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Re-writing English Education: A Review of Robert Yagelski's *Writing as a Way of Being*

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Given the Cartesian influence in mainstream American education, writing instruction has come to reflect a dualistic worldview, with the writer understood as an autonomous observer/knower. As such, writing instructors have the potential to convey problematic lessons about the self as entirely separate from the world. This essay delineates a corrective to the Cartesian mindset in mainstream writing instruction: Yagelski's ontological theory of writing as a way of being-in-the-world. In the spirit of connectedness Yagelski espouses, I consider the ways in which Yagelski's ontological theory of writing might work in tandem with Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading. Together, Yagelski and Rosenblatt allow English educators to reimagine reading and writing as activities with the ethical potential to repair the rifts of a dualistic worldview, and ultimately to reimagine English education as a field that breaks the Cartesian frame.

Keywords: Robert Yagelski; Louise Rosenblatt; English teaching; writing; reading; ontological theory

Throughout my six years as a high school English teacher, I considered myself a devout follower of Schön's (1983) reflection-in-action. It wasn't until I began teaching in a teacher education programme, though, that I realised the full extent of my reflexive capacities. Teaching pre-service and in-service teachers, an experience in which the content one teaches is about the very thing one does, is like teaching in a room full of mirrors. As teacher educators, what we profess to believe and what we actually *do* as course instructors are in such close proximity to one another that we cannot help but notice when our pedagogy appears to compromise our commitment to the content that we teach.

Though I could offer a litany of moments that have caused me to question the degree to which I am 'true' as a teacher, the one most relevant to this essay occurred while teaching an online writing course to teachers in the midst of reading Robert Yagelski's (2011) *Writing as a Way of Being: Writing Instruction, Nonduality, and the Crisis of Sustainability*. I had been assigning Yagelski's (2012) essay 'Writing as Praxis' ever since I had begun teaching the course, encouraging my students to take up his new and somewhat radical approach to writing theory and pedagogy: *writing as a way of being*. I will say much more about this theory in what follows, but suffice it to say, I spoke with much enthusiasm about Yagelski's call to de-emphasise

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the focus placed on written texts and to place greater emphasis on what is happening to or within the writer as he or she is writing.

Mid-semester, while reading Yagelski's book, I found myself grading students' Genre Portfolios, many of which included short narrative memoirs. According to my rubric, I was to be grading for evidence of thoughtful revision, adherence to the genre's conventions, coherence and so on. All was safe and sound in my online world of writing assessment – until I came to this passage in one young woman's portfolio:

The doctor smiled wistfully. He shook his head and said, 'Your baby has a genetic condition. She is missing her lungs and kidneys. In the womb, a baby breathes amniotic fluid and the kidneys process that fluid creating new fluid. Your baby is not able to do this. Your baby has no chance at life. It will either die *in utero* or during childbirth. It is a genetic condition and you did nothing and can do nothing to prevent it. I am so sorry.' It was the saddest set of sentences I had ever heard.

Twenty-four weeks pregnant and a mother of one healthy almost three-year-old, I couldn't help but contemplate the difference between my 20-week ultrasound and the one my student described. I couldn't help but think about the *writer writing* this piece. And staring at the rubric in front of me, I couldn't help but notice how nothing about that rubric allowed me to respond to anything beyond a dehumanised piece of text. Yagelski's book, my rubric and this student-writer had thrust me right back into that room of mirrors we all face as teacher educators. Needless to say, I didn't like what I saw.

Knowing what Yagelski's book did to and for my own practice as an English educator, I have begun to consider what his book might do to and for the practice of an entire field. In what follows, I shall delineate Yagelski's ontological approach to writing instruction – the theory that made visible my own hypocrisies as a writing instructor. In the process, I hope to show how Yagelski's ontological theory of writing illuminates the ethical potential of other seminal theories in English education, namely Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory. Given that the subjects at the heart of Yagelski's and Rosenblatt's work – writing and reading – have traditionally formed the backbone of English education, I contend that Yagelski's ontological theory of writing might function as a heuristic for transforming the field of English education at large.

Yagelski's ontological theory of writing, his theory of writing as a way of being-in-the-world, might be read as a response to American education's dominant paradigm: Cartesianism. According to Yagelski (and many others), the central 'problem' of the American education system is its tendency to 'teach separateness rather than interconnectedness', to 'see a world defined by duality rather than unity' (17). Its obsession with standardised test performance, its subordination of behaviour, extra-curricular engagement and social dynamics to academic achievement, all the way down to the physical arrangement of classrooms implies a Cartesian dynamic of duality that champions the self as 'autonomous observer/knower' (17). Though he does not cite Dewey, Yagelski's articulation of the problem of American education is one that Dewey (1899) articulated over a century earlier in his complaints about the fragmentation of schooling in his seminal work *The School and the Society*.

Writing instruction, unsurprisingly given the Cartesian context in which it occurs, treats writing in the same dualistic manner. Criteria for scoring students' writing on standardised tests like the SAT and ACT reflect a form-content binary

with the value of form typically trumping the value of content. Writing, as Yagelski observes, is taught ‘as if it were an empty vehicle to carry meaning’ – a simple chain of thought, turned language, turned text (24). Minimal emphasis on the rhetorical situation of writing – a trend that scholars like Lindemann (2001) have been working to correct – treats writing as a decontextualised act, independent of the audience, purpose and cultural/historical moments that lend it meaning. As such, writing, operating within the dominant Cartesian framework of American education, becomes a reflection of the fragmented