

## The University and the White, Rural Male

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*Howley (1997) argues that rural education has its own legitimate place in educational research. He questions the idea that rural schools must mirror their cosmopolitan counterparts in order to achieve educational excellence. In short, he suggests that institutions and their affiliated educational researchers need to rethink their own positions on the issues connected to rural education and its students.*

*The following is a result of a year-long study on the interaction between a rural student and his first-year composition professor. The struggles of this nontraditional university student, along with the idea of audience, language forms, and adaptation to a new culture, suggest that the burden of change is not the student's alone. The university itself must learn to recognize, acknowledge, and work within all students' potential for academic success.*

When I was a high school English teacher in a rural town of 7,000 people, I was always dismayed when our academically promising seniors rarely chose to attend our flagship state university, SFU.<sup>1</sup> When those infrequent students would decide to travel 3 hours down the turnpike to SFU, most would never stay beyond their first semester, opting to transfer either to the other state university or a local community college. Their major complaints about SFU centered around its urban environment ("There are too many strange people there . . . it's too big"), attitude ("People are stuck-up . . . they're snobs"), and inaccessibility ("I don't belong there . . . it's hard to maneuver around or figure out"). To me, these reasons seemed odd. Our town was less than an hour away from urban areas that offered many desirable urban amenities such as shopping malls, popular chain restaurants, and other typical locations of entertainment. Although I had not grown there, I had spent enough years there to believe that my students could fit into the SFU community, if they would only give it a fair chance. Yet it wasn't until I relocated to SFU and found myself in a position to observe the truly wide expanse that exists between rural students and, in my particular case, the composition teachers who teach the general education writing classes, that I discovered that the university community itself might not be giving my students, and rural students like them, the equitable opportunity for academic and related social success.

### *Theoretical Ties*

The first issue considered is the general university environment of state universities. The sociocultural back-

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ground of academies such as SFU did not occur by happenstance. Tradition, ritual, and experience (Applebee, 1974) shape the familiar roles both students and teachers act out in the university setting. Universities do have a culture of their own with a social context that provides the language for thought in which activities and events are perceived and represented in special ways, laden with meaning and values. Wertsch (1991) points out that the ways entering university students depend upon to make meaning only become valued when they match the culturally valued tools of the academy.

Yet universities, in their policies and programs, claim to accept, value, and promote student diversity. DiPardo (1993) observes that these policies and programs can become "a sort of shield, a veil which obscures the many ways in which university efforts are missing the mark" (p. 4) because, as she claims, institutional good intentions are normally devoid of any understanding of who these "diverse" students are, what their past and current struggles involve, and what sorts of support might help them. (I use the term "diverse" rather loosely, including all students who do not reflect the traditional values of the academic institution and its immediate surrounding community.) Thus, many students spend their days making meaning in accordance and conflict with two different worlds. Each of these worlds can have differing notions of effective language use, appropriate discourse themes, structures, and styles (Hymes, 1980).

Dyson (1993) and Heath (1983) argue that university faculty should not assume that all their students share their own social backgrounds and purposes for academic achievement such as writing and response. According to many researchers (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978), cognitive activities carried

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<sup>1</sup>SFU is a pseudonym.

out by the student are culturally based and arise from socially constructed goals. These researchers see the importance of helping students expand and negotiate among the sociocultural worlds in which they participate.

The second issue has to do with pedagogical concerns within the classroom. A great deal of activity of university instruction focuses on encouraging students to master discourse grounded in decontextualized forms of representation (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Wertsch, 1990). As Wertsch argues, the general tendency of formal schooling is to silence other voices and privilege the voice of decontextualized, rational modes of discourse.

In order for students to be offered meaningful support, university personnel should consider that these students' struggles with satisfactory academic achievement are embedded in cultural learning as they attempt to make sense of an unfamiliar social environment and dialectic (Rose, 1989). Rather than seeing assignments, such as those requiring written response, as opportunities to express and communicate, these students see their produced assignments, and themselves, as being pinned under the microscopic and discerning eye of those who possess an exclusive membership in an all-knowing academic community—a community whose doors are forever barred to them. Although schools set themselves up hoping to provide the same educational opportunity for everyone, what in fact results with many students from nontraditional backgrounds is a mismatch of school expectations and individual performances.

