

## Part II



### Writing Group Two: *Looking Closely at Classroom Practices*





# Sharing Journal Reflections of Inspiration and Remembrance in Holocaust Studies

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My middle school rests in a suburban middle-class Atlanta community. Most students' parents are professionals, and they have high expectations for their children's achievement. Both students and parents value creativity, task completion, and intellectual growth. In the year when I joined the inquiry team for this project, one of my classes—an integrated literacy course—was composed of twenty-one gifted eighth grade students. We met once every day for forty-eight minutes. These students had already attained scores in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile and above on standardized tests in Reading and Language. They were ready for a learning challenge.

Being a nationally trained Holocaust educator, I decided to develop a project to instruct my gifted students on how to enhance basic knowledge of the Holocaust with first-person accounts of local survivors. (See Totten.) This essay revisits the learning processes through which these students and I used an inquiry-based journaling approach to respond to their study of the Holocaust.

My eighth grade students have always done expressive writing assignments. I encourage students to think about their learning experiences and record responses in a reflection log or journal. Before this project, I had always wanted to share my own journal writing and my studies of the Holocaust with students as a means of encouragement and connection to their learning. After all, Moffett advises that collaborative inquiry is active learning: "Witnessing, attuning, imitating, helping, collaborating, and interacting occur so spontaneously, just as part of living, that we seldom think of these six basic learning activities as education. . . . Investigating makes use of all means, from witnessing and experimenting to interviewing other people and researching the symbolized information transmitted from the past" (161).

Several questions guided this classroom project. First, I asked, how can my students and I use journaling to discover our written voices and share attitudes, opinions, and emotions about our learning process? Second, I wondered how first-hand testimonies by Holocaust survivors could enrich knowledge and student engagement with this challenging topic. Also I questioned whether using collaborative reflective writing in the classroom might help us process the challenging material at the heart of Holocaust studies in a productive

way. Reflective writing in journals, we found, was especially productive for our study of the Holocaust—a topic that is personally moving, emotionally intense, and intellectually challenging.

My initial concept for this project came to me after I viewed the iPhoto program at an Apple Computer Store. Originally, I envisioned that the students would interview survivors, listen to first-hand oral testimonies, digitally photograph and video these testimonies, and then publish multimedia-based interview narratives. Their work, I hoped, would be a community-based project involving students, parents, local survivors, and Apple Computer, Inc., the school's Partner in Education. The end product I imagined seemed an especially good way to meet a call from our principal to "incorporate technology into your lessons." However, along the way, the process of doing the research and reflecting on it gradually extended itself to the point where this class did not achieve my original goal for a final publication. But their learning was important and powerful, nonetheless, and it centered in our shared processes of inquiry and reflection.

Just as I was beginning this project, colleagues at the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project were starting to collaborate on a study of reflection and writing by teachers investigating their own practices for professional development. Meanwhile, I was seeking advice from some of those same colleagues about the unit I was preparing to teach. I decided to join one of that team's writing groups. Thus, written reflection journals began to develop for my students and me at the same time, and I really began to feel like a mentor to the students in a new way. I had never actually shared journal writing with students before. I had read along with them, but had never written alongside them, other than to comment on and grade their compositions. This project led me to become a writer *with* my students. Therefore, drawing on collaboration with my teacher writing group and my students, this essay provides a record of shared reflection and writing-to-learn.

Oral histories focus on people, not statistics. So the first step in conducting an oral history project is to select a subject that is of high interest and historical importance, like the Holocaust. Learning how to conduct interviews was a new goal for my students, and so we needed to spend time researching effective interview techniques. Together, the students and I developed questions appropriate for each survivor we interviewed and then synthesized our knowledge together. This collaborative work built on research by David Lindquist, who has pointed out that in Holocaust studies, "Students [can] become so immersed in the event that they begin to think in sophisticated ways, often raising the overall level of their academic activities" (66).

