The Sideshadow Interview: Illuminating Process

Rebecca Luce-Kapler

Rebecca Luce-Kapler, Associate Professor of Language and Literacy, Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Abstract: *Drawing on the conception of the literary sideshadow, the author describes the development of a sideshadowing interview used to investigate the decision-making processes of writers in a research group. To prepare for the interview, the researcher reads and notates the text that she will discuss with the participant using a process of "close reading." Sideshadowing interviews ask not only the "why" but also the "why not" and the "what if" questions, following a process of both prepared questions and conversational discovery. In the interpretation of a sideshadow interview, the researcher describes how this approach characterizes the complexity of a process. Furthermore, the researcher's biases and influences became readily apparent through this analysis. The author suggests that her conception of the sideshadowing interview is a research technique that might offer useful data to qualitative researchers interested in exploring the nature of processes such as writing, reading, or teaching.*

Keywords: *research interviews, writing research, process research*

Citation
Luce-Kapler, R. (2006). The sideshadow interview: Illuminating process. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *5*(1), Article 1. Retrieved [date] from
http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5_1/pdf/luce-kapler.pdf

Introduction

Alan Lightman (1993) imagines dreams that Einstein might have had as he finished the theory of relativity, each one conceptualizing time differently. On April 19, 1905, for instance, the dream begins on a cold November morning after the first snowfall in Berne. A man in a long leather coat is on his balcony staring at a red hat in the snow below as he wonders if he should visit a woman in Fribourg. Finally, he decides not to travel there, because he thinks the woman is manipulative and judgmental and would make him miserable. He goes on with his life, working at the pharmacy, going out with friends, and drinking beer. In 3 years, he meets another woman, who eventually comes to live with him, and they grow old, contented together. Then the dream shifts. "In the second world," Lightman writes, "the man in the long leather coat decides that he must see the Fribourg woman again" (p. 20). He goes to visit her, and they make passionate love. She persuades him to leave his job in Berne and come to live with her. His life is a stormy one filled with arguments, complaints, and sex, yet "he is happy with his anguish" (p. 21). In the third world of the dream, the man also decides to see the woman. He travels to Fribourg; they have tea in her kitchen and visit. Eventually, she tells him that she has to leave to help a friend. They shake hands, and he travels back to Bern feeling empty. Lightman writes,

> These three chains of events all indeed happen, simultaneously. For in this world, time has three dimensions, like space. Just as an object may move in three perpendicular directions, corresponding to horizontal, vertical, and longitudinal, so an object may participate in three perpendicular futures. Each future moves in a different direction of time. Each future is real. At every point of decision, whether to visit a woman in Fribourg or to buy a new coat, the world splits into three worlds, each with the same people but with different fates for those people. In time, there are an infinity of worlds. (pp. 21-22)

This story, like the other dreams in the book, reveals that time is much more than the 24-hour clock that commonly governs our lives. Although it is expedient to measure time in hours or calendar days, Lightman's book reminds us that time has many realms and that each moment holds numerous possibilities.

What fascinates me about Lightman's (1993) stories are his representations of how living is a process of choosing among multiple potentials. By engaging some of those possibilities through creative processes, individuals can develop new insight into directions available for them. In the work I do with my research groups, for instance, I see the potential of moments borne out through the writing. At every word and with every sentence, the writer chooses the direction in which she or he will travel, influencing the shape of the story. Will the narrator linger to describe the lake breezes she is feeling or will she wander away into the woods where someone is waiting? Sometimes, if the writer is basing the work on an actual incident, the choice might seem clear whereas a fictional account can offer greater possibilities. Even so, when writing about an event already lived, the writer often can see the path of decision nestled among alternative pathways.

I searched for a theoretical framework that would assist me in creating a structure for investigating the processes of decision making that illustrated the multiple potentials of the texts created by the writers in my research groups. The most evocative framework I found was Gary Morson's (1994) conception of sideshadowing,[1] a term he created to suggest that there exists a multiplicity of temporalities, each of which has different consequences, as illustrated in Lightman's story about Einstein. Because Morson was most interested in using this conception in his work as a literary theorist, the choice of sideshadowing stood in contrast to the common literary term foreshadowing, which suggests a certain inevitability about events in a text and a backward causation. Sideshadowing, as Morson describes it, casts a light across the present moment in the text to recognize not only the actualities and impossibilities of events but also the shadows of a middle realm where real possibilities exist even if they did not actually occur.

Morson's sideshadowing, I thought, would be an interesting way to approach my participants' texts. On further investigation, I discovered that Welch (1998) had developed the sideshadow concept in

her work with student revision. Her connection of Morson's work to writing was significant to my developing the sideshadowing interviews with writers where I would ask them not only the "why" but also the "why not" and the "what if" questions in an exploration of their process.

Sideshadowing and time in the text

I am intrigued with how the creation of autobiographical and fictional texts helps individuals understand their decision making more clearly and develop a stronger sense of agency (Luce-Kapler, 2004). In my previous work, I realized these kinds of insights more globally; that is, from the writers' overall impressions of the group process and from their interviews about the changes they had observed in themselves through writing (Luce-Kapler, 1999). They tied these realizations not to the texts that they were producing, however, but rather to their personal insights and impressions of the changes in their identity through the writing process. As I became more interested in learning about their process of decision making in the writing of a particular text, I searched for a way to explore this aspect without resorting to the thinking-aloud protocols (Flower & Hayes, 1981), which seemed to interfere with the immediacy of the writing as participants were required to verbalize their thinking process as they write. Furthermore, Flower and Hayes proposed a model of planning and goal setting in the midst of the writing. As Kuhn (n.d.) noted in her study of written responses to hypertext reading, she eventually abandoned the process because she tended to influence the direction of the response and such interference creates an "un-natural quality of the experience, given its clinical nature, and the failure to verify results with the participant" (¶7).