#### *General Problem in General Education*

The general education courses at SFU, standard in terms of universities across the nation, offer a basic overview of what institutions believe to be the fundamental core courses for beginning students. Entering students who do not successfully bypass the university requirements via an Advanced Placement or CLEP score must normally take both Composition I and II through the English Department. (I focus on the required composition classes because they provide the context for the situation I am discussing.) Therefore, most first-year students will encounter a first-year composition instructor in this fledgling university experience. At first glance, it appears that these students have an equal opportunity in this setting. In fact, issues of race and ethnicity are often addressed in the first-year composition teacher-training seminar that many universities hold two to three weeks prior to the start of the fall semester. Yet, at the SFU seminar (and I would imagine, at similar seminars across the nation), the particular cultural make-up of the rural student is never mentioned.

Furthermore, in the university setting, where graduate students in English abound, Composition I will not usually be taught by tenure-track professors. In most cases, the

graduate students teaching Composition I and II become part of the introductory process in the transition from high school to college. Of course, this seems to make perfect sense. For the monetary benefit of the university, the two English classes can be taught in a relatively inexpensive manner. Generally, composition programs in universities such as SFU are structured to introduce entering students to the general structure and concerns of academic writing. The plan appears to work as long as those entering students can fit into and readily understand the institution's cultural structure.

#### *Rural Concerns*

Elliot (1989) highlights some of the basic problems connected to the rural struggle for an accepted place in the university community. Rather than focus on the students' previous education in their rural communities (the conventional approach), she sought to understand how these rural students' community-fostered ways of knowing and understanding stood at odds with the literacies imperative for university success. She questioned why such a large number of rural students who attended this university eventually transferred to smaller regional universities or simply dropped out of school altogether.

Elliot's investigation examined the college experiences of rural students, including the decision to persist or withdraw from college. Through a series of interviews with select students, she saw two thematic categories emerge which she called "back home" and "the new world." According to Elliot, "*back home* was the lens through which they viewed life at the university. It came to mean all that was ideal about the eighteen plus years spent in the rural culture, and provided the context for all interaction and experiences at the university" (p. 5).

In contrast, "*the new world* represented those experiences where what they 'knew' (thought, understood, communicated) was different from or at odds with what was demanded for a 'fit' in the culture of the university" (p. 5). They faced social as well as academic challenges in their efforts to fit in with the system. In their close-knit rural communities, they had secured a "place" for themselves as a worthy member of the community. In their interviews with Elliot, they discussed the frustrations of not having a similar membership in the university system. They wished to find a place within the university that "would allow them to feel again as they had in their rural community, where who they were and what they knew was recognized and validated" (p. 17). They arrived at the university expecting that they would find a culture similar to the one that they already knew. In other words, they were completely unprepared for the culture that they discovered, which created even a larger disadvantage for these students. Elliot concluded that the university in her study did not take any

special measures to recognize and validate the literacies that these students brought with them to the university, thus increasing these students' feelings of alienation.

Eliot's study underscores the fact that what makes rural students' transition into the university culture most difficult is that they are casually led to believe that they are the "typical" student. If they choose to attend the state's flagship university, it then stands to reason that they can assume that they have ready membership in that particular academic community. When this proves to not be the case, the retreat to a safer institutional environments, such as local community colleges, makes perfect sense.

### *A Common Ground*

Stern (1985) explains that meaning results from interpersonal negotiations acquired with common interpretive worlds, in which teachers and students share intersubjectivity or "mutually created meanings" about experiences. Thus negotiating meanings is also negotiating culture, or the meaning structures shared by people who belong to a particular group or community.

The exchange between a white, male first-year student and his white, male composition instructor may not seem too unique at first glance. But in a closer inspection of the two primary participants of this study, it is clear that the only shared similarities between these two people were their gender, race, and the university classroom they both were in for Composition I. Bill, the composition instructor, was from the Chicago area and had moved to SFU to work on his doctorate in English Literature. Charlie, Bill's student, came to SFU on a football scholarship. From a rural community in the state, Charlie was the first member of his family to ever attend college, much less the state's flagship university. At six foot eight and weighing approximately 285 pounds, Charlie was also an unmistakable presence on the SFU campus.

This study took place in both the English department and the Athletic Writing Center ("Center") where I held positions as research and teaching assistant and interim director, respectively. The Center had no affiliation with the university writing center; it was not under the jurisdiction of the university or the English department. Therefore, it did not have to adhere to the demands and rules placed upon the English department and did not have to reflect any particular university perspective or pedagogy. The goal of the Center was not to produce perfect papers, but to expand the students' abilities to better understand how their lives and experiences shaped their writing practices. Rather than always focus on the paper at hand, I was allowed to build personal relationships with the students in this center, which enabled me to better understand how their lives and experiences shaped their writing practices. The major-

ity of student-athletes who attended the Center on a regular basis were from diverse populations. Not only did we have many urban African-American students, we also had students from clearly rural cultures as well.

