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The flow of writing is rarely derivative of free thought.

# Experience and the Philosophy of Composing

Daniel J. Royer

Educational foundations require a philosophical framework for thinking about students, the world, and the educative events through which we see them brought together. But what philosophical options do we have in this postmodern era? There has been talk about the "end of metaphysics" and even the "end of Philosophy." (Kane; Rorty). But this is not new. Modern eulogies for metaphysics date back to Hume's judgment that it "contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" and his injunction that we "commit it then to the flames." (quoted in Post, 16). And Alfred North Whitehead reminds us that it was Hume also who repudiated the philosophic basis of science, yet adds, science "has never cared to justify its faith or to explain its meaning; and has remained blandly indifferent to its refutation by Hume" (*Science* 16). But educators don't have the luxury of the renaissance scientist who could narrowly focus with detachment and impunity on the world of stubborn facts: our purposes require that we explain our faith, justify our meanings, and sound the depths of educative events. We must remain philosophers.

Postmodern philosophy is an option, but there are at least two distinct traditions claiming that title. I believe that our most viable option is the second. The first, and most familiar, is the anti-metaphysical philosophy led by the proponents of deconstruction. Its historical roots are traced in such figures as Hume, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Davidson, and Rorty. The second tradition, calling itself *constructive* postmodernism, has sought to ally Peirce, James, Dewey, Bergson, Whitehead, Hartshorne and others in the pragmatic-process tradition by emphasizing the way these philosophers have corrected the shortsightedness of the moderns.<sup>1</sup> Both traditions claim to address modernist problematics: the former renders them otiose and makes a deconstructive move "around" them; the latter reunites them with pre-philosophic experience for illumination and guidance in the effort to work "through" them.

Modernism presents us with a dichotomy. We have a human world and a world of nature; a world "in here" and a world "out there." This disjunction between the world of human thought and feeling and the world of science is well documented in the history of many academic disciplines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Stephen Franklin explains that we now live in a Kantian culture, a culture that has abandoned

the claim to genuine knowledge about the human world and limits its real knowledge claims to the phenomenal world of "scientific" and "factual" understanding. (79)<sup>2</sup> Thus, modernism takes knowledge of human affairs to be a matter of making practical postulates about the preconditions of our actions. In other words, cut off from nature and from our basis for making theoretical claims about what is the case in the world itself, modernists live with a bifurcation that traces its most rigorous formulation back to Kant's distinction between the *phenomenal* world of measurable sensation and the *noumenal* world of freedom, ethics, art, immortality, and metaphysics. The former yields facts about what is the case in the world; the latter reveals the presuppositions of our cultural commitments. Franklin says this distinction raises a fundamental question: "Do these bifurcations serve to protect our human integrity or do they destroy our human integrity by isolating us from the very world which provides us with our context? Western culture is profoundly ill at ease with this question" (77).

In education we see the modernist influence in the compartmentalization of subjects, in the competition among research methodologies, in behaviorism, and in mechanistic views of learning. That we are still moderns is evidenced most viciously in our educational research where there is a sharp distinction between the cognitive and the affective.

The deconstructionist postmodern response to these dualisms leaves the world well lost and abandons the rational aim of demonstrating the systematic coherence of man and nature, thought and language, individuals and societies, mind and body, thinking and feeling. The constructive postmodern response, on the other hand, is working from a theory about experience where these dual features of nature are understood as aspects of a unified experience. In Whitehead, for example, there is praise for the Romantic poets because they reacted against these static bifurcations and, valuing synthesis over analysis, sought to reunite human experience with nature, while also revising the view of nature that had been reduced to mechanistic push and pull. Wordsworth writes,

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;  
Our meddling intellect  
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things—  
We murder to dissect.

Unlike its deconstructive counterpart, constructive postmodernism does not reject everything associated with modernism and this is one example. It seeks to reunite aesthetic intuition and scientific analysis. Shelly loved science. Romantic poets remind Whitehead that science supplies us with only a limited abstraction, a partial and simplified view of the world. "The point I wish to make," Whitehead says, "is that we forget how strained and paradoxical is the view of nature which modern science imposes on our thoughts. Wordsworth, in the height of genius, expresses the concrete facts of our apprehension, facts which are distorted in the scientific analysis. Is it not possible that the standardised concepts of science are only valid within narrow limitations, perhaps too narrow for science itself?" (*Science* 84).