I wanted to focus on the writer's awareness of extant choices in the text, some of which appear at the time of writing but others of which are visible only on reflection once a particular path is taken. There is a clarity of potential depths and directions for the text once the intensity of creative decision making has passed, as those who have engaged in serious revision processes understand. Through such a reflective process, I wished to give a deeper and stronger focus to revision possibilities as well as interpreting the experience from different viewpoints. It was the conception of the sideshadow that suggested a way to structure such a process.

In *Narrative and Freedom*, Morson explained that our use of narrative (at least the Western use) has worked very well to create a single line out of a multiplicity of alternatives, but in doing so, we have tended to give an anachronistic sense to the past, shutting down the more complex and plural nature of experience. It is not surprising that this happens because our minds can consciously entertain only a few possibilities at any one time. We tend to focus on specific details, making links between them and developing a thread to shape the event in a more or less linear path. In our communication with others, we have learned that a few well-chosen and connected details will ensure greater understanding, and in our stories, we generally interpret events from our history of past interactions and experiences that determine the shape of their telling. This is not to say that we are unable to interpret or write about experience from multiple perspectives but, rather, that the common approach is a more singular vision.

I employ a number of writing practices that encourage writers to broaden their perspectives. In one practice, I ask them to create a descriptive passage about a place they know or imagine. Afterward, I give them a list of characters from which they choose one individual. The characters are quite narrowly defined (e.g., a young woman who has just done a terrible deed or an old man who has learned some joyful news). The writers then rewrite their piece, describing it entirely from that character's perspective. Very quickly, they realize that the choices they made as narrators of their place differ from the choices their characters will make.

"Choice is *momentous*. It involves *presentness*," Morson wrote (p. 22, emphasis in original). In each moment of writing, choices exist. Only through such a process of "unpredetermined becoming" can there be any real creativity (p. 24). Unfolding along a determined sequence toward an existing conclusion does not allow for multiple possibilities.

Novelists (as well as other writers) have long been aware of the multiple pathways available for their characters and, hence, for the author. To exemplify sideshadowing in literary texts, Morson, as an expert in Russian literature, drew on the work of Tolstoy and Doestoevsky, the latter of whom "insisted

that life must be an open process, and some of the most remarkable passages in his works defend this view" (p. 9). Dostoevsky's characters are some of the more complex manifestations of the effects of choices made and not made. For instance, the chronicler in *The Possessed*, who is a resident in the town where the story takes place, tells the reader what might have happened or what could have happened whereas the actions he describes are often checked impulses, which might have been possibilities contemplated but were not actualized (p. 120).

Although Morson focused on an accomplished author who represents the richness of choice through the characters in his novel to argue his point, he also noted that such potential exists in most narratives, albeit unwritten or unspoken. Embedded within every text are landscapes of directions taken and the shadows of those unrealized. In developing his understanding of textual choices, Morson was influenced by the work of Bakhtin (1981), who described how different genres define a field of possibilities; that is, there is a particular time and space available in which events can occur—what Bakhtin called a chronotope. Bakhtin was interested in how all contexts are shaped by the kind of time and space that operates within them. The chronotope arose from his understanding that organisms rely on a variety of rhythms that differ from each other and from those of other organisms. Time and space vary in qualities, he suggested, and different activities and representations of those activities presume different kinds of time and space (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 367).

These chronotopes of living serve as the source of representation for chronotopes in literary texts where, as Bakhtin explained, "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (1981, p. 84). This time/space relation in texts is always perceived in the context of a larger set of time/space relations of the social and historical environment in which it is written and in which it is read (Holquist, 1990). A chronotope, then, not only combines spatial and temporal factors but also includes an evaluation of those factors' significance from a particular point of view, creating a "ground for the . . . representability of events" (Morson, 1994, p. 106). In developing a narrative, writers envisage certain potentials within that genre's shape, history of usage and reception as well as their own histories. They come to their narratives with a particular understanding about what narratives can or should accomplish.

Morson's concern (like Bakhtin's [1981]) is how some cultural understandings of writing and text limit or close down time, eliminating its processual nature and inhibiting creative exploration. Seeing only one outcome or following a determined path leads one to believe that there are few, if any, choices beyond the one seemingly given; hence, the possibilities for thoughtful action are narrowed.

An example of limiting possibilities in texts occurs in the overuse of a plot diagram to teach story structure in school. Based on Freytag's pyramid (Wheeler, 2006), this diagram describes a beginning complication, rising action, a climax, and a denouement. Although this structure is helpful for understanding some stories, it does not describe all stories; neither can one overlook the point that this structure was originally an interpretive one for drama. In the plot diagram, time appears linear, and events contribute to the rising of suspense and the ultimate resolution. In such a structure, some events might seem inevitable and other choices remain submerged. Instead, within a text there are the choices taken and those passed over, yet even unactualized possibilities can leave their mark on history. A present, therefore, can grow partly from an unrealized past.

