Coeditor: **John S. Mayher**

The Legacy of English Education at NYU

With the retirements of John Mayher, Marilyn Sobelman, and Gordon Pradl, the NYU program in English education marks the end of an era. To reflect on and celebrate that legacy, we organized a session at, appropriately, the New York NCTE Annual Convention in November 2007. Featuring the retiring faculty and a random collection of our alumni whose current email addresses we had, the session was celebration, reunion, and sober reflection on the past, present, and future of NYU's program. The selections below speak mostly to the past and don't recognize all of the voices who have contributed to the dialogue. We apologize for the omissions and invite you to join our reconsiderations of what an English education program can mean to its faculty, students, alumni, and, above all, to the students of our students.

Practicing Uncommon Sense at NYU

John S. Mayer

From 1969 to the end of the millennium, Gordon Pradl and I had an extraordinary opportunity to shape and advise the English education doctoral program at NYU. We had colleagues who helped—especially Marilyn Sobelman and Harold Vine; an administration that gave little support but even less interference; and above all, the opportunity to work with wonderful students—but in retrospect it is amazing how free we were to follow our own creativity as teachers, scholars, and curriculum designers. There were institutional constraints on admissions and schoolwide doctoral curricular requirements in such things as foundations and research, but these proved to be minimal in practice and easily manipulated in a system designed to support the faculty's professional decision making as to who we would teach and what they should learn.

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A description of my first day at NYU will give you an idea of the de facto if not always de jure autonomy I enjoyed. I was sitting at my desk during the first day of advising when a student came in, introduced herself as Sophie Wechsler, and said that I was her advisor. "Oh," I said. "What program are you in?" "Applied linguistics," she replied. So I excused myself and rushed into the office suite next door to ask my program director, Roger Cayer, what to do. He said he was sorry that he hadn't mentioned this, and then he went to the file and pulled out a folder with half a dozen rather vague descriptions of a doctoral program. I initially panicked but solved the first problem by asking Sophie how many courses she wanted to take. "One," she said, so in the classic tradition of good advising I signed her up for my Foundations of Educational Linguistics course.

I was still worried, of course, that I didn't understand the program, so I went back to my director and asked what else he had on its requirements. Roger couldn't find anything else and for a day or two I was concerned—until the big bulb lit up! If there was no other record of requirements, then I had discovered that it was a nearly blank slate on which to shape a curriculum. And that's what we proceeded to do. There were a few more specifications in the mainstream English education program, but even there we had amazing flexibility limited only by our own imaginations. We built a new MA program and revised the doctoral seminars, eventually creating seminars in literature teaching, educational linguistics, composition teaching, and curriculum.

Above all ours was not an elite program. We weren't looking for people with record-breaking GPAs or GRE scores, but rather for people who were committed to becoming the best teachers/scholars they could be. We looked for people who were interested in teaching and teaching teachers above all, and we discouraged people who were exclusively committed to, especially, literary scholarship. Ours was an English **education** program, after all, and even though, as Gordon remarked, that encompasses all human knowledge, it isn't a program to prepare Arts and Sciences English or linguistics professors. We did have a fairly broad conception of English education, welcoming those interested in applied linguistics, composition teaching, literature teaching, as well as the full panoply of subjects and approaches that make up the secondary English language arts curriculum, and preparing people to teach others to teach in all of these areas.

Saying we were not elite does not mean that we didn't have our fair share of extraordinary students who have been and still are leaders in NCTE. We've had promising researchers who fulfilled their promise such as Rita Brause, Lee Galda, and Sondra Perl; we've had journal editors such as Joe

Harris, Mary K. Healy, Ruth Vinz, and Louann Reid; we've had leaders such as Keith Gilyard, Nancy McCracken, Frank Madden, Brenda Greene, and Joan Steiner; and our graduates have published too many articles and books to even begin to count. Most important, we've helped extraordinary teachers develop themselves and become leaders on campuses throughout the New York metropolitan area and across the country: Georgia, Minnesota, Colorado, California, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, to name a few.