Meetings and interviews with survivors needed to be prefaced, however, with a historical study of the Holocaust. Our class used examples of multi-genre literature; a Holocaust memoir, *All But My Life*, by Gerda Weissmann Klein; accounts of interviews on the internet websites of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; and Holocaust-related videos. The entire project extended over a three-month period from February through April. We used journal writings throughout the study, aiming to generate and document a learning process connecting Georgia's standards for teaching research skills with the eighth grade language arts curriculum. To retrace my teaching experience, and to suggest how the collaborative writing with my students helped me manage a challenging teaching experience, the remainder of this essay will revisit excerpts from our journals and set them within a narrative of the project's history. While acquiring important knowledge about the Holocaust, we learned additional lessons about writing to learn, especially when that writing is done in a social context. (See Young and the closing chapter of this book, "Teachers' Writing Groups in Context.")

### Journal Reflections Shaping Curriculum Teacher's Reflection - January 30, 2003

*How do I begin? What am I thinking? How can I pull this off in three or four months? When will I teach other language arts classes and grade papers? Uh oh, I am overwhelmed already! My juices are flowing; I am energized and excited. I need permission slips for off-campus travel. I need legal copyright forms for the survivors, and for the use of photos I scan or insert from other resources. Let's face it; I need lots of help. Let the process begin; I will stumble, I may even fall, I will get up, then put on a Band-Aid, and continue.*

I first discussed all of my ideas with my principal, Dr. Tim Tyson. He was very supportive and immediately contacted our representative from our school's partner in education, Apple Computer, Inc. The Apple Computer representative told Dr. Tyson that the project appeared to be just what Apple was looking for, to show actual student technology use and learning through integrated curriculum. Dr. Tyson then asked me to write a prospectus for the project. Since I had never written one, I became flustered. But I took the proposals I had done for presentations at professional conferences, a genre which I have written before, and proceeded from there. I shared the prospectus with my principal, and he submitted it to Apple.

I knew I needed to engage student learning and promote personal growth. Some questions emerged about the instructional process:

- How could I design creative journal prompts to help students meaningfully reflect on their learning?
- What would be the best progression of activities to use for this project?
- How could I assess the acquisition and use of knowledge about the Holocaust?

### Teacher's Reflection - February 3, 2003

*Filled with excitement, I introduce this project to the students. All of the students know of my involvement in Holocaust education and that the study of the Holocaust is a part of the eighth grade curriculum. I anticipate positive comments from the students regarding their desire to study the Holocaust, interview survivors, and produce a book composed of photographs and survivor testimonies.*

Students responded honestly to their feelings about studying the Holocaust and interviewing survivors. Several young men showed reluctance in their reflections, and I initially had trouble understanding their perspective.

### Students' Reflections - February 3, 2003

**Daniel:** *"I do not want to do this project. I do not really understand it."*

**Michael:** *"I feel this is not of my interest, and I would like to be in another Literacy class."*

While I was initially discouraged by some of the reactions, others were more positive:

**Melissa:** *"This project sounds pretty cool. I'm not psyched beyond words because it sounds like a huge undertaking, but it sounds very interesting."*

**Alyssa:** *"The first time my teacher, Mrs. Kaplan, told me about the iPhoto project we are going to do, I was thinking, 'Oh Joy! Another boring learning project.' Then, the more I heard about the project, the more I liked it. It sounded more fun and different than the usual projects that I have done for other classes."*

I decided to share the students' reactions with the principal; together we agreed to include those reluctant students and proceed with the project as planned. I wanted to engage them despite their initial resistance. The principal and I together decided they would be responsible for the Holocaust history, the readings and writing in the class, but not the actual interviews, if they did not want to participate. I pledged to express my respect for their honesty in private, individual conversations with the students and their parents via phone calls and emails. The two young men who had been reluctant decided that this could become a great project, but they still felt some shyness and fear.