The remaining sections of this essay will attempt to make good my claim that constructive postmodern philosophy can serve as a foundation for guiding educators through the perplexities of educative events and illuminate their relational fullness. In this essay, I can only suggest that this philosophy has far-reaching application across the curriculum and point to other scholarship that helps make this case.<sup>3</sup> I can show, however, that as a foundation for thinking about education, its philosophical footings are deep, and I can demonstrate specifically the shape and possibilities of a Whiteheadian view of experience and written composition. I will begin with one aspect of Whitehead's description of the nature of events generally and then discuss the nature of composing as an event.

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*The Nature of Events and the Unity of Experience*

Whitehead describes the unity of experience in terms of generic features common to all events. He calls fundamental events, "actual occasions." Whitehead argues that events, rather than substances, are the basic building blocks of reality, and in this, his analysis agrees with contemporary physics. Hence, his philosophy is relational and opposes static independence whether in the physicist's laboratory or the sociologist's study of human culture. For Whitehead, there is a generic structure to all events and he analyzes them in a highly technical, systematic manner. These common, basic structures, as complicated as they are in their systematic context, he explains, lie at the base of all experience, human and non-human. Every event, therefore, can be understood in terms of common structures. Complex events that endure through time, what psychologists call "molar activity" (e.g. walking the dog, visiting the sea, writing a poem) have an isomorphic relationship to the singular actual occasions of which they are composed.

In order to appreciate the value of Whitehead's analysis of actual occasions for understanding educative events such as writing, one must understand the way that the metaphysical analysis of such events integrates human experience with the non-human world. Once this connection is made clear, I will compare the metaphysical structure of events to the peculiarities of writing or composing events and seek thereby to view the fuller meaning of Whitehead's theory for education generally while at the same time we gain clearer insight into the nature and practice of writing.

*Causal Efficacy*

The nineteenth-century Romantics appealed to tacit knowing and to the deep, gravid feeling that pervades our experience in the world especially noticeable when in nature and during pastoral moments of reflection. When Whitehead says that the "romantic reaction was a protest on behalf of value," (*Science* 94) he is directing our attention to a metaphysical proposition that is denied by modernism: the unity of experience. This unity, however, is not the deconstructive postmodern unity of shared cultural commitments, language, politics, or ideology—a kind of solidarity that we seek in our common alienation from the non-human world. Instead, it is a unity of feeling that runs deeper than consciousness itself. Whitehead puts it this way: "The brooding, immediate presences of things are an obsession to Wordsworth. What the theory does do is to edge cognitive mentality away from being the necessary substratum of the unity of experience. That unity is now placed in the unity of an event. Accompanying this unity, there may or there may not be cognition" (*Science* 92).

How different Whitehead's view is from the contemporary notion that language and cognition are the foundation (and the sole determiner) rather than the apex or late achievement of deeply rooted experience. Whitehead's constructive postmodern conclusion is related to his rejection of Locke's (and the prevailing postmodern) identification of perception with sense perception and the deconstructive postmodern claim that there is no bottom layer of experience common to humanity, the more deep and more general "something there" described here by William James.

It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call "something there," more deep and more general than any of the special and particular "senses" by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed. (58)

Are we, as the deconstructive postmodernists imagine, cut off from our noumenal grounding and contact with the perceptions, feelings, and experiences that make the human world

count for more than the projection of our cultural-linguistic commitments? And if not, is there still some sense in which our phenomenal world the world of scientific study and ordinary sense perception is socially constructed? Is our knowledge of one world any less reliable than the other?

To answer these questions, Whitehead, like James, develops a distinction between *sensuous* and *nonsensuous* perception. The former he describes as handy, vivid, well-defined, superficial, and derivative: "it halts at the present, and indulges in a manageable self-enjoyment derived from the immediacy of the show of things" (*Symbolism* 44). The latter is massive, primitive, underived, and "however insistent, is vague, haunting, unmanageable . . . heavy with the contact of the things gone by, which lay their grip on our immediate selves" (*Symbolism* 43-44). These two modes of perception are essentially two different sources of information about the world. In Whitehead's technical vocabulary *presentational immediacy* (the former) and *causal efficacy* (the latter) are brought together in the complex experience of *symbolic reference*, the correlation of these two modes resulting in what the actual world is for us as our datum for conceptual analysis. These levels of experience are prereflective and prelinguistic, although enhanced by both reflection and language.