The trace of paths taken (light) and untaken (shadow) in a text, when recognized,

> leads to the subjunctive and the contrary-to-fact conditional: what if, if only had it not been, were it not for—what would have taken place then? . . . Sideshadowing restores the possibility of possibility. Its most fundamental lesson is: to understand a moment is to grasp not only what did happen but also what might have happened. (Morson, 1994, pp. 118-119)

Within a text every choice the writer has made embodies within it those that he did not follow.

Focusing on the sideshadow of the text deepens our sense of time's openness. Morson submitted that sideshadowing has

> profound implications for our understanding of history and of our own lives while affecting the ways in which we judge our present situation. It also encourages skepticism

about our ability to know the future and the wisdom of projecting straight lines from current trends or values. (p. 6).

Texts are sites of contingency and possibility. Different from our lived experience, writing offers time to imagine the fullness of time and the patterns of choice. Within the subjunctive spaces of writing, (Luce-Kapler, 1999, 2004), one can realize the complexity of experience, whereas the very openness of writing and the consideration of possibilities question what we have assumed.

Welch (1998) described how she developed a revision process from Morson's conception of sideshadowing for teachers to use in their work with student writers. She noted the tendency of teachers to bring an "ideal text" to their reading of student work, and as she began to read her own student's work, she reminded herself,

> Bill's words dramatize Bakhtin's, telling me that reality as we have it in a student's essay is likewise not inevitable, not arbitrary; this single paragraph bears within itself many possible realities, or, more accurately, many competing ideas of and forms for composing reality. (p. 374)

Her work with sideshadowing opened up a more dialogic, less directive, and more open-ended conversation with the student text, where jottings in the margins are from both teacher and student—a negotiation rather than a prescribed direction. Her students reflected on their texts in the margins, and she, as teacher, engaged with this exploration of possibility by writing responses, posing questions, and making comments. Such conversations open up the potential of the text, both past and future, and help to clarify the author's current choices. Through this collaborative work, multiple interpretations are encouraged and alternatives examined, enabling the writer to determine the center of gravity that brings a coherent pattern to her or his text.

For my interviews with writing participants, I brought a desire to explore the open and subjunctive nature of texts informed by Morson as well as the example of Welch (1998) in her work with writers, teachers and revision. Bringing together the dialogic nature of Welch's response together with the richness of textual possibilities highlighted by Bakhtin and Morson, I developed what I have come to call the "sideshadowing interview."

Preparing for the sideshadowing interview

Sideshadowing interviews involve the researcher first carefully reading a participant's text and then reviewing that text with her or him using both prepared questions and conversational discovery. In preparing for the interviews, I follow Welch's (1993) suggestion that the "genuine question has the heuristic power to awaken new words and evoke response" (p. 9) and spend time carefully reading and rereading the texts my participants write for the research group. I work to engage in what Gallop (2000) has called close reading, whereby the reader stays attentive to her own assumptions and separates those anticipations from the actual words on the page. As Gallop noted, "It means noticing things in the writing, things in the writing that stand out" (p. 7). Furthermore, I am attentive for what Welch (1993) has called "cultural and ideological overtones." As she explained, "At the very least, readers can hear on the contours of the words suggestive overtones about the joining of people, the formation of community, the sometimes mysterious and sometimes stifling creation and continuation of belief, order, and culture" (p. 5).

I have found that this process of reading requires one to reread the text several times, and even then, I know, as the example of the interview in this article will show, I cannot be aware of all my assumptions and anticipations that are influencing my reading.

As I read, I mark places where I wonder about words they have chosen, where I find myself thinking about what was not said, or where I see interesting figurative devices. I note choices of line break if the offering is a poem, and for all texts, I watch for places where the rhythm shifts or falters or where images are particularly striking. I plan for each interview to be between 1 and 2 hours, as we give the text our careful attention, spilling a sideshadow across the page to notice the interpretive possibilities, both

those taken and those untaken, as we break the line of the narrative and a singular notion of writing. I want the sideshadowing process to "conjure the ghostly presence of might-have-beens or might bes" (Morson, 1994, p. 118), seeing what did happen and what could have happened—the hypothetical shadowing the actual.

The first instance of sideshadowing

To illustrate best the effects of the sideshadow, I refer to the research project for which I first developed the process. The study was a 3-year process whereby 33 teacher candidates in English education and curriculum graduate students participated in small writing groups. I structured the groups to have no more than seven participants (many were smaller), divided participants according to gender (i.e., all-male or all-female groups), and invited graduate students who had already gone through the process to lead the groups. Over the course of eight meetings, the individuals chose a significant incident in their lives and wrote about that event through three forms: narrative (2 pages), poetry, and hypermedia software Hyperstudio. The groups wrote together, discussed the work, and developed conceptions of writing processes that might influence their future teaching practice. The primary objective of the study was to investigate how teacher candidates' awareness of the relationship between the forms of writing and understanding could be enhanced through this structure of writing practices and participation in the groups.

The sideshadowing interviews were my opportunity to explore their understanding of writing processes in more depth and to contribute to their textual awareness. Each participant chose one of the two print texts that he or she had written and gave it to me in advance of the interview. (The hypermedia texts were not used for this phase of the study.) In what follows, I describe and represent the circumstances and data from one participant's interview.[2] Although I have 33 such interviews, the representation of these events is lengthy, as will become evident. For this article, I have chosen one of the more evocative texts from a woman I have named Elizabeth.