With the range of my students' journal reflections in mind, we next focused on writing a rationale for studying the Holocaust so as to clarify our goals and objectives. We planned to revisit the rationale statements again near the end of the project. The statements would become a means of evaluating the students' understanding about studying the Holocaust and the application of knowledge learned from the survivors. Student draft rationale statements ranged widely from vague understanding to no concept of the content whatsoever. But many students did appear to be making a connection between the unit's goals and related vocabulary words we had discussed, such as "prejudice and hatred" and "genocide."

### Students' Reflections - February 4, 2003

*Alyssa: "I am very indecisive and cannot answer that question about rationale at this time."*

*Grant: "To prevent genocides and extreme acts of hatred from ever happening again through educating our generation about the horrors of the Holocaust."*

*Erin: "I think people study the Holocaust so they are better informed about the past, and people teach it so younger generations don't make the same mistakes of the past."*

### Teacher's Reflection - February 10, 2003

*At this point in the process, the pedagogical details are becoming overwhelming; I need to pick the brains of the experts. . . . Sylvia Wygoda, Chairperson of the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust, and Stephen Feinberg, Director of National Outreach in the Education Division of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum...offered helpful suggestions. We discussed ideas such as motivating students, obtaining addresses and phone numbers of local survivors, setting up appointments for interviews, posing appropriate interview questions, bringing survivors to [my school] for oral testimonies, arranging the visual layouts of pages in the book, and using pictures and maps from published materials and the internet for the class publication.*

### Teacher's Reflection - March 6, 2003

*Students need to have time for reflection on their learning, whether reading a selection, discussing in groups, note taking from teacher's lectures. . . . Response writing may work best immediately after the learning experience. I, as well as*

*almost all the teachers I know, do not make the time nor have the time to devote to this activity in class. In language arts, this should probably be the closing activity..., not an initial class activity. Let students think and write about what they did or did not learn or feel during a lesson.*

*How to attract students for writing to learn is sometimes a problem. Does one student do the reflective writing just because it is assigned while another is ready to leap into the process? How about this free writing method? Should it only be prose or can it be sketches or even in poetic format? Length is also a [question]. Can one express a thought as a metaphor or simile while another needs to describe a feeling in a full page? Rather than elaboration, my eighth grade students want to find the shortest route to achieve the assignment.*

*They always ask: "How long does this have to be? Do I need a full page? Can I skip lines? Do I need a title? How come she writes so much, and I can say what I want to say in a few lines? Do I need five sentences per paragraph?"*

*Re-reading my journal now, I see how hard I was working to think about writing and to avoid being discouraged that all my students were not enthusiastic about the topic.*

*[My] students...are not as excited as I had anticipated for them to be. They have finished reading *All But My Life*; I now need to try different strategies to motivate those who are blasé about this project.... Am I over estimating [my students'] abilities as eighth graders?... Will the students really be able to accomplish all of this in a short time? How many interviews can we actually do?... I feel overwhelmed, and that this project is growing like the Southern vine, kudzu. It is taking over my life.... I feel tangled and my method of instruction for the written reflection is a weave or braid rather than a straight direction of thoughts and feelings. I am the type of teacher who needs constant mental stimulation, so I go home and think and read about ways to incorporate multi-genre writing, Holocaust survivors' interviews, oral history projects, pedagogy on reflective and responsive writing, and the latest research on technology integration?... What is my reasoning behind all of this?... I am now wondering: is reflective writing becoming a tool to my understanding of the process of written instruction. Do I reflect, write, and teach? Or do I teach, reflect, and write? How will this change as I really delve deeply into my own thoughts and feelings about student learning and the process of writing for self-expression? I am now imagining a circular order of reflection <-> writing <-> teaching, and I am beginning to learn that no one single method comes first before the other.*

*Looking back at these journal entries, I can see that I was tapping more and more deeply into the power of writing to learn. As a teacher, I realize I am writing all the time, just as I am reading all the time. I write vast multi-genre materials: lessons; emails; notes to students, parents, and colleagues; proposals, and*