We didn't support our students very well—only a few got fellowships or teaching assistantships—and most of them worked full-time and studied with us part-time. And we had what most people regarded as too many of them. Our doctoral seminars ran too large and the faculty had more students to mentor than traditional definitions of doctoral work in an apprenticeship program would have allowed. One of the reasons this worked, however, was that we were not running a replication factory. We did not have one model of scholarship or one set of topics that we steered students into. Instead, we encouraged them to discover and pursue their own interests, often growing out of their professional context. This was the great advantage of having part-time students: they were already practicing professionals who brought their own classrooms to ours and enlivened our discussions with real-world anecdotes and examples. They also called us on our pretensions whenever we threatened to get too pontifical.

As a faculty we did share some important values and beliefs. We were committed to education for all students, and to preparing teachers who would be able to support their students in turn. Intellectually we were deeply influenced by our predecessors at NYU: Lou LaBrant and Louise Rosenblatt, as well as by Noam Chomsky in language study, and the British English educators we first encountered through reports of the Dartmouth Conference and later got to work with as first Gordon and then the rest of us ran our summer-abroad program in York (later Oxford), which took a steady stream of our doctoral students to England. We didn't always teach identically and there was plenty of room for spirited curricular disagreement among us, but there was an overall stance we shared that made our program more coherent than most.

This was a turbulent time in higher education, dominated by student protests and curricular challenges. During the early 1970s, we redesigned the MA curriculum and the teacher education program, and we began to modify the doctoral program after Louise's retirement. (Louise had kept the doctoral program pretty tightly under her control prior to her departure.) The new teacher education program led by Harold Vine tried to get students into schools earlier, giving them experiences as tutors and small-

group leaders before becoming full-fledged student-teachers. Each step of that process was accompanied by a colloquium course that explored how to teach English one-on-one, in small groups, and in whole classes, respectively. The sequence concluded with a philosophical/historical/reflective course, which encouraged students to look back at their field experiences and forward to their first year of teaching.

As part of that process Harold and I developed what we call the Teaching Act Model, which tried to illustrate the enormous complexity of teaching through looking at the constructs that teachers bring to each teaching situation: of themselves and of teachers, of their students, of their subject, of how that subject is learned and taught, and of the school and community context within which the teaching takes place. We were rebelling against the behaviorist-based view of teacher competence, which focused on watching teachers behave in classrooms, while we, influenced by both Louise Rosenblatt and Noam Chomsky, were looking beneath the surface of behavior to understand the whys that led to it. And, crucially, looking, as well, at the reflective processes that teachers use to learn from their experience and continue to grow in competence. Indeed, in that era of long lists of competencies/behaviors, Harold and I concluded we really only needed to assess one competency: the ability to learn through reflection.

The MA curriculum attempted to embody the integrated vision of theoretical practice that was the core of our approach to teacher education. Students did not take courses in literature, language, and rhetoric and then other courses on how to teach literature, language, and composition. Instead, each course combined content and pedagogy, simultaneously engaging with the subject and exploring its implications for teaching and learning. Throughout, the intellectual framework that guided us was derived from Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory and the British commitment to the constructivist personal growth model, which emphasized a learner- and learning-centered focus. The faculty didn't always agree on how to enact these ideas—one hysterical day saw three of us trying to teach á là Louise to high school classes in New Jersey that we'd never met before. None of our "demonstrations" would have passed muster as exemplars of anything except our own personalities, but our different interpretations did keep the intellectual pot boiling in the department for years to come.

The intellectual ferment of that period was consistently exciting and often challenging. The 1980s saw NYU faculty's increased involvement with CEE and NCTE. Gordon Pradl and Mary K. Healy became the editors of *English Education*, and I was elected to the CEE Executive Committee, eventually becoming its chair in the early 1990s. During that period, the NYU faculty

and our students began to have a big impact not only on the substance of NCTE Conventions but, even more important, on their processes. We tried to break down the talking-head quality of conference sessions to make them more participatory and interactive. And in the most radical move of all, Rita Brause as program chair and I as CEE chair decided to accept all of the people who had submitted proposals for the Washington Convention in 1992. We wrote to everyone and said we'd be happy to have them participate but that they had to run their program in an interactive/transactional way. We combined some proposals together and required people to communicate with each other about what their plans were and so on before the Convention. Even the general sessions were structured in a participatory way, with brief talks and lots of conversation. While this full experiment has never been repeated, it was undoubtedly one of the most exciting meetings anyone ever went to. It influenced directly the International Federation for the Teaching of English conference I convened at NYU in 1995, and it has influenced indirectly CEE meetings since, including the recent CEE summits. Gordon and Mary K. devoted a whole issue of *English Education* to reports on the Washington Convention, and it's fascinating to go back and look again at what happened. During the same period, I was able to push the NCTE Executive Committee to encourage a wider range of formats for convention sessions. Although the talking head has never completely disappeared, other formats are encouraged.