Elizabeth and "Chez Nous"

Elizabeth was an enthusiastic writer who had come back to university at the age of 28 to become an English teacher. At the time of the study, she was a student in my creative writing class. Before we discussed her story, she told me that she was part of another writing group outside the study as a way

> to kind of keep it alive, to continue writing. You know, being forced to write in journal. It's important not just for myself to nurture my own kind of writing or creative soul but also to stand up in front of 30 kids and tell them to write and be doing it myself.

She mentioned, too, that she was one of 11 children in her family, and it was this circumstance that prompted her choice of writing topic and the story, "Chez Nous." "I find people are so interested in this story," she said. "Not only do I love telling this story, but people loved it. They ask me all the time 'how many siblings do you have?' They are fascinated; they want to hear more."

In Elizabeth's short narrative, she takes a "camera-like" perspective and moves through the house where she and her sibling grew up. As she describes specific details, we come to envisage not only the life within the house but the life of the house itself:

> Cups tumble in dresser drawers, crayons roll in saucepans, pears rest in laundry hampers and children fill the cracks of everything in-between: they are out on branches, in dryers, beside door frames, wrapped in quilts. They are quick and small and soft and loud. They fill lukewarm tubs in threes, surrounded by floating blank-faced Barbies and play gardening tools. They crouch at the driveway's end, in twos, frying unlucky ants with sneaked magnifying glasses. They scamper, one by one, under the enormous kitchen table to look up at multiple gobs of hidden chewing gum, all the colours of the

rainbow. A light smell of baby-poo and peanut butter dominates the middle floor, upstairs it's Ivory soap and dust, in the basement it's apples and earth. (Elizabeth, "Chez Nous")

The sideshadowing interview

After some general conversation, I opened the interview as I did with all participants by asking the writer to talk about the group process and how she felt working within such a structure. (I had found that this was a good way to get the participants talking and feeling comfortable before turning our attention to their writing. Often, something they said in response gave a clue about where we might start talking about their writing.)

As we turned our attention to Elizabeth's writing, I asked her some general questions, such as how she began the writing and her motivation for writing on this topic. Starting generally opened up the possibility for the writer to pinpoint aspects of the text she wanted to talk about in particular. Then we focused on specific details in the text, where, for instance, I asked about images she had chosen. As we examined some of the specifics of the text, we explored some other directions she could have taken, and I offered some feedback as a reader of the work as the focus shifted to my reception of her work. The interview ended with Elizabeth thinking aloud about the possible directions for her text and how she now understood the work after our conversation.

When I revisited the transcript of our interview and read it within the context of the other sideshadowing interviews, I discovered a pattern in all of the conversations the participants and I created. Initially, when I prepared by closely reading the text, I imagined two aspects to the interview: the global questions about the process of the writing the piece and the detailed ones about decisions of image, character, rhythm, and plot, leading to a discussion of possible choices and directions. What I had not anticipated in my preparation for the interview was a discussion about the responses by other readers both within and outside the writing group. The discussion of reader response added another dimension to the consideration of choices within the text, as those ideas sometimes opened up new directions for the writing or confirmed the choices already made. Furthermore, I was astounded at some spots where I seemed overly directing and anything but open to the writer's exploration. I realized that this style of interview highlighted the possibilities and processes not only for the participant but also for the researcher. To exemplify these perspectives of the text, I take a closer look at my interview with Elizabeth, but first a word about how I present the data.

I find it difficult to rely entirely on discrete quotations pulled from a transcript when describing sideshadowing, because I find that the interviews are developmental in nature. As we begin from a distance and move closer to the details, the conversation starts and stops. We revisit themes; the writer fills her responses with verbal hesitations and moments of silence as she thinks deeply about her work, considering ideas often for the first time. A more detailed look at a section of transcript serves as an example:

> R: You're very careful about the detail and I think you look for contrast or it seems that you do. I don't know if you do so deliberately. You've got the images of "wiping the little bum." That's great. Then you said it smells of Ivory soap and dust up here. So you know, in our head, we have another smell. You bring in that smell. It's really an interesting kind of contrast because it surprises us. And it's nice because it shifts that focus away from—
>
> E: From the bum.
>
> R: From the bum. But it works you know.
>
> E: Oh, okay. I didn't think that's what you were going to say. I realize that when I wrote my—that's a pretty strong image. Like having to wipe little kid's butts.
>
> R: But that's the reality right?

> *E:* Yeah. Yeah. And then I thought I'll talk about the smell really should be the baby poo, should be here but didn't. The upstairs didn't smell like baby poo, but the middle did.
>
> *R:* But I think that shift is good because it surprises us because we are expecting one thing and then you tell us a smell like Ivory soap which is a very distinct smell.
>
> *E:* Yeah.
>
> *R:* So you thought about that pretty deliberately?
>
> *E:* I had to be true to the place. It's like, I started laughing when the image of the kid—oh, I have to put that in. That was, it was like, I've forgotten that part. But it happens so much. Downstairs you just hear, "Could somebody come and wipe my bum?" It happened so often and I didn't hear it. When I was doing this tour of the house, I went in there and that's what I saw. Oh that's a mental thing. I didn't hear that call for assistance. [sighs] Oh yeah. That's true. But I had to be true to the place in that smell.