*more. But I now know, reading back over my journal, that all my writing does not have to be in these professional formats; some of it should be truly exploratory. Reflective writing makes a difference for me because my written voice is different than my spoken voice. I feel that my written voice is an echo of genuine feelings and thoughts. My spoken voice is the one I usually use in the classroom. It feels the push and hurry of addressing multiple demands for curriculum delivery. I now feel that my written voice is a truer echo of feelings and thoughts as a teacher. Once I let my writing voice into the classroom, I slowed down and reflected on learning with my students. (See Fletcher.)*

### Students' Reflections - March 10, 2003

Students wrote approximately twice a week in journals. One prompt midway through the project asked the students to think about how they felt about interviewing survivors.

**Daniel (one of the students who was resistant at first):** *"I will feel more motivated when we get into the interviewing part of the project. [But] I would be scared that the survivors might be embarrassed or insulted by our questions."*

**Michael (another of the initially reluctant students):** *"I feel the cause, knowing what this project is for, has made me more motivated. This is an important subject and this project should show it. I want this project to be great. The victims could be sad and cry about telling us their story. This would make it very sad."*

**Melissa:** *"Interviewing survivors will be scary, sensitive, and uncertain because they have gone through many tragic events that will be hard for us to 'stomach'."*

**Jackie:** *"The area of this project that will make me feel more motivated is the actual interaction with the survivors. I feel that just seeing the people who lived through such a time will be inspiring. A project of interviewing survivors is very informative and almost in some aspects scary. ... [I]n my sheltered life; I have never encountered any real hardships myself."*

Seeing the students' blend of excitement and apprehension in these entries, we were able to work through these feelings in open discussion of this writing, becoming prepared for the interviews even as we noted the complexity of doing primary research on the Holocaust.

### Teacher's Reflection - March 19, 2003

*I have never really realized sharing written reflections with my students could promote such in-depth relationship of learning experiences; I feel like a mentor to students, acquiring knowledge with them. When I read my journal entries to them,*

*they applaud, and I feel embarrassed because that is not my reason for sharing. The atmosphere becomes extremely personal; sharing gives me an opportunity to explore my teaching styles and reflect upon the richness of instructing and collaborating with students. Experimenting [with] collaborative reflective writing [shows me] that I must be a learner from my students.*

### Teacher's Reflection - March 24, 2003

*I now feel . . . that the students are sophisticated enough to comprehend the information from the interviews and the emotions they feel as well. The heart and soul of this project is the creativity and the collaboration of young middle school students with senior adults in the community. Maybe these senior individuals and the students can become living examples of what education should be. . . . Each story should chronologically tell about a time in history that is unique; it puts key events in context by looking back in time as well as looking forward. . . . Deciding upon the way to retell the interview will be a monumental and frustrating task. Students will [need to] paraphrase some information that survivors mentioned as well as add personal movements, such as a tearful eye or a nod. Interpreting accents is also difficult.*

*All the time, I wake up thinking about this project of interviewing Holocaust survivors. I think of the challenging concepts we are discovering together. . . . When students have interaction with each other and the survivors, and voice opinions in their speaking and writing, they feel a sense of ownership of their learning.*

### Teacher's Reflection - March 26, 2003

*I had the privilege to speak to three survivors [Stephen Feinberg, Bert Lewyn, and Eugen Schoenfeld] on the telephone today. One I will visit tomorrow, and the two others I have arranged for class visits. Listening to a survivor speak stays with me. I need to create a classroom atmosphere that is comfortable for the survivor and the students. Survivors may speak of their lives before the war, of the personal losses they experienced, of their days in concentration camps, and of liberation and coming to America. A glimpse is all we ask for.*