### *Methodological Considerations*

When Bill approached me at the beginning of that particular fall semester, he told me about Charlie and expressed concern about his potential success in his composition class. I immediately contacted his academic counselor who assigned him to 2 hours of weekly mandatory Center attendance, where I would work with him on his texts. From our meetings, the nucleus of a developmental microethnography began, where I as the participant-observer used several methods to acquire firsthand, sensory accounts of the enveloping phenomena (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) as it occurred in three distinct settings. I tape recorded our writing sessions for the duration of our two semesters together, as well as his four writing conferences and my twice a semester interviews with his instructor. I then transcribed this information for thematic analysis. In addition, I attended their mutual composition class three times per semester, tape recording and taking individual notes to capture the essence of this classroom experience.

### *Meeting Charlie*

At the agreed upon time, Charlie walked into the Center ready, as he put it, "to get on with it." Wearing his Wrangler jeans and Roper boots, Charlie personified "Pure Country," the nickname his teammates gave him midway through the fall semester in reference to the popular country and western movie of the same name. At this first meeting, he even acknowledged that, in an effort to help him assimilate into the university world, his mother had tried to buy him a pair of baggy jeans like that which many of the university students wore. Yet, he said, "it just isn't me and I told her she would only be wasting her time and money. I said, 'I'll stick to my Wranglers and just be me, thank you very much.'"

Charlie's attitude was upbeat, yet quite matter of fact. He immediately told me that he realized he needed some help with his writing because he could already tell that somehow he and Bill were not really communicating clearly with one another. "I need to figure out how to make Bill understand me," Charlie aptly observed. I outlined our format: Charlie and I would meet twice a week at the appointed time for at least one-hour sessions, working on current drafts of the first essay until we both agreed that it was ready to be submitted. Once that essay was turned in, we would continue with the next assigned essay.

*Charlie's First Day*

On my first day here at SFU, I encountered many different people. I met my roommate again for the fifth or six hundredth time. See, I am a football player from a small town of about two thousand plus. I graduated with 34 kids. Well, actually only 30—4 of those did not get diplomas.

This was the opening paragraph of Charlie's first assigned essay. Bill had told me that Charlie initially had difficulties trying to find a topic for this personal narrative. Finally, Bill suggested to Charlie that he might want to discuss his first day of class at SFU. Bill's composition class was the first class that Charlie attended. He continued the essay:

Now, what I am about to tell you is about the first day of my college career. It was a very interesting day, to say the least. It all started about 7:30 that morning when my alarm went off. Not having the slightest idea of what I was about to get into, I headed off to my first class of the day. English 1113 was the place of my first adventure of the day. Professor Bill White was the first college teacher to see my face in a classroom, and boy will he regret that some day.

At this point in the essay, Charlie began to recount the events of that first day in his first class:

The one event that took place that made me realize that this place is a nut house, had to be the interview done on this student in my class. See, our teacher, being the kind harted (sic) man that he is, wanted us to get to know the people of our class. We split up into groups of two and conducted our interviews.

Charlie ended up interviewing another person named Charlie. This in itself was quite strange since Charlie had never been in any class with someone who shared his name. In their mutual interview, Charlie discovered that this person had an unusual hobby: He made his own clothes, and he did not use conventional material.

What shocked me was when I looked at him, I figured he made the stuff. Because I figured know (sic) body in there (sic) right mind would buy the stuff that he had on, out of a store. But he likes to use rubber, and plastic, and other things you buy at Radio Shack. Now, that's when I knew I had stepped in a world that was completely different from what I was used to. In fact, I made the state-

ment that I will never get used to this place. What I should have said was the people is what I will never get used to. (sic) I guess my small town background makes me think of the people up here as being nuts. But I guess everyone is entitled to have their own hobbies . . . I figure that if a man enjoys making clothes. Than (sic) he must be a few sandwiches short of a picnic. But you watch, in five years when I graduate I still won't understand them. And that's even after I had already been around them for five years.