The beginning of the 1990s saw the publication of *Uncommon Sense* and the formation of a new Teaching and Learning department at NYU. The department combined all of the elementary and secondary teacher education programs except the arts. The English education faculty took leading curricular roles, finding ways to infuse our transactional learning-centered progressivism into a department whose other curricula were still pretty traditional. This was exemplified most clearly in the core course called Inquiries into Teaching and Learning, largely developed by English education faculty and students and for fifteen years coordinated by Marilyn Sobelman. She and Maris Krasnow eventually described it in their book, *Inquiring into Teaching and Learning*. And, somewhat later in the decade, Gordon's *Literature for Democracy* appeared, describing clearly the connection between teaching literature and political action and human rights.

Our most dramatic impact on the national scene took place at the Spring Convention in Minneapolis in 1995. NCTE and IRA had been working on standards for a couple of years, and they presented what they hoped was the final draft of the NCTE/IRA standards at the Convention. For a variety of reasons, a firestorm of protest erupted over these standards, and I was

proud to see that it was led by NYU graduates: Joan Steiner of Wisconsin, Rita Brause of New York, Nancy McCracken of Ohio, Cindy Onore of New Jersey, and I all voiced negative responses, and the executive committees of the elementary, secondary, and English Education groups all voted to reject the standards. It was a proud moment for me to watch our graduates articulate their critiques without collusion. (The somewhat negative upshot of all this was that Michael Kibby of the IRA and I were asked to redo all the standards, and our version too was rejected in favor of a final version that, ironically, looks a lot like the one that caused the firestorm in Minneapolis. I discussed all that in an *English Education* paper in January 2000. And the good thing about it was I got paid, so my kitchen in our cabin in the Poconos will always be the standards kitchen!)

NYU's national impact on English education will continue to expand as our graduates go on to take leadership roles locally and nationally. And I certainly have never regretted my choice to become a teacher educator or to work at NYU. Teaching is always challenging and exciting, but for me the chance not only to have influence on future teachers but, by mentoring doctoral students, to influence how *they* prepare their students to teach has made it an extraordinary career. Those of us who built the program from the 1970s through today will no longer be running it, but the new faculty will have outstanding students to work with and a strong tradition to build on.

The following pieces are abridged versions of papers presented at a CEE history session at the NCTE Annual Convention in New York in November 2007.

Rita S. Brause

Fordham University

After some years of classroom experience with middle school adolescents along with serious contemplation, I decided to return to NYU for my doctorate—to become a teacher educator who kept one foot in the classroom and one at the university. I knew the degree was required, but I had no expectation of learning anything. (I am embarrassed by my unfortunate but real cynicism, which I quickly discarded as a student in John Mayher's classes.)

Nothing prepared me for my realization of how much I enjoyed learning while taking courses and engaging in research. Memorable conversations and classes with John Mayher, Harold Vine, Gordon Pradl, and Marilyn Sobelman assured me that we could play an important role in that process. Our understanding of the power of language, and its development in our

students, would enable us to make a difference in English language teaching practices and schooling in general.

Erica-Lee Lewis

New York University

As I contemplated my academic and vocational paths after completing my master's program, I was enticed by a course referred to as Other People's Children taught by John Mayher and Perry Greene. Boy, was I surprised when I discovered I had inadvertently enrolled in my first teacher education course. Approaching education as an academic discipline had never even crossed my mind. Why would it? I had endured and rebelled against a long history of a non–context driven, teaching-centered, commonsense education, never suspecting another philosophical framework existed.

To say I had developed into a resistant student is understating the school-game behaviors I honed in response to my traditional schooling environment. Not that I didn't love learning. I did. I snatched learning moments wherever I could find them, everywhere but in the traditional classroom.