*A big issue is to be respectful and sensitive to the victims of the Holocaust. Elie Wiesel explains, "The Holocaust is not a subject like all the others. It imposes certain limits. . . . In order not to betray the dead and humiliate the living, this particular subject demands a special sensibility, a different approach, a rigor, strengthened by respect and reverence and, above all, faithfulness to memoir" (167-168).*

*Students viewed *Courage To Care*, a video profiling rescuers, non-Jews who risked their lives to protect Jews from Nazi persecution. Students wrote responses afterwards. Several expressed admiration for the rescuers.*

## Students' Reflections – April 1, 2003

**Michael:** *"It is great knowing how much these people care, knowing that they put their lives on the line to save other peoples' lives. They have great pride and huge hearts to do such acts of unselfishness."*

**Ann:** *"It takes a lot of guts to risk your life for someone else. It must have been scary to know you could be killed at one certain moment for risking your own life for another. If more had done this during the Holocaust, maybe not so many people would have been killed."*

Two survivors came on different days and shared their oral testimonies with the students. One man lived in Berlin, Germany, during WWII and was a Jewish victim on the run, or "U-boater." The other, son of a survivor, was a toddler during the war, hidden in Romania. After these visits, I offered two open-ended questions for journaling: "What have you found beneficial about hearing the first two survivors' testimonies?" and "What was the most important message you learned from the survivors?" (See Totten.)

## Students' Reflections - April 16, 2003

**John:** *"I think it is beneficial hearing from actual survivors because there is less room for error in a first-hand account as opposed to a misinterpretation in a second-hand account. Who knows better the actual pain and fear than one who experienced it? I also learned details that a textbook would never portray."*

**Jessi:** *"Their two different stories showed different perspectives in their involvements in the Holocaust. They showed that no one has the same Holocaust experience. Every story is different... One survivor mentioned something that meant a lot to me. He said, 'We are all different on the outside, but on the inside we are all the same.' By saying that, I think he meant that people should look past their appearances or races because everyone wants to be accepted, meaning that we are all alike."*

**Jamie:** *"I was able to picture the places and things that were happening as they were telling their story. It made me think more about the people it was affecting than just hearing it from the teacher. The facial expressions and voices of the two men seemed to make it real, and made me realize it was a very tragic event that happened not so long ago."*

**Matt:** *"It was better than just reading about it from a book because the information was coming from first hand experiences. It also showed how survivors came to America and can become successful after going through the Holocaust. They made new lives for themselves."*

**Chelsea responds:** *"I found out how important it is to listen to others' experiences. And it made me realize how lucky I am to live in America and be as safe and free as I am."*

**Allison:** *"This showed how in the midst of uncertainty and fear, one can still have hope.... One even got a chance to play professional basketball as a Jewish immigrant. I really enjoyed how he shared his story and tried to truly convey the message that the Holocaust really did happen."*

A week later, with the end the time available for the project fast approaching, I gave the students another prompt designed to help them think through how their own work of recording the interviews would become an archive for next years' students to draw upon to complete the Holocaust memory book. Our prompt was: How do you feel about doing the process of the interviews and thinking about students working next year to prepare a publication?

### Students' Reflections - April 23, 2003

**Alyssa:** *"I think that this is fine because then you can see more points of view and that develops a better understanding of what the Holocaust was like. And since different people will be in the class next year, that just means that more will learn about the Holocaust."*

**Greg:** *"I feel disappointed that we can't continue the project because I was interested in interviewing more Holocaust survivors and hearing their stories. I also wanted the satisfaction of having helped make the iPhoto Book. Then another small part of me feels excited for the next group of students who get to work on this project."*

**Daniel:** *"I feel sort of frustrated that I can't finish something I started. It is really suspenseful, kind of like when a good movie abruptly ends, and I have to wait until the sequel. I really anticipate finishing this project."*

**Amonae:** *"I feel kind of disappointed because I wanted to see the finished product, but at the same time I am proud that the project got so big that we can't even finish it.... Everyone had heard of it and was talking about it."*

Students were also asked to revisit our earlier questions about a rationale for studying the Holocaust today.