The distinction is important because it supplies the conceptual grounds for talking about our relation to the "external" world. There is a conceptual problem to be overcome. If Kant's two worlds, the noumenal and the phenomenal, are to be reunited in the broader notion of experience, there must be some sense in which the world "out there" is handed over to and occupies the world "in here." If our very human lived-world "out there" is to be known with more conviction and authority than Hume's habits of mind or Kant's categories of thought, if we don't merely construct the human world of freedom, ethics, art, nature, feeling, immortality, and metaphysics, there must be an explanation for the real presence of the noumenal in the phenomenal, some theory that accounts for how the external world really informs and participates in the subjectivity of personal experience.

Whitehead's theory of symbolic reference, with its accompanying notions of causal efficacy and presentational immediacy, introduces a theory and a way of talking about the integration and unity of experience. The brooding, immediate presence of things in Wordsworth is Whitehead's causal efficacy. Surface features of color and shape are presented in the mode of presentational immediacy. It is not the case (as with Hume and his modernist successors) that our easy familiarity with presentational immediacy makes causal efficacy a plausible inference. On the contrary, Whitehead says,

In the dark there are vague presences, doubtfully feared; in the silence, the irresistible causal efficacy of nature presses itself upon us; in the vagueness of the low hum of insects in an August woodland, the inflow into ourselves of feeling from enveloping nature overwhelms us; in the dim consciousness of half-sleep, the presentations of sense fade away, and we are left with the vague feelings of influences from vague things around us. It is quite untrue that the feelings of various types of influences are dependent upon the familiarity of well-marked sensa in immediate presentment. (*Process* 176)

Nature impinges on or permeates personal experience just as, more obviously, persons impinge on nature. Perception in the mode of causal efficacy is our primitive state of being in the world. Again, Whitehead remarks, "those periods in our lives—when the perception of the pressure from a world of things with characters in their own right, characters mysteriously moulding our own natures, becomes strongest—those periods are the product of a reversion to some primitive state." (*Symbolism* 44)

These periods are the subject matter of Wordsworth's poetry. This massive, primitive, underived, perception is, to repeat, "heavy with the contact of the things gone by, which lay their grip on our immediate selves" (*Symbolism* 44). The world about us, Whitehead explains, participates in each new moment of our lives. Wordsworth supplies some of the most telling phenomenological evidence to which a Whiteheadian can appeal.<sup>4</sup>

An implicit point not to be overlooked, however, should now be made explicit: "Causal efficacy is the hand of the settled past in the formation of the present" (*Symbolism* 50). The clearest phenomenological evidence of causal efficacy can be discerned in our awareness of the immediate past. Our awareness that each present moment begins with a conformation to the immediate past is another way of recognizing the world from which we issue, or as Whitehead says, "the inescapable condition round which we shape ourselves," (*Symbolism* 58) impinging on, and participating in, our subjective immediacy. A moment of experience begins with the issue of the past, we consider and respond, and we hand over to a future moment our creative synthesis. The character and structure of this event or moment of experience thus described is what Whitehead describes in technical detail as "concrecence," i.e., the coming together of an actual occasion. It is important to keep in mind for the remainder of this essay that the basic structure of this concrecence is isomorphic to such enduring events like "writing a paper."

#### *The Solidarity Thesis and Two Principles of Whitehead's Organic Philosophy<sup>6</sup>*

Whitehead's argument is much different from the ones offered by those who follow the (deconstructive) linguistic turn in contemporary thought. The claim that we have two sources of information about the world instead of one causal efficacy and presentational immediacy—the latter derivative of the former, puts human knowing back in real contact with the kind of experience that informs our religious, artistic, ethical, and creative educational lives. Whitehead does not deny that human knowers have a hand in constructing the world as it emerges in experience and is handed over to superseding moments. His *principle of process* claims, for example, that "how an actual entity becomes constitutes [i.e. creates] what that actual entity is" (*Process* 34–35). But Whitehead's metaphysics does insist that we are not cut off from the noumenal grounds of our existence. His *principle of relativity*, in this regard, maintains that "every item in its [actual entity's] universe is involved in each concrecence" (*Process* 33). More generally, this means that there are no radical bifurcations within nature and experience, including human experience. Each new moment of experience inherits its entire corresponding universe. This view entails a kind of "constructionism" far more radical than deconstructive postmodernists imagine, but it is of a different, one could say, *realist* philosophical order. As one interpreter says, "the fundamental thesis of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism is that the final actualities of the universe cannot be abstracted from one another because each actuality, though individual and discrete, is internally related to all other actualities" (Nobo 1). This *thesis of solidarity* is an important metaphysical claim, for it supplies a conceptual view of our human world that accounts for the simultaneousness of our individualness and our plurality, a paradox that lies at the core of many postmodern dilemmas. The principles of *process* and *relativity*, and the thesis of *solidarity* are fundamental in Whitehead's philosophy. This process theory of experience is the grounding for what Whitehead calls a "provisional realism." And without denying the many ways that symbolic use of language constructs our lived-experience, it also supplies the metaphysical basis for a constructive postmodern alternative to the variety of constructionism that so often slips headlong into relativism.