In Other People's Children, we wrote self-assessments and open-ended journal responses to multicultural texts, participated in group work and group sharing, had professors who did not assert themselves as experts but rather valued all voices equally, and who embraced uncertainty, using it as a tool for learning. For the first time in my academic career, names and theories were beginning to be attached to what I had needed as a student, what I believe as a thinker, and what I would come to value as an educator. For the first time in my academic history, I engaged in and enjoyed in-class learning.

Throughout the doctoral program, course by course, paper by paper, I found this model of democratic, student-centered teaching and learning emerging ever-powerfully, reshaping my ambitions, encouraging my voice, and providing a safe, enriching, and challenging teaching and learning environment for us all, even for the most unreachable of learners.

Growth through English: The International Connection

Marilyn Sobelman, New York University

One of the four distinguishing features of NYU's English education legacy is the enduring relationship we have fostered with our colleagues in other parts of the English-speaking world, especially in England. It began in the early 1970s when our School of Education decided to experiment with a variety of new summer offerings.

Gordon Pradl had the vision to initiate a study-abroad program in Great Britain for master's and doctoral students of English education. He had the foresight then to anticipate the impact that the 1966 Anglo-American Seminar held at Dartmouth could have on the teaching of English in the United States. More knowledgeable than most at that time about the impressive contributions being made by a number of British educators—among them James Britton, Douglas Barnes, John Dixon, David Holbrook, Nancy Martin, Harold Rosen, and Geoffrey Summerfield—Gordon sought to bring the personal growth model of English teaching to bear on the thinking and practice of American teachers and researchers. In addition to encouraging students at NYU, his goal was to attract and support a corps of graduate students from across the American continent, professionals whose time commitments limited their academic pursuits to concentrated study during the summer months.

Three years after Harold Vine moved it to Oxford, I assumed the role of director—and I recall my experiences there and my associations with the British faculty as among the highlight of my professional career. But I sensed that something was missing. If we really conceptualized growth through English as a continuum, we needed to encourage interactions with language arts teachers at the primary and elementary school levels, as well as at the secondary schools and colleges. We all needed especially to learn about Margaret Meek Spencer's insights into reading and Myra Barrs's work on holistic assessment. And, thus, a new chapter opened: a Study Abroad program offered jointly by the programs in English Education and Early Childhood and Elementary Education. Margot Ely and I were the first co-directors with others from both programs taking the helm in subsequent years.

For students and faculty alike the impact became evident in the way we spoke about what informed our practice. Often without acknowledging the authors, we employed phrases such as *expressive writing*, *exploratory talk*, *shaping at the point of utterance*, *participant* and *spectator roles*, *journal writing*, *a sense of audience*, *writing across the curriculum*, and *drama in the English classroom*.

Moreover, we extended our international perspective when John Mayher initiated an association with Garth Boomer and educational leaders in Australia. We, and our students, became involved as participants at meetings of IFTE, the International Federation of Teachers of English. And in 1995, NYU hosted the IFTE Conference here in New York. These were indeed special years during which important connections were cemented.

What have emerged are not merely structural changes or artificially symbolic gestures. Our international collaborations are a critical part of the

legacy that I hope will continue to shape English education at NYU, giving meaning to our beliefs about language and learning. Most particularly:

1) That English language arts teaching and learning must span all school levels and content areas and involve professionals from a variety of disciplines
2) That language learning is a developmental process that must be viewed as a continuum and as richly embedded in multicultural contexts
3) That the social, political, and pedagogical issues surrounding the processes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing, and of literary response and literacy development, are best addressed when there are genuine partnerships, here and abroad, among teachers, teacher educators, theoreticians, and researchers
4) And, lastly, that English education at NYU will remain committed to membership in an international community that values—and benefits from—an exchange of viewpoints

As some of us depart from NYU, we treasure our memories, but more importantly, we hope that our international legacy will continue to enhance our field and address the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Joan Zaleski

Hofstra University

My doctoral studies were shaped through an uncommon-sense lens, having started my studies the same year John Mayher's *Uncommon Sense* was published in 1990. Throughout my coursework I read it, referred to it, discussed it, and most of all, *reflected* on it. As an uncommon-sense learner, I transacted, constructed, and *reflected* again on the language and literacy issues that were important for me. Perhaps nowhere was this uncommon-sense perspective better enacted than in NYU's study-abroad experience in Oxford, England.