**Daniel:** *"It's simple; we want people to be informed especially kids, so in the future people will remember what happened and hopefully history won't repeat itself."*

**Paul:** *"I think now that the rationale for studying the Holocaust is because it was an act of pure evil that was committed only a few decades ago by educated*

*people against society. It should not be repeated, and the only way to prevent it is to teach younger generations the truth of it. We should appreciate human rights.”*

**Erin:** *“I [would] teach the subject because the world is full of hate and history can repeat itself,” said Mr. Kessler, a survivor. I agree with this. We study the subject to educate today’s youth so a new Hitler won’t arise. We also study because it happened quite recently and in an important time in history. It also occurred throughout Europe, a cultured and educated location in the world during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our rationale is to educate young people and to teach them individual responsibility and what to do with their lives.”*

## Looking Back and Forward

David Lindquist has observed that “teaching and studying the Holocaust becomes a profoundly moving experience for educators and students” (203). By putting together faces of real people with facts and stories, survivors bring the subject to life for students. All the details survivors report are part of an immense picture; every family, every place, every friend, every job was erased, and trying to rebuild each survivor’s memory supports an interplay between history, morality, and human spirit. The current personalities of the survivors are layers of private experiences that no one can fully comprehend. But sharing living history with today’s youth is the most real educational experience I can think of. This class project promoted the collection of memories of the human spirit. I hope the finished Holocaust memory book will become a keepsake, a provoker of memories, a guide to relationships between children and seniors in the community.

Like the collaborative research for this classroom project, learning to write reflectively is a process. It becomes easier if it is shared with others in the learning stages. My beliefs about writing have changed because of the sharing of honest reflections with my students. Of special importance to me as a teacher is the fact that I will continue to use this approach in the future.

How do I know this collaborative, reflective method of teaching about the Holocaust was effective? For one thing, we did evaluations of learning through writing tied to our initial goals and rationale. When reading students’ journals, I used the following “positive feature” rubric for formative assessment, based on traits of effective reflective writing shared with the class:

- “The journal entry is concise and easy to follow.”
- “The journal entry focuses on personal thoughts and feelings about the topic or experience.”

- “The journal entry expresses a clear opinion, along with supporting reasons.”
- “The journal entry shows the personal meaning or value of the topic for the learner.”
- “The journal entry shows the writer is willing to take risks and attempt new ideas.”

Did students write profound journal response statements? Some did, more than others, but they all expressed honest opinions, fears, and hopes through interaction with peers, survivors, and me. For example, some indicated that may never again be as innocent, as secure, or as naive in their feelings that good triumphs over evil—but that confronting these themes was important for personal growth. And, at the same time, I could see in their journal entries how students increasingly emphasized themes of personal responsibility and ethics.

Students did write to learn. They expressed honest thoughts; they shared feelings and beliefs; they also gained a valuable understanding of a learning process as tentative, since the end product publication would not be finished until later, by another group. They learned that producing a quality, “finished” product takes time and becomes a journey that should be enjoyed as we travel to the destination.

## Reflection

*This was my first experience writing about my classroom for publication. I learned a number of basic skills for professional writing. For instance, this was actually the first time I had done revisions and editing using technology—the software in Word for Windows that supports these stages of writing. I also learned about formatting and citing. Exchanging our drafts online taught me a new approach to editing.*

*Working with my small writing group and the larger inquiry team also brought new thinking to my classroom, because I was writing about an instructional project that was still very much in process. Answering questions from readers in the project pushed me to critique my teaching. By joining a community of teacher writers, I became able to explain my new instructional project to my students more effectively. Significantly, while I was gaining suggestions for improvement from colleagues in my writing group, I was also learning to work along with my students differently than in the past. Through shared journaling, my students and I became co-researchers trying out a new approach for studying the Holocaust. Our shared reflective writing monitored and guided the flow of the instructional unit and eventually led to the focus of this essay.*