#### *Feeling as Foundation*

Generally speaking, this view of experience suggests that feeling is the foundation of a process philosophy of education. Howard Woodhouse argues from a Whiteheadian perspective that physical elation, enjoyment, satisfaction, and even pain "ground all our experience in a direct way to our bodies and, through them, to the world around us." "These feelings," he adds, "are rarely acknowledged as having any pedagogical or philosophical importance, and yet they are the root of all human experience" (41). But "feeling" is a technical term for Whitehead. Emotions are akin to feeling, but feeling may be preconscious. Causal efficacy is feeling, but in phenomenological terms, so is the physical reception of our past, the enjoyment of things received and the entertainment of possibility in the present, and the satisfaction that accompanies the choice and determinateness with which we hand ourselves as new creatures over to a promising future.

And yet there is another feature related to feeling and causal efficacy that figures in a general foundation for a process philosophy of education. Feeling connects us organically with ourselves and the universe. Again, Woodhouse makes this very point and illustrates it with this example:

the radiance of the sunset is a process imbued with feelings that can reach out from the depths of space to someone watching it here on earth. In feeling the beauty of the sunset (its warmth, light, and energy), the subject appreciates it as "the concrete achievement of a thing in its actuality" (*Science* 199). That is, s/he feels the process of the suns setting as an integral part of the same rhythm that runs through his/her own experience. This rhythm carries both the subject and the sunset, as object of the experience, from an initial dim awareness of one another through a process in which their feelings begin to merge to a sense of satisfaction in which those feelings become fully integrated with each other. In achieving this unity of feeling, the subjective and objective poles of experience merge with one another, thereby breaking down any distinction between them. . . . This rhythm of becoming, founded on fluid feelings, provides an organic link between human beings and the rest of the universe, a link that makes new and creative configurations possible. (42–43)

The upshot is this: Whitehead's philosophy argues that subjective experience retains real and efficacious ties to the world without. But it must be kept in mind, that his is not what philosophers call *naive* or *direct* realism. Ordinary human experience is rooted in primitive modes of perception that we share in common with, for example, plants—we both may be unconsciously attracted to a warm, sunny window. But in higher forms of experience such as consciousness, vision, and language use, many animals make complex use of a symbols. In such cases, although we gain much in terms of precision and ease of expression (e.g., words are very handy for calling attention to slick spots on the highway) we often pay the price through error (the "water" may only have been rising heat). For Whitehead, all experience is imbued with symbolic activity. Language is symbolic and thus it can elicit in our experience things that would otherwise have remained in the dim shadows of causal efficacy. This is why we love our poets. Language thus has a hand in constructing our lived world. Nevertheless, human experience, despite all the errors it suffers for presentational immediacy, finds itself in the grip of the vague and unmanageable things gone by.

#### *The Nature of Writing Events and the Composing Life*

Modernism's legacy to writing instruction has come to be called "current-traditional" rhetoric, and to a large extent, this pedagogy is associated with what has come to be called the

*modes of discourse.* One historian of rhetoric describes current-traditionalism this way:

Such convenient abstractions as . . . the forms of discourse were ideally suited to the purpose of instruction in a subject that had been cut off from all relation with other subjects in the curriculum and, in a sense, from life itself. . . . They represent an unrealistic view of the writing process, a view that assumes writing is done by formula and in a social vacuum. They turn the attention of both teacher and student toward an academic exercise instead of toward a meaningful act of communication in a social context. Like Unity-Coherence-Emphasis or any other set of static abstractions concerning writing they substitute mechanical for organic conceptions and therefore distort the real nature of writing. (Kitchhaber 220–21).