Over the course of our interview, the rhythm at times stutters and the ideas meander, even though there are specific themes to be garnered. To illustrate the insights from our conversation most fully, I wrote a representational piece, using what Cheney (2000) has called "creative nonfiction." This genre "tells a story using facts, but uses many of the techniques of fiction for its compelling qualities and emotional vibrancy" (p. 1), engaging the reader in a more textured experience with the data (see also Richardson, 2000; Rinehart, 1998). The result was what Fowler (personal correspondence, 2004) has called a narrative trope.[3] She described such pieces as short narrative writings that represent understandings from some other event or process; in short, a metaphorical process. In the piece that follows, I needed to bring the reader with me through the chronology of our discussion. By representing some of the dialogue and excerpts from my field notes through exposition and description, I hoped to invite the reader to see the texture of the interview and to recognize the intertwining of themes and the coming to understanding that was evident to me by reading the entire transcript.

Dwelling in "Chez Nous"

Early in the new term, Elizabeth knocks on my office door for her sideshadowing interview. Five sessions of writing over the fall term are behind her, and she has given me one outcome from that work: "Chez Nous." Elizabeth is full of energy, excited about having the chance to speak to me for an extended time about her narrative and her participation. This is my second sideshadowing interview, and I am still not comfortable shifting from friendly small talk to "research talk." I tell my recorder, "This is my interview with Elizabeth."

"I am pretty forgettable. It's a good idea to note that," she says pleasantly.

I stumble for a moment, sorry that I have made her feel that I will not remember her. I offer an explanation about needing to be sure who is speaking when I listen to the tapes that I might not hear for nearly a year. I remember that her story is about a house full of kids. Perhaps she is used to getting lost in the crowd.

For a few more minutes, we chat about the beginning of the term, how she is running a tree-planting camp in preparation for summer, and the work she is doing in her English curriculum class. Then, without any effort on my part, we slide into talking about writing, as she mentions her creative writing presentation for the class.

"Today I talked about my own personal kind of philosophy of creative writing," she tells me. "I guess about creation and what creative means."

She talks a bit about teaching drama and her philosophy of teaching, and I realize that Elizabeth has been thinking a great deal about the importance of being a teacher and that she sees the role as much more than knowing what to hand out or write on the board. She envisions teaching as hopeful, creative, and life restoring. This point of view is not one that many of my students dwell on during a busy year.

They are more concerned about knowing what to do in the classroom with the students than about the philosophical questions of learning and teaching.

I ask her about the writing group and how it is contributing to her thinking about teaching. She agrees that it is an important learning opportunity for her. "I am comfortable writing but by no means a better writer than anyone in the group. What the other guys produce is amazing, but some of them are not very confident. It's interesting being with people like that because I can know that's how our students are going to feel. Like a reminder."

I ask her if she is ready to focus on "Chez Nous," and she agrees.

"Tell me about the writing of this," I say. "Where did it come from? Did you use a prompt?"

"When G [the group leader] said that you need to choose a subject that you're going to stick with, I kind of cut to the quick. . . . I considered writing about this because I find that people are so interested in the story. People asked me all the time things like 'how many siblings?' They're fascinated; they want to hear more. . . . It's been in my mind because I lived there for 20 years . . . The writing of it, the way it moves through the house was really easy . . . I started out from the house like a lot of films will do. They give you a look at the house and then move in . . . It's maybe that I'm a big film buff too. I thought maybe that's where the idea came from . . . I think some of the most effective metaphors in here didn't come through editing of every version. I think the most striking ones came the quickest."

"You were right there?"

"Immediately," she tells me. "This was all written in one go too."

Choosing to write from her perspective of a member of a large family enabled Elizabeth to respond quickly, as the possibilities for the story were rich. I was interested in Elizabeth's filmic perspective, as it seemed to replicate our process of considering her text: long shot with a move in for the close-up. Such a view also offered a sense that different perspectives were available to understand the story.

"This is very film-like," I tell her, indicating the entire piece. "It's almost like a walking camera."

"I guess I just went into the house like I was just thinking about the one bedroom. I was going to start with just having the one bedroom and the four sisters, the bedroom the four of us shared. But there's too much fun. I want to talk about the kitchen and the downstairs too, so I just mentally moved through and out the back basement door to the outside and then back through the front door again."

Two years ago, her family moved away from the home and out of the province. The younger members of the family went with the parents, but a number of the older ones remained behind, including Elizabeth. She explains how since that event, she has realized the mythical presence of the house.

"We moved out of our childhood home that had kind of reached mythological proportions.…There was a big window in front that never had any curtain. I don't know why. There it was like a television screen. People drove by very slowly and looked in all the time and we would perform sometimes—if we saw people."

She again admits that she has done almost no editing—just moved through the piece as through her memory. "The writing of it, the way it moves through the house was really easy. I just started there."

I do not want to ask if she has thought about revisions—at least not yet. I want to keep our exploration open, keep the possibilities shimmering through the text, so I ask about specific aspects of the text.

"So tell me about your sense of the narrator. You have chosen first person but who do you think the narrator is?"

"Initially it was me when I was about 12 because I thought it was cool when I was growing up."

"So it is a character from your memory who is you?"

"When I was immersed in it, like in the grasp of the family I couldn't ever extract myself because I never can when I'm in the situation. Now I close my eyes and I can reflect back."

We spend a few moments exploring why she has chosen this particular age; I wonder about its resonance for her.