*Bill's Reaction*

What Bill initially saw with this paper was a student who could not spell, had not achieved a mature level of logical syntax in his sentences, and, according to Bill, was "flying way out in left field." Nothing in this essay indicated that Charlie had any clue to the conventions associated with academic writing. In addition, when I discussed with Bill his initial reactions to Charlie and the person interviewed, Bill replied that Charlie had acted disgusted by the other Charlie and had made a bit of a scene during class when the other Charlie had explained where he bought his clothing materials. According to Bill, Charlie's reaction was to "shake his head violently and let out an extended, disgusted 'Ugh!' I saw his response as a big, loud-mouthed country boy reacting to someone whom he saw as strange."

Bill admitted that this incident set off a stream of negative reactions within him. His reaction to Charlie was also triggered by the fact that the person who shared Charlie's name was an African-American student, and Charlie's outburst appeared to be discriminatory. Bill had previously taught in a community college that, in part, served the western suburbs of Chicago, and he had become used to seeing fairly large numbers of African-American students. He added:

By contrast, on that day when I first walked into my classroom at SFU, I saw a lone black face [the other Charlie] surrounded by two dozen white ones. [This state] seemed to me to be the home of an uninteresting, white-bread, unsophisticated monoculture. I had been living in [this state] for only about a month when the class started, and I wasn't liking what I had seen. To me, [it] was a backwater, hick state, full of pickup-driving, cowboy-hat-wearing uneducated losers. I am not usually prone to making such hateful generalizations, but I was trying to figure this state out, and that was the conclusion I came to. Being from Chicago, I was used to spending much of my free time in the city. [This] college town offered some of the amenities I was used to, but the rest of the state

... seemed to be a vast cultural wasteland. Charlie typified every fear I had had about [this state].

When Charlie could not decide on a topic for this first personal narrative essay, Bill had casually suggested he write about the first day.

I threw out the "first day of class idea" sort of a joke. He actually went with the idea. So, amid all of the typical stories about car wrecks, prom dates and the 'big game,' I received one paper about the first day of class in English 1113. Because the event he was 'remembering' had happened only a few weeks earlier, I sensed laziness or a lack of imagination of his part.

Not only did Bill think that Charlie had not taken the topic very seriously, he also believed that Charlie's language in the paper was "unduly judgmental and hostile" over the other Charlie. Bill was also frustrated by Charlie's inability to understand the stated requirements demanded:

He didn't even try to make himself understood. He was always just so very obvious. He seemed dumbfounded when I told him I didn't understand what he was trying to say. I didn't think he had any chance. Not only would he fail my class, but if he couldn't capitalize on the given chances to revise the paper, since I had been working with him on it, then there was no way he was going to write anything for any instructor ever that would make any sense.

Bill described himself as a "pretty loose character" who certainly empathized with the struggles encountered by many university students. Yet Bill admitted that it had never occurred to him that rural students represented a unique culture of its own. Bill later realized that, when it came to rural students, he "didn't consider them part of a modern university system." He had never attended school with rural students and didn't remember them being a part of his own undergraduate or graduate classes. In addition, there were no clearly rural colleagues serving as graduate teaching assistants.

#### *A Different View*

My reaction, once I sat down and carefully read Charlie's essay, was quite different. What I saw was a bewildered 18-year-old who, much like the students I had previously taught in high school, had moved completely out of his familiar element. I took one look at the misspelled words and other errors and soon realized why some of the glaring mistakes existed. Charlie, who had never been ex-

posed to the luxury of computers, had walked across the hall to the computer lab in the Center and hastily typed his paper in a "hunt and peck" fashion the night before it was due. Charlie, like many of the other first-year student-athletes who had not been previously exposed to computers, would eventually learn to type.

I was far more interested in what Charlie had to say about his first day of class. I had read the associated research on sociocultural factors in composition and worked with students in similar situations who eventually became an integral part of the academic community. Looking past the weak writing, I saw a person who had stepped into a totally different world than the one he had been used to for the past 18 years. He saw this new sociocultural situation as an "us" versus "them" conflict, as those last two sentences revealed ("I still won't understand *them*. . . and that's even after I've been around *them* for five years"). Charlie, indeed, had entered a "whole other world."

As mentioned before, I met with Charlie in a different setting from the typical composition classroom, and our roles were not as structured as the traditional teacher-student roles. Perhaps this environment enabled us to further Nystrand's (1989) notion of reciprocity that, in the facets of composition research, assumes that the writer and the reader will have a shared interest and purpose in the text. In the course of the semester, Charlie and I not only attended to his essays, but we also discussed the connections to our own lives. We discovered many mutual frames of reference related to small towns and high school activities that increased our awareness of our own shared social realities.