In addition to static abstraction, isolation of subjects from experience and life, modernism in composition studies tends to perpetuate a naive or direct realism when it theorizes about the writers relation to the world. Consider, for example, what Sharon Crowley says in her consideration of recent writing theory:

The modern model required a double assurance that human understanding could be brought into direct contact with the things of the world and that the syntactic order of language corresponded in some essential fashion with the ordering of things in nature. Locke grounded this double set of representative relationships in the primacy of sensation: the senses handed over accurate information about the world, which the operations of the mind translated into ideas. (9)

Although Crowley simplifies Locke in this quote to the extent that she has mistakenly represented him as a naive realist, her point that Locke is one source of the modern model still stands.<sup>6</sup> Crowley points also to another consequence of modernist current-traditionalism, which is implied in her quote above: its view of invention "trivializes the process of knowledge acquisition any subject whatsoever can be read up on and mastered for the occasion" (164).

A modernist view of invention (to take just one concern of writing teachers) presupposes a substance rather than a process metaphysics. That is, it assumes a Cartesian self or mind that is independent, requiring nothing other than itself in order to exist. In this way, modernism's principle doctrines contrast sharply with Whitehead's principles of relativity, process, and solidarity outlined above. When this static view of the independent subject is coupled with the modernist close identification of experience with sense perception, what follows is a mechanical view of writing: the senses hand over the sense-data to the mind; the mind transforms this data into novel cognitions through such operations as association, generalization, comparison, contrast, and similar modes of thought. Furthermore, these presumed cognitive operations take over the imaginations of writing teachers. Current-traditional pedagogy thrives exclusively on these mental operations taken as narrow modes of discourse. And finally, modernism fosters the view that writing is a singular set of independent operations rather than a matter of synthesizing a plethora of data presented in experience.

Developing a deconstructive postmodern reaction to current-traditional pedagogy is now a major concern of writing professionals. Karen Burke LeFevre represents a position that embodies some of the Kantian themes I've discussed above. Her view emphasizes the role of language as a foundation for a social perspective on invention and takes a position that involves "Ernst Cassirer's extension of Kant's philosophy to include symbolization and the role of culture in influencing the ways we constitute reality" (96). LeFevre affirms Kant's dualism of things in themselves—the world "out there"—separated

from, as she says, "the a priori categories according to which we construct what we know" (107) and tells readers that "Kant leads us to see that science is used not to study the actual things in the world, but to study our ways of knowing and understanding those things" (108).<sup>7</sup> Although LeFevre repeatedly states Cassirer's conclusion that language "is an active agent in a process of constituting reality" (119) and tells readers that this fact is important to writers and their teachers, she does not embrace the more radical claim that the reality that is not language is of absolutely no importance. LeFevre aims mainly to introduce a social view to balance the long-standing tradition of rhetorical invention as the private act of the individual writer.

James Berlin's deconstructive postmodern argument, however, represents a step beyond LeFevre's moderate (by contrast) Kantian posture. Berlin holds that "the perceiving subject, the discourse communities of which the subject is a part, and the material world itself are all the constructions of an historical discourse, of the ideological formulations inscribed in the language-mediated practical activity of a particular time and place" ("Rhetoric" 489). Our language, according to this view, indeed frames the limits of our knowledge claims. Berlin maintains that

the observer, the discourse community, and the material conditions of existence are all verbal constructs. This does not mean that the three do not exist apart from language: they do. This does mean that we cannot talk and write about them—indeed we cannot know them—apart from language ("Rhetoric" 488).

From a constructive postmodern perspective, Berlin is partially correct: language is symbolic activity and one of the most important tools for eliciting and selecting specific things out of the welter of the vague background in our experience. But he exaggerates. Language, he summarizes, "creates the real world by organizing it, by determining what will be perceived and not perceived, by indicating what has meaning and what is meaningless" ("Composition" 775). Whereas the modernist burdens the isolated and private subject with the sole responsibility for experience, the deconstructive postmodernist more or less takes the world itself to be a product of linguistic processes.

Neither modernism nor deconstructive postmodern philosophy encourages the exploration of causal efficacy and pre-linguistic experience as a valuable resource for writers. Theories about writing like theories of education, typically overlook feeling and pre-linguistic experience. It is time now to suggest some of the possibilities.