"When I was about 12 or 13," she says, "I remember being embarrassed about my family. There's a period when my family would go to Ponderosa [a restaurant] because kids could eat free."

She debates about what might have happened if she had chosen other ages. "Now of course, my family is such a source of pride," she says, implying that a narrator at that age would have said different things about "Chez Nous," and yet I can read that pride beneath the sardonic eye of the 12-year-old. Elizabeth is really using an adult narrator remembering the past.

This uncertainty about narrative voice becomes apparent to me near the end of the piece, when the perspective shifts and the narrator suddenly moves from behind the camera to being in front.

"I did that because it felt a little distant," Elizabeth tells me. "I think that's why at the end I talked about how I dashed upstairs all of a sudden. It's me acting. It's not just me leading you. But I go upstairs to make a puppet for my little sisters because that's who I was, that was always who I was, doing stuff for them."

It is clear that there is more than one age, even more than one self that appears in the text. It is not Elizabeth at 12, but Elizabeth remembering 12 as well as 13 and 20 and 28. Like many writers who are just beginning or who start to explore a piece from experience, the possible selves can shift throughout the piece, making the character of the narrator fleeting and somewhat ghostly. I think that perhaps in the past, as a writing teacher, I was in too much hurry to have them "pin down" their character. I realize that my exploration of the narrator(s) with Elizabeth is perhaps more fruitful because that character is still multivoiced. I wonder if more thoughtful consideration of the possibilities would result in a deeper sense of the narrator in future drafts. Another indication of the shifting viewpoint is evident in her description of her siblings.

"I understand what you are doing here," I say, "and I like that kind of set up, but somewhere you need to be clear that there's more than three kids in the house."

"That's a good point."

"You know how many there are so you forget about it. And it's clear that there's more because you say that there's a bedroom with four tall girls and then there's five other bedrooms . . . so clearly a number of kids are here, but it's not entirely clear how many. And I think that's important."

"Yeah. That helps too with my use of numbers because I do say they fill tubs in threes, they crouch in driveways in twos, they scamper one by one. So I'm using numbers but . . . "

"It's never clear. You can decide how you want to do that. It's just that it's more effective when you know, when you have that contrast between the three kids and the 11. It's a much bigger contrast than what it feels like at first."

"That didn't even occur to me," Elizabeth admits.

"Of course not because you know."

We pause for a moment, and I reread a paragraph as she makes some notes on her page, and then we move from characters to metaphors. She has used the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Empire State Building as points of comparison for the house, and this leads us to think about the structure metaphors at work in her text.

"Just another image I wondered about," I say to her. "You write 'the assembly of stuff is somewhat backward here, odd, as if someone has taken our home and given it a little shake and let the contents fall about the place how it would.' Tell me what you're thinking when you're saying 'assembly of stuff?' "

"It's not assemble like . . . it's like those stupid little Christmas balls that you shake in the snowfall."

"Snow globes?"

"The snow globe. I thought of the shake because there's so much surprise in the house, but the assembly, I guess the way it's assembled is like thinking of the house as, and it is almost like a, what's the word? Not grotesque but like obscured. It's an obscured normal house. There isn't a Mom, a Dad, three kids. It's like it's taking that normal house and shaking it up like and set it down . . . There's still a fridge. The content is still there. But the assembly of them, like thinking of the house, almost like a doll house. But somebody like little kids has been playing with the doll house which literally is what happens. . . . So that's why there's a banana in the car and a bra under the couch," she adds.

I tell her that I think the word "assembly" is what throws me off because it suggests a very particular order.

She thinks for a moment. "And it just falls as it should. Yeah," she says.

"Maybe just taking the word 'assembly' will do it. When you write 'the stuff is somewhat backward here, odd, as if someone is taking this home and giving a little shake,' we don't have that orderly assembly vision."

"I agree with you, but I guess I was thinking things have been actually assembled though obviously somebody did come and shake it around. Kids do assemble things. They do strange things like take out the pots and lay their crayons in them and then put them back."

"Okay," I say, but she can tell in my voice that I am not entirely convinced.

"It's so natural. You know, no assembly required. They actually did put the pear in the clothes hamper."

"Well maybe you can think some more about the image and how you might talk about it. Maybe you just need to say more."

We continue our conversation about her choice of the word *assembly*. I am explaining how I interpreted the word as a reader, and she continues to explain what she meant. In a search to explain my dissonance about assembly, I say, "There's something very Dr. Seuss about this description."[4]

Elizabeth is not happy with such a comparison until I explain that I was thinking of how he put quirky details about place in his writing. At this point, she agrees. "That kind of detail really makes these places come alive. . . . They characterize the house and make it something unusual or different," I suggest.

We continue to mull over how the house could be described, and I realize that the house is perhaps the most important character in this story for Elizabeth. I tell her, "It feels like a time shift here. You talk generally about this house and then you say: 'There're three floors to explore here.' You give us the lay of the land and now you're moving in. Was that what you were planning to do at this point?"

"Yeah, kind of. But I don't like 'there're three floors here.' That's boring."

"Whether you like it or not, it does shift everything into focus."

"Right. Such things like Dr. Seuss does, for example. He does that seamlessly. He never has to give directions."

