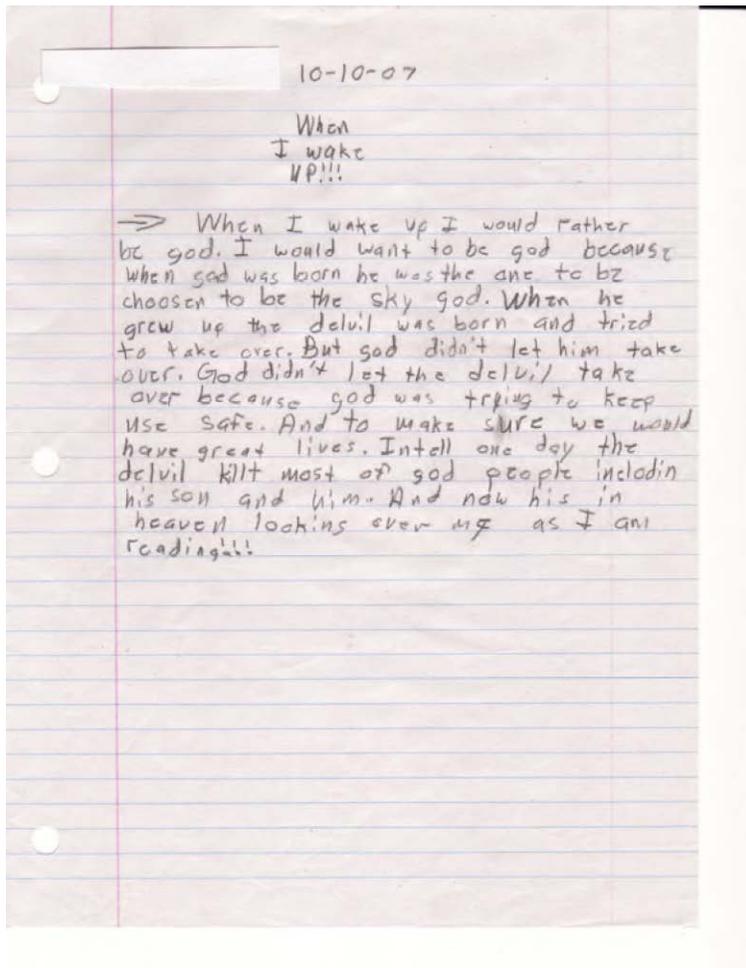




2-27-07

Mr. Cloud story

Mr. Cloud,
The Karate Teacher told us a story about his friend.
His friend was standing on the roof of a school and
hollered down to Mr. Cloud and said hey cloud I can
fly, and he took a puff of marijuana and, jumped off
the roof and landed in front of Mr. Cloud, and opened
his eyes and said cloud I can't fly.



Appendix D