*Initially, even when I was journaling along with students in my classroom, I found that my primary audience was myself. In the next stages, my writing group became my main audience, as I was gradually transforming journal entries and combining them with new analysis. At that point, my writing became part of a collaborative writing group's process, and finally it took shape into an essay for professional publication. Along the way, I learned how to describe, analyze, and reflect on varieties of journaling that were going on in my class. Gaining more practice in writing to analyze my teaching helped give me confidence to do more professional writing.*

*Using writing and then reflecting on my writing, I discovered that I was willing to take risks as the Holocaust project developed. It became much larger in scope than I originally planned. As the power of journaling in my classroom grew, the students became enthusiastic about shared writing experiences and about their research into the Holocaust. They really enjoyed listening to my written reflections, and I saw how modeling writing to learn was encouraging them to write in new, more exploratory ways in their own journals. Now, with the groups of students I've had since the project described here, I still share my writing.*

*Moving from using my journal writing to improve my own classroom instruction to writing about shared journal writing for an audience beyond my classroom was a challenging step for me, however. I had trouble deciding how to organize my material at first. My group helped me by asking questions until I recognized the right approach to take; their feedback wasn't a telling—it was a questioning—and then I identified a plan through my own cognitive process, through questioning and dialogue. For example, I had difficulty deciding upon the organization of my reflections and the students' reflections. My writing group encouraged me to start by revisiting my reflections about the project in chronological order. This step led me to recognize how my management of the classroom journaling had changed over time. Gradually, I had developed more meaningful writing prompts for students that would show their knowledge and feelings—to me and to each other. Reviewing my own and my students' journal entries also led me to see that sharing the reflective writing process with my students had made the learning environment caring, individualized, respectful, and challenging for everyone. Then I realized that my essay should be a chronological narrative, taking the reader along on our classroom journey, moving back and forth between my journal and my students' reflective writing.*

*Through journaling, the students also changed as learners. In the beginning, some were reluctant about studying and writing about the Holocaust. As my writing team pointed out to me, the project was very large in scope and therefore challenging for eighth graders to comprehend as a "whole" piece of learning, one blending writing, historical research, oral history, and technology. Some students*

*became frightened, and a few did not want to participate. Through discussions and written reflections, their reluctance, along with the age-appropriate feelings behind it, became apparent. Some were especially afraid of meeting strangers, in this case the survivors who had experienced the Holocaust. At the same time, sharing their journal entries showed that many were excited about the project, and hearing that enthusiasm in writing encouraged others. I was sharing my journal too, of course. As my students listened to my thoughts about the project and how I praised their responses, my classroom became a community. They started to assume ownership of the project and spoke of feeling special because it was unique. Students' writing improved due to the extra practice, the sharing of ideas, and their feelings of project ownership.*

*All along the way, I invited my students to use the practices that I was learning through work with my own small writing group. Oral sharing became a major part of our classroom. Students shared responses in pairs and in small groups; some volunteered to share with the whole class. Often they literally applauded their peers and encouraged extended discussion of each other's entries, leading us to deep insights. Reading, thinking, speaking, listening, and writing became entwined, as journaling became a productive routine for promoting learning.*

*Based on the experiences of being a part of a small writing group, a community of practice, and a community of writers in the classroom, I now recognize the importance of collaboration. Teachers need motivation as much as students do. Successful teams respect each other's ideas and value suggestions for improvement. Discussing pedagogy and sharing best practices with my teacher colleagues promote leadership which extends into the classroom. We develop as writers and grow as learners. One way this happened in my classroom during this project was that I shared our writing group's reflections-on-process with my students. That helped them value the writing process; it made collaboration seem real. Now, in my classroom, we don't know the outcome when we begin a learning enterprise. We get there together.*



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