Elizabeth has picked up my comparison to Dr. Seuss, and I wonder if I should have even mentioned something so specific. During the sideshadowing interview, I find it a difficult balance to highlight characteristics of the text and encourage writers' responses without being overly directive and interpretative. After reading the texts carefully, a reader naturally wants to respond with her understandings. Bringing knowledge as a writer to the discussion is also important, but both of those aspects need to be used to encourage the writer to plumb the depth and breadth of her text and not reflect the researcher's vision.

As the interview begins to draw to a close, Elizabeth reveals her awareness of other readers and shifts the perspective outside the text for a few moments as she mentions how others in the group have agreed with my observations about the narrator, and she tells me about her mother's response to the text. "When my mom read this, she liked the tired photos like badges because she said, 'How did you know that's kind of how I felt?' She would pin them up there. She's always proud of her kids, whatever. I said, 'Mom, I didn't think of yours. It was like when I was little, I needed to look up and if you got your picture there it was like a badge of honor. That's the idea I am trying to get across. It wasn't about you at all, Mom, actually.' "

This comment brings us back to the character and from whose point of view the story is told. Elizabeth leaves telling me she is thinking about how to create a strong and cohesive character for her story—both for the narrator and the house.

Casting a sideshadow on the interview

In rereading the last line of the narrative, I am in doubt again about my role in this interview. How closely was I able to highlight the light and shadow—both those actions taken and those left as potentials? There are moments when I feel that I have been too swift to shape Elizabeth's narrative into my long-held notions of "good" writing; that is, cohesive stories, strong characters, and consistent metaphors. It seems the sideshadow interview is a negotiated text (Fontana & Frey, 2000) that illuminates not only the writer's processes but also those of the writing teacher and the interviewer.

In my previous studies of writing, I used semistructured interviews that focused on participant's impressions of the writing process in school (Luce-Kapler, 1994) or on their understandings of how particular writing events had offered personal insights (Luce-Kapler, 1997, 2004). In those instances, I was prepared to listen to their stories and asked only clarifying questions. With the sideshadowing interviews, I spent time considering and reading their texts—reading them deeply. I came to the interview with specific ideas about their writing just as they came after having spent time imagining, writing, and reading their work in a group.

Nevertheless, I did not have a strong sense of this negotiated text when I first read the transcript. I focused on what Elizabeth was saying about her writing and only occasionally cringed at my comments (cf. Dr. Seuss). It was when I brought the transcript, my field notes, and interpretations together in a narrative trope that I was able to clearly see the potentials that I did not follow and the places where I insisted on a particular potential without regard for the writer's response.

In a way that was not possible by simply reading and coding the transcript, I had to make connections between seemingly disparate bits of dialogue and search for the threads of our conversation. Weaving these pieces into a story has enabled me to realize more fully the emerging understanding as Elizabeth and I explore her text. By creating a narrative trope, I faced the complex and plural nature of our conversation and reflected on my role as a researcher by acknowledging how my choice of detail influenced the writer's response. For instance, I am appalled at how my insistence that *assembly* was the wrong word really interfered with my desire for Elizabeth to explore possibilities and led to the ill-considered Dr. Seuss comparison. At the same time, I noted that my follow-up on her identification of the filmic metaphor at work in her writing was the type of comment that opened up an interesting conversation about perspective in the piece. That moment was an instance where I took my cue from Elizabeth and listened more carefully. Within such a context, I was able to offer my perspective as a writer and reader in a way that was appreciated and useful. It seems that in writing interviews, I tread the line of teacher and interviewer; editor and reader. Inhabiting such a space is much more difficult than I appreciated at the time of these interviews, and it is a space that remained entirely unacknowledged in my previous interviews with writers. I have come to realize that the sideshadowing interview discomfits me and demands reflexivity (Dingwall, 1997; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998).

This awareness grew as I prepared the narrative trope to represent the interview to readers. van Manen (2002) explained that a critical part of research is the writing. Insights "depend on the right words and phrases, on styles and traditions, on metaphor and figures of speech, on argument and poetic image" (p. 237). Nevertheless, he warned that writing can be both insight and illusion. Although my writing of the sideshadowing interview revealed both insight and (dis)illusion for me, I have offered only one interpretation, using particular images and literary structures. Yet, no matter how I choose to represent those moments, there will always be a "residue of ambiguity" (Fontana & Frey, p. 645) as other interpretations emerge. Each time I read the narrative trope, I understand the text differently and see other possibilities in the midst of our conversation even as I recognize other aspects of myself as a researcher, writer and teacher. For me, it has become a teaching text for how I might work with students and engage with their writing.

In spite of my overdetermining comments during our interview, I do believe that Elizabeth (and the other participants) had the opportunity to consider their texts more broadly than otherwise. For example, Elizabeth took notes at times as we spoke, and her voice on the tape had an energy that suggested she was deeply engaged in the process. Later, she and other participants expressed appreciation for having time to explore their texts in depth with me. Admittedly, this consideration was more pleasant because they were not required to make revisions and the pieces were not ones created for assessment. Nevertheless, I associated their responses to times when I had had conversations with individuals who had considered my work carefully and remembered the pleasure in receiving that focused attention. A thoughtful suggestion that opens up the possible moments in the text can be a rich gift for a writer that spurs on his or her writing, just as an ill-considered comment can block alternatives.