For eight weeks during the summer of 1994, I joined with twenty other NYU graduate students in elementary and English education to set up residence in Trinity College, Oxford University. We had all just returned from York, each of us staying with a local teacher who hosted us for the week and brought us to visit classrooms. I'm sure my host family expected someone younger than a 45-year-old doctoral student, but they could not have been nicer and 13 years later we still stay in touch. At Trinity, our days fell into a

rhythm of writing, sharing, exploring new ideas, reading, more writing, and finally more reading. In between we met for breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the great, impressive dining hall and organized small study groups that met on the lawns of Trinity to discuss books, share poetry, develop curriculum, and pose questions that related to our teaching.

The legacy of NYU's English education program will always be about discovering such uncommon-sense perspectives toward teaching and learning. They continue to inspire possibilities for changing my own classroom teaching, as well as to reflect on how and why I read, and write, and learn.

Louann Reid
Colorado State University

Distance defines my experience at NYU. My situation was fairly unusual, I found when I compared it to the other doctoral students. Because I couldn't leave my high school teaching job in Colorado, I sought a program that I could attend in the summers. John and Gordon had represented NYU well at NCTE Conventions, and I knew that this was the program I wanted. Flexibility made it work. Because there were enough NYU faculty attending, we met during the NCTE Convention in Los Angeles to discuss my candidacy paper, and I defended the dissertation during my school's spring break a few years later in New York. Marilyn was always available and encouraging. With her assistance, I worked through the red tape of an unfamiliar system several hundred miles away from my home. At NCTE Conventions, faculty checked on my progress and added their encouragement. These personal connections made the distance seem less.

But distance was also productive. The international vision of the program's faculty opened my eyes to what English education could be and helped me understand the forces that had shaped what English education was. I realized that my education was setting me apart from the other teachers when I mentioned James Britton in the teachers lounge one fall and not a single person knew who he was! Because of the NYU program, I had visited British schools, met British educators, sat in tutorials (and the pub) with Jimmy Britton and in the garden at Wycliffe Hall with Nancy Martin—and that was just the first summer. Both summers in Oxford were magical, heady times, replete with new learning, new friends, and new perspectives. The summers in New York were a bit less magical but nonetheless heady. I had never lived anywhere so exciting nor had such incredible resources available for research and distraction.

Universities these days are keen to get into the distance learning busi-

ness. While there is some value in learning from a distance, my experience suggests that there is far more value in going some distance to learn. Because of the faculty and the design of NYU's English education program, I learned *from* distance. My current teaching and research interests are informed and enriched by international perspectives because I graduated from NYU.

Ruth Vinz

Teachers College
Columbia University

What is now 22 years ago, John Mayher came to me during a Ramon Veal seminar at NCTE and said, rather abruptly but convincingly, "I hear you should be in a doctoral program. How about joining us in Oxford next summer?" That was it. No elaboration. "Let me know if you'll go"—that wry smile of his. I'd thought about pursuing doctoral work, but now? What promised to be a wonderful seminar of research-in-progress was pushed to the back of my mind, and I sat in that room dreaming about Oxford and the possibilities all that would bring. The day went on and sometime before the end of that seminar, we'd sealed the deal. I'd apply. Sometimes I feel like this little invitation stopped time for a moment, helped me catch my breath, nudged me to reach far past what I knew about teaching and learning, and brought me into the presence of that uncommon band of NYU faculty who were intent on leading us to elsewhere in our thinking.

It wasn't really the Oxford experience or the classes I took at NYU or even the long talks about our work as teachers and learners that offered the most. The program and my experience at NYU allowed, no, demanded, that I reach out to touch the perceptual landscapes that attune us to be critical and aware. I learned to see slant as I participated in a marketplace where learning circulated, causing us to be restless in our teaching, putting us on the road to new journeys, and luring us into imagining other possibilities.

The first lesson I took away from the NYU program—offer up the spaces and not the maps. And, I believe part of the legacy of NYU that resides in many of us is that we recognize the map is often overdrawn for us, for other teachers, and for our students in classrooms with scripted curricula and standards and objectives stated on the board and in all the policies of No Child Left Behind that seem intent on leaving every child behind and encouraging their teachers to walk carefully along the paths of the map that has been scripted for them. In too many classrooms, students don't have opportunities to use (and, yes, challenge) the repertoire of texts available to

them out there in the world where the maps haven't already been drawn. They are seldom given opportunities to step out into the spaces of the unknown and learn for themselves.