#### *The Phenomenology of a Writing Event*

Following Woodhouse and my own explication of causal efficacy, I have argued that feeling and primitive nonsensuous perception are highly relevant to our philosophy and our pedagogy. Physical elation, enjoyment, satisfaction, and even pain, to repeat Woodhouse, "ground all our experience in a direct way to our bodies and, through them, to the world around us" (41). What is missing from prevailing educational theories is a corpus of systematic phenomenologies of learning. Whitehead's philosophy, like Dewey and other constructive postmoderns, always returns to pre-philosophic experience to inherit the full meaning of a theory as well as for suggestion and direction. What writers tell us about writing has been enormously helpful for theory construction, but relative to what happens in raw experience, as theorists we typically focus on high abstractions and miss what is most interesting in experience. The compositionist Peter Elbow suggests that composition studies needs a new kind of concrete evidence.

The nascent interest in phenomenology in the profession is a good sign: a respect for the facts of what actually

happens in writers. We've had a decade of protocol analysis and television cameras trained on writer's, all fueled by a devotion to the facts about the writing process. But feelings are facts, and until this research bothers to investigate the powerful effects that feelings often have on a writer's thoughts and choices, I will have a hard time trusting it. . . . My own investigations show me that feelings often *shape* my cognitive choices. When we get a more careful phenomenological research, I suspect that one result will be to give us more respect for this suspect business of being excited, aroused, carried away, "rolling." (205)

The field of writing could greatly profit from what Nobo calls a "guided phenomenology" whereby the description of an experience such as writing is "guided," in a minimal sense, by metaphysical presuppositions. The idea is that the presuppositions might direct a phenomenological description that can help make us aware of previously unnoticed aspects of our experience. A corpus of composing phenomenologies might suggest to writing professionals a real sense of the importance for what Elbow calls the "dangerous territory" of feeling, felt sense and experience (204). A corpus of phenomenologies might suggest theories that are closer to the lived experience and raw pulses of the composing life. As an alternative to a pedagogy that traffics in high abstractions like "prewrite, write, rewrite," a corpus of good phenomenological descriptions could function for researchers much like a canon does in literary studies or perhaps like case studies do in psychology. Such a corpus could be studied by novices and experts as basic texts that document a theory, while challenging its adequacy.

It is not uncommon to see essays like those in Thomas Waldrup's *Writers on Writing*, but rarely are these authors attempting to write anything like a systematic description of the composing event. There is at least one exception however in Waldrup's collection and I nominate it to my canon of composing phenomenologies: a marvelous piece of work by Louise Wetherbee Phelps entitled "Rhythm and Pattern in a Composing Life." I have discussed this essay elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> What I want to emphasize in this essay is the general sense in which causal efficacy is related to the writer's experience. I should note, by the way, that Phelps's description, as Whiteheadian as it is, was written without knowledge of Whitehead's philosophy.

Phelps begins her description by reminding us of the vastness of the scope of what needs explaining. She writes:

Much of my ongoing composing process is submerged below consciousness and only occasionally and partially rises to the *level of intensity* where it can be felt . . . . In my life as a writer part of the stream of my language is continually being directed in all these ways toward multiple, vaguely anticipated or possible textual events, some of which are gradually discriminated from their matrix and realized as individual entities. I see this enlarged, holistic "composing process" as the primary reality to be explained. (243 my emphasis)

What is suggested by this phenomenology and affirmed when we introduce Whitehead's metaphysics to guide us, is the notion that the roots of creativity reside in the very structures of experience, in the welter of pre-cognitive experience out of which consciousness, language, thought, and writing emerges. *Intensity* is Whitehead's word to capture the character of this emergence. The more novelty that is integrated in the becoming of an actual entity, the more intensity that entity attains in its satisfaction because of the greater degree of contrast these conditions entail. Phelps describes such a moment as "a joyous state of physical excitement and the pure power felt in the stomach and rising up in the chest as a flood of energy that pours out in rapid, explosive bursts of language. It

is a pleasantly nervous state" (247). And then she elaborates: "It means being wide open to stimuli from every direction and source. In this state any experience, no matter how trivial, may suddenly seem strikingly relevant, funneling into the expanding connective web of my thought" (247). Surely Wordsworth would approve, for we can recognize here in an intense but otherwise quite ordinary writing event, something akin to his "spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion." Or if we consider a poet of extreme experience like Emily Dickinson, we have this: "When I feel that the top of my head has been taken off, then I know, this is poetry."