By approaching the work with a view to exposing its multiplicity of direction, I noted that the process required Elizabeth and me to shift between the metonymic and the metaphoric. We looked at a particular element of the writing and how it is realized (the metonymic) and then considered how it influenced the piece as a whole (the metaphoric), such as with the discussion about her filmic perspective or when we considered the different manifestations of Elizabeth's narrator. We traced how each contributed to the character of the narrator—a narrator that she hoped represented her 12-year-old self. As we examined the choices she made and thought about the character that was developing, it became clear to her and to me that the narrator was still fragmented and unclear. Elizabeth began to consider the variety of choices to develop the voice she wanted in her story.

In Lightman's (1993) story, too, his character has different choices for direction, each event qualitatively different and each leading to quite a different existence. This fluid conception of the shape of one's life and the potential of moments is one that, when brought to writing, opens up the process of revi-

sion and the many dimensions of a text. Although I had first appreciated Morson's conception of the sideshadow as an approach that represented the rich potential of texts, the sideshadowing interview had unexpected results for me. I came to appreciate how such work is an interaction that leads to "negotiated, contextually-based results" (Fontana & Frey, p. 646), whereby not only the participant but the researcher is put under scrutiny. This process created data that were more nuanced and available for deeper interpretation than my previous data sets. Although it certainly gave me more insight into writers' processes, it also subjected my own biases to the light and shadow. From my perspective, this deepens what Varela (1999) has called ethical know-how. Not only does careful choice of form help to create a more authentic representation, it also engages researchers in a complex consideration of the data as they examine and interpret them from different perspectives within differing contexts—both their own and their participants'. In my experience, it is such a cycle of recursive interpretation where deepest insights come. As philosopher Zwicky (2003) has written,

> Recognition," even in apparently straightforward cases, involves re-organization of experience—an act of contextualization, a sensing of connexions between aspects of immediate experience and other experiences. Thus, the experiences of seeing how an assemblage of parts must go together, recognizing an old friend in an unfamiliar setting, and understanding a metaphor are species of the same phenomenon. They all involve insight, understood as re-cognition; a gestalt shift. (p. 1)

Ethical behavior arises not from habit or obedience to patterns or rules, Varela (1999) wrote, but from intelligently guiding our actions in harmony with the texture of the situation. Attending closely to that texture through a sideshadowing process enables the researcher and the participants to perceive what is unfolding before them, understand the possibilities, and then thoughtfully respond with what Zwicky (2003) called a sensitivity to resonance. Choice is momentous and does demand our attention in the present. By turning our focus to the process of choosing and by pointing to multiple directions, we cast a light and create a sideshadow that distinguishes alternative pathways for our acting and brings thoughtfulness to our work that comes with such awareness.

Notes

1. All subsequent references to Morson refer to this work unless otherwise specified.

2. The data that I am presenting are used according the permission granted by the participants and within the ethical guidelines of Queen's University.

3. *Narrative trope* is a term that Leah Fowler from the University of Lethbridge has been thinking about for some time. I thank her for sharing the idea with me.

4. Theodor Seuss Geisel was better known by his pen name, Dr. Seuss. He was an American writer famous for his children's books such as *The Cat in the Hat* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas.*

References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination* (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Cheney, T. A. R. (2001). *Writing creative nonfiction: Fiction techniques for crafting great nonfiction*. Toronto, Canada: Ten Speed.

Dingwall, R. (1997). Accounts, interviews, and observations. In G. Miller & R. Dingwall (Eds.), *Context and method in qualitative research* (pp. 51-65). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, *31*(1), 365-387.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2000). The interview: From structure questions to negotiated text. In N. K. Denzin & Y S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 645-672). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gallop, J. (2000). The ethics of close reading: Close encounters. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, *17*(3), 7-17.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1998). Narrative practice and the coherence of personal stories. *Sociological Quarterly*, *39*, 163-187.

Holquist, M. (1990). *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*. New York: Routledge.

Kuhn, V. (n.d.). *Five student readings of* Afternoon, a Story. Retrieved November 21, 2003, from http://www. uwm.edu/~vkuhn/mamethod.html

Lightman, A. (1993). *Einstein's dreams*. New York: Warner.

Luce-Kapler, R. (1994). *Never stepping in the same river twice: Teaching and writing in school*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

Luce-Kapler, R. (1997). *As if women writing*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

Luce-Kapler, R. (1999). As if women writing. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *31*, 267-291.

Luce-Kapler, R. (2004). *Writing with, through, and beyond the text: An ecology of writing*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Morson, G. (1994). *Narrative and freedom: The shadows of time*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Morson, G., & Emerson, C. (1990). *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 923-948). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rinehart, R. (1998). Fictional methods in ethnography: Believability, specks of glass, and Chekhov. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *4*, 200-224.

van Manen, M. (2002). Writing in the dark. In M. van Manen (Ed.), *Writing in the dark* (pp. 237-252). London, Canada: Althouse.

Varela, F. J. (1999). *Ethical know-how: Action, wisdom, and cognition*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Welch, N. (1993). One student's many voices: Reading, writing and responding with Bakhtin. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, *13*. Retrieved November 24, 2003, from http://jac.gsu.edu/jac/13.2/Articles/12htm

Welch, N. (1998). Sideshadowing teacher response. *College English*, *60*, 374-395.

Wheeler, L. K. (2006). *Freytag's pyramid*. Retrieved March 23, 2006, from http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/freytag. html

Zwicky, J. (2003). *Wisdom and metaphor*. Kentville, Canada: Gaspereau.