Literature for Democracy: The Legacy of Louise Rosenblatt

Gordon M. Pradl, New York University

I first met Louise Rosenblatt during the fall of 1965 when as a beginning master's student I took one of the courses she pioneered in our English education program, Literature and Values. The point of Louise's course was to locate and explore value and emotion as we the students encountered and evoked a series of poems and novels. While Louise herself had obviously read these texts many times, it was clearly not her role to lead us to any single or correct "answer" or "response." Despite how often we might hesitate as student-readers, anxiously holding back on revealing our responses, wary of exposing our inadequacies, what Louise was modeling for us is the fact that **readers must finally read the text for themselves**.

This was not an easy lesson to learn, because one was so caught up in waiting for signals from the teacher authority. Louise worked hard at weaning her students from such a hierarchical and undemocratic view of reading, and thus her second lesson was as equally demanding as the first: **A reader experiences the poem in time**. This **temporal** aspect of the reading act cannot be overestimated, for often what we say or write about texts treats them as if they were immediately available to us in some burst of simultaneity. Instead, we work our way through the structures of a text, building, shaping, revising, testing, then revising again. The work and pleasure of reading come precisely from the unfolding of our expectations in the light of the textual constraints, as we gradually construct connections and meanings that both serve us personally and socially reinforce our membership in the human community.

Louise kept pushing us to see more in the text and intertextually, but she also showed us that she couldn't do this seeing for us. The title of her most startling book, written now generations ago, *Literature as Exploration,* tells it all, just as the title of that course, Literature and Values, helps mark out precisely Louise's commitments to a body politic that is just and inclusive. She was not interested in the traditional approaches to English Studies that came to prevail once the literary folks had banned the rhetoricians from their central place in the humanities. Reading literature from her perspective was not primarily about the historical display of the canon and the accumulation of literary knowledge. No, it was about what one does with

the work, how one reads it as a way of scrutinizing and interrogating a series of ongoing and adjusting relationships between self and community.

As luck would have it, when I began my teaching career in the English education program at NYU in 1971, Louise had not yet retired but was beginning her final year. This allowed me to forge an important professional relationship with her that I hope has helped carry her legacy forward, especially as I attempted to extend her vision in my book, *Literature for Democracy*. Louise, of course, never required defenders or explicators for her theory about aesthetic reading and its crucial role in a democracy; still, the tradition of a progressive way forward for the teaching of English remains fragile. This is especially true in these times of excessive and mechanical educational accountability. Endless testing, along with an instrumental and skills-driven view of literacy, places the student decoding of messages above the making of personal and social meaning.

The legacy of Louise has greatly shaped the experiences that students of the NYU program have had and carry forward, and it is important to remember that perhaps her most galvanizing vision remains her commitment to democratic citizenship. The work in reading and writing that they so powerfully advocated was never just for the personal or economic gratification of the individual; rather, it was in the service of developing the kind of confident literate practices so necessary if as citizens we wish to continue engaging in a free and liberal society.

Joseph Shosh

Moravian College

Teachers and teacher educators from NYU's program in English education hold a distinctly uncommon-sense view of students—not blank slates or vessels to be filled—but rather knowledge producers and active meaning makers, a view my fellow alumni and I developed through powerful dialogue with the faculty. As students at NYU, we had incredible opportunities to explore transactional approaches to texts and to teaching and learning; a negotiated curriculum within and across individual courses; writing as a medium for learning from the admissions portfolio to the candidacy paper to the participant observation entries we wrote for our qualitative research studies; and literature itself, not as cultural artifact but rather as cornerstone of a democratic society.

Back in November of 2001, I wasn't thinking very much about the congressional reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, but rather celebrating the completion of my dissertation at the CEE

luncheon in Baltimore. It was there, seated with fellow NYU English education alumni Gordon Pradl, John Mayher, and Louise Rosenblatt, that my own innocence ended as Louise rose to give an extemporaneous speech. While I can't be certain to re-create her words exactly as she stated them, I can share the meaning that I made at the time and have held with me ever since: "Those of us seated in this room have a responsibility to stand up and stop the endless and mindless testing. The children depend on us to speak when they cannot or will not otherwise be heard."