#### *Charlie's Values*

I was also keenly aware of how much this essay told about Charlie and his life. I discovered that he graduated in a class of 30, thought the university was a "nut house," and truly doubted that he would ever understand the particular culture he had entered by means of an athletic scholarship. Nowhere is Charlie's feeling of foreignness more evident than, in his first essay, when he recounts his conflicting experiences and perceptions associated with attending his first university class. He talked about initially walking into the classroom and feeling "just fine until I saw all the chairs in the room."

He made the comment to me, after much deliberation, that the "weirdest part about this class" had to do with the "other Charlie making his own clothes"; however, the fact that the size of the composition class was equal to his entire graduating high school class, "give or take a few souls,"

was just as foreign to him. He also believed that the person leading the class was no ordinary individual either:

I'm going to have a problem. I always pictured college a little different. College professors being those little scrawny dudes that have hair just around here (points to the area around his ears and hairline), you know, a little halo, and then this (he points to the area of hair in the center of his head) is gone, a little bow tie right at their necks, a suit, and a briefcase. I always figured they were little eggheads. They don't know what's going on. The only things they know are books, books, and more books.

Obviously, Bill was not the only person with a presumptive attitude.

### *Making the Connections*

Once Charlie and I had decided that the object of this first paper was to recount the details of his first class in his first day of college, he removed many references to the football team. Even in our first session together, Charlie read his text aloud, stopped, and recognized some obvious errors, misconceptions, and "things that just don't make any sense." Charlie wrote the eight drafts of this paper in the next two-week period. From that point on, he turned in his other assigned essays with the rest of his class.

Bill began to see that Charlie did indeed have a work ethic, as Charlie, more and more, invested time and effort in Bill's class. This investment eventually paid off. Bill observed:

I'm beginning to see what he was thinking. He's got this drive to do really well and, frankly, I'm a little shocked that he cares so much and works so hard at it, but I'm very, very impressed.

Consequently, Bill's initial misgivings about the grammatical errors gradually diminished in light of the narratives and arguments that Charlie conveyed to us in his essays. Even though I initially had felt that Charlie had to do most of the "changing" in order to meet university standards, I gradually realized that Bill's initial attitude towards Charlie greatly influenced Charlie's potential success, or demise, in this composition class. Fortunately Bill's attitude eventually changed. Yet, most remarkably, Bill's attitude changed despite the fact that it didn't have to change. After all, Bill's academic stance would always emerge as the victor when pitting two different cultures against one another. Bill's stance "belonged" at the university while Charlie's clearly did not. Furthermore, if Charlie had

dropped out of the university, no alarms would have rung, no one would have been surprised. Everyone would have assumed that, as a rural student, Charlie had simply followed the path of many rural students who had tried to gain membership in this exclusive club and subsequently failed. In fact, Charlie had said that even members of his own home community were skeptical that he could succeed at SFU. Bill's willingness to give up the authority in his classroom, and allow my intervention with Charlie at the Center, gave Charlie the time and encouragement that he needed to become a valid member of the university community.

Bill told me that Charlie began speaking up in class and contributing more to the class discussions. In addition, Charlie was not afraid to say what was on his mind even if it went against the popular consensus of his classmates. Charlie had established himself, in his own terms, as a "presence to be contended with." Paralleling Bill's growing acknowledgment of Charlie as a classroom contributor was Charlie's emerging self-perception that he was someone who had something valid to say. In the beginning, Charlie had trouble handling debates regarding his opinions. On many occasions, he left the Center frustrated and confused. He encountered many problems trying to see the "other side" (the more liberal side) to such issues as gun control, women's rights, and capital punishment. Charlie felt that, in his hometown, everyone "felt the same way."

As a student thrust into the particular community of SFU, "home" felt very far away to Charlie. As a result, I surmised that many of his more outrageous statements were a sign of bravado, that seemed more forced than sincere. Yet as the semester progressed, I sensed that he was beginning to feel less intimidated and was thus better able to tolerate viewpoints and experiences that did not match his own.

I encouraged Charlie to view his texts as an informed contribution to the academic discourse at SFU. With this in mind, in our sessions, I would explicitly question and solicit a justification of the ideology that informed what Charlie decided to write in his essays. As our first semester progressed, Charlie strengthened his audience focus to include not only Bill and me, but the other class members as well.