We have elation, enjoyment, satisfaction, and pain. The flow of writing is rarely derivative of ordered forethought. Writing an essay is not a trip to the grocery store. Causal efficacy informs the critical moments of creative work, but it can't be expected to perform on demand in the classroom. We, and our students, need *composing lives*. Here is another glimpse at Phelps:

At any moment in my daily round—fixing dinner, playing ping-pong, listening to music, talking with friends—such moments of composing attention may crystallize in my consciousness as images, fragments of text, shadowy patterns: sometimes transient, merging smoothly back into the verbal background; sometimes fixing themselves in notes or talk or memory; sometimes pursued effortfully through long periods of sustained composition" (242–43).

I have argued above that the principles of *process*, *relativity*, and *solidarity* fundamental in Whitehead's philosophy are also guides for our philosophical foundation as educators. The themes these principles illustrate are varied, but among them is the argument that subjective experience obtains real and efficacious ties to the world in a way that unifies our experience. But more is involved than this, so once again, Phelps' phenomenology illustrates and underscores the nature of the efficacious power (and where it leads) that can be discerned in the unity of our connection to the world about us. Here are her words:

The essence of the generative [writing] moment is experiencing the human power to connect. The small power of my composing is perhaps a very shadowy expression of the unity of being that is felt in profound religious experience—what Freud called the oceanic feeling. It is by nature both an enormous and a diffuse power, because it understands or present everything I know in terms of (ultimately) everything else I know or learn. Nothing is excluded and therefore nothing is selected or directed—except, as we shall see, through the mediation of the structuring moment. Hence to be in the high generative state is to be uncritical, naive, playful, and unfocused. Typically I might wake up from a dream, rush out of the shower, or return from my hour-long commute with my head crammed with inchoate ideas, fragments of phrases, titles, vague patterns that I try quickly to capture in free, telegraphic, idiosyncratic text and, often, little icons—sketches, diagrams, lists. (247–48)

Causal efficacy is elusive. Whitehead warns that it is rarely, if ever, open for inspection in its pure form. Though it fails in precision and immediacy, it generates a diffuse power. A moment of experience begins with the primitive conformation to the past, but its final unity arises out of a conflux of new particulars that will either have their way or they won't. The primitive phases of experience give way to higher phases of selection and determination. If what is prehended in causal efficacy is not to be lost to the useless shadows, the diffuse, naive, playful, and unfocused power of becoming can linger over possibility for only so long before it need be channeled into a determinate and decisive being. Whitehead's *principle of*

process is ineluctable. We corral and harness this concreteness as best we can. That's a writers work. The task begins in shadow and feeling and sometimes crystallizes into icons, sketches, diagrams, and lists. Eventually, if we can turn lose of the powerful feeling, the vagueness will give way to hard-fought selection, definite direction, and a final written product. But ultimately nothing is excluded, and the final edition of this process will include elation, enjoyment, satisfaction, and pain.

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#### References

1. See Griffin for an excellent introduction to these philosophers as constructive postmoderns.
2. Franklin's Whiteheadian analysis of our "Kantian culture" is thorough and insightful. My own development of the consequences of Kant's phenomenal and noumenal worlds is in "New Challenges to Epistemic Theoric."
3. The Association for the Process Philosophy of Education publishes *Process Papers*, an occasional journal devoted to Whitehead, process philosophy, and education. For more information about the association or the journal contact Malcomb Evans at P.O. Box 32, Belle Mead, NJ 08502.
4. In this text I can only appeal to the reader's own phenomenological awareness for evidence of these philosophical doctrines. Their full justification lies in the coherence and applicability of the complete metaphysical scheme.
5. I'm indebted to Jorge L. Nobo for the technical explication of these Whiteheadian principles (see Chapter One). Nobo names creativity, relativity, ontology, and process as the fundamental principles of the organic philosophy. The thesis of solidarity is closely related.
6. For Locke, sensation is only one source of knowledge and sensation does not supply accurate information about the relations of qualities nor about the substances to which these qualities are presumed to relate.
7. LeFevre's conclusion about Kant is not very Kantian. In fact, Kant's first *Critique* affirms the possibility of a "pure" (non empirical) science of nature. I have supplied this quote, in part, to show the influence of Kant on contemporary non-philosophical thought in the academy but also to exemplify the kind of misinterpretations that lead some postmodernists, who think that they are following him, to formulate an idealism and subjectivism that is not even as coherent as Kant's own philosophy.
8. I offer a Whiteheadian appreciation of Phelps' phenomenology in "Lived Experience and the Problem with Invention on Demand."