Sue Ruskin-Mayher
Bank Street College of Education

It's always about the teachers. Coming to the English education program at NYU after almost 20 years as a teacher myself meant a multilayered experience of reflection, action, growth, reflection, challenge, growth, reflection, and more reflection. Often this process began from true Piagetian dissonance. Frustrated, at first, because no one would give "the answers" to the many questions I had brought with me, or the ones that were growing as we read and discussed, I learned over time to become comfortable: exploring deeply and creating an ever-widening pool of possible interpretation and meaning.

Constructivist theory became the foundation of an approach to teaching and learning that concretized a practice that, until then, had left me out of synch with much of the educational system in which I was teaching. The intellectual world, created by a supportive faculty and an eager group of co-learners at NYU, became a safe space for learning to articulate a practice that is rooted in advocacy for what is right for children. The support for taking this practice out into the world of schools created the means to implement and articulate a practice that is securely based in learning theory. The challenge, in the current climate of skills and drills and testing, is to take the understandings that the experience in the English Education/Teaching and Learning program at NYU provided and raise our voices in advocacy for a system that operates in the best interest of all children. I am ever grateful to the faculty of the NYU English education program for the role they played in helping me to find that voice. It's always about the teachers.

Amanda Gulla
Lehman College

NYU's English education program is at the center of a rich tradition of reflective constructivist practice. It is so much at the center, in fact, that it is

surprisingly difficult to write about even though it is so much a part of what I know and believe. The voices of people such as Louise Rosenblatt, Jimmy Britton, James Moffett, who were such living presences in the Department of Teaching and Learning, were the same voices that have influenced the people I've respected and admired in the field of English education. Because I share this legacy with those who continue to make a difference in this field, I have the privilege of working among them. It was NYU who taught me the importance of reflective practice and modeled strategies to use writing to make connections between the theories I wish to embody and the actual enactment of those theories. That blend of theory and practice that is designed to help students make thoughtful decisions about their teaching is what makes the English education program I now coordinate at Lehman College an effective one.

My dissertation research, which was a study of the role of teaching stories in staff development, was born when I moved from being a teacher to being a staff developer, and I discovered that the teaching strategies I had to share were much better received when delivered within the context of my own teaching stories. This approach became what Gordon Pradl called "nuggets of theory wrapped in practice." The need to do this research was born of a frustration with a school system that has increasingly moved toward standardization. Under the guidance of NYU's Teaching and Learning faculty, I was able to do a study of my working relationships with a group of teachers. Looking at their beliefs about children and their role as teachers, I began to understand how I instinctively used stories to bridge philosophical differences between us so that teachers would be more open to receiving my suggestions. Throughout the process of doing the work, gathering and analyzing the data, and writing it up in narrative form, my committee was thoroughly supportive. The heart of this dissertation research lives on as I have transitioned from staff developer to professor. Now as I go to conferences, submit work for publication, and meet colleagues in the field, I am enriched and stimulated by the work of thoughtful, progressive educators who come from the NYU tradition, and passes through me to the upcoming generation of teachers who believe in the notion of the democratic classroom and the power of reading and writing to transform lives.

Susan Levin Schlechter
New York University

My legacy from the experience of coming in 1991 as a doctoral student and then staying on and on and on, still teaching at NYU, is to have had the

benefit of a rich, varied, and envelope-pushing intellectual journey. Through the example of John, Marilyn, and Gordon, who I watched in classes I took, or classes I co-taught with them, or conversations I had with them, I got to rethink my teaching and learning life. John, Marilyn, and Gordon encouraged talk with peers in that casual-seeming-with-high-expectations environment, and now the tradition continues with more talking and listening with my students.

And what did I learn? I learned by example that teaching is an ethical act; that how you teach reflects one's core values, in my case, of respect, equity, the need for a safe and inclusive learning community; that theory is not separate from practice; and that knowing inspires the complex relationship between being and doing that every teacher should be aware of. I learned the value of play in learning, the encouragement of the role of imagination, the need to rethink inherited notions of teaching and learning to change the status quo. I also learned about that wonderful Vygotskian idea of the zone of proximal development, and I try to use it with my students as it was offered to me. What a heady tradition I am proud to claim being part of. Every day I teach my classes I enact the teaching and learning models offered to me in word and deed.

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John S. Mayher is professor of English education in the Department of Teaching and Learning in the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University.