### *The Process of Change and Accommodation*

Charlie never did become an "A" student in Bill's class, but he was no longer considered an "F" student either. He fell in somewhere between a "B" and a "C", but the important point is that he "fell in" somewhere. He actually "belonged" in the class. Bill, in our final interview, commented on his initial perceptions as compared to what he now felt about Charlie:

All right, I have to admit that I look at Charlie in a totally different light now. Yes, I now see that I had to change my view, that my biases were not truly founded since I really didn't know Charlie. It's impressive, and he's pretty impressive in his own right. He's learning and so am I.

For Charlie, the feeling was similar. He had initially believed that professors were "eggheads who thought of nothing but books." Yet, he told Bill in their final writing conference for the second semester that this perception was "not what you were at all."

In addition, Charlie, who touted hard-nosed conservative values, opined about gays in one of our final interviews, stating that he wished they would stay in the closet. After this pronouncement, he looked at my running tape recorder and quickly asked me if Bill would hear what he had just said. When I replied that he would not hear it or see the transcript, Charlie looked relieved and said, "Good. I wouldn't want him to hear me say something like that cause I think he might have a few friends who are that way. I wouldn't want him to think bad of me, you know."

In my last interview with Bill, we pulled out that first draft of Charlie's first essay and looked at it one more time. As Bill's eyes fell upon the jumbled words and phrases on the page, he paused a moment, shook his head and remarked:

You know, the remarkable thing about this essay is, knowing Charlie as I do now, I know just what he's talking about. It actually makes some strange kind of sense. That's just wild, but you can see (pointing at the part where he describes the other Charlie) where this must have freaked the hell out of him seeing this wild-looking person in that get-up. Boy, has he come a long way.

Not only had Charlie come a long way, but I believed that both Bill and I had made the journey with him.

### *Discussion*

We can see the "mismatch between what a teacher expects and what students do" (Hull & Rose, 1990, p. 289) as being the missed perception of what the student was communicating, with this communication being reasonable and interpretive given the student's home culture. By calling for a richer model of classroom discourse where a cooperative sharing of views and attitudes takes place, those of us in higher education can only add to the success of our rural students. Classrooms can become a community for all learners, where diversity will not be looked at as a demonstration of being remedial or illiterate.

Studying the "ways of knowing," in correlation with the "ways of writing," enhanced the perspective of this study. Each person in the classroom is a product of a unique sociocultural environment that affects how writing and other classroom forms of discourse are perceived. When I began this study, I was unaware of the impact Bill would have on my discoveries. His acceptance of my methods of working and connecting with Charlie, which eventually influenced his own practices and attitudes, aided the larger idea of intersubjectivity that linked the three of us. As the academic year went on, I noticed that Charlie continually used the pronoun "we" rather than "I" when he discussed how to approach a perceived problem in his text. He discovered the value of "talking" the text out with not only me, but Bill as well. I should emphasize that Bill also recognized this value and began to meet Charlie halfway, rather than demanding Charlie merely measure up to his expectations. This making of social context became a pivotal and conscious consideration in all of Charlie's produced texts. Consequently, I encouraged Charlie to write about the real-world literacies he was involved in, such as football, hunting, and country music. Bill's eventual acknowledgment of these literacies served to validate Charlie's efforts and bring about a mutual respect. I cannot stress enough that Bill's unconventional allowance of Charlie's emergence as a student in good standing with the university was the key to Charlie's success. Bill did not automatically write Charlie off, like so many instructors might. Instead, he allowed him some room to grow and, in time, Bill found that Charlie was not the only person who benefited in the exchange.

I agree with Moll (1992) that individuals should be studied dynamically within their social circumstances and complexity so we can gain a more complete and valid understanding of them. By recognizing that there is no quick fix to our academic literacy concerns, by acknowledging the wealth of knowledge and perspective that rural students bring to the academic setting, and by combining this perspective with the interplay of theory, research, and practice, I was able to see how literacy practices developed through Charlie's complex social relationships and cultural practices. I also saw Bill's effort to acknowledge, understand, and ultimately appreciate Charlie's endeavors.

Obviously, Charlie's status as a student-athlete separates him somewhat from other rural students who attend a university such as SFU. Thus, a need exists for more studies of this type that focus on rural students of other backgrounds who attend state universities. I continue to be interested in students, much like my former high school students, who eagerly attend the state university but soon transfer. Studies such as this could elucidate the factors involved in rural student attrition. Most importantly, connections might be made that would allow rural students to

successfully negotiate the cultural demands of higher education. These connections could provide the impetus that opens the gates for equitable educational opportunities for our rural students and allows them an easier entry into new cultural avenues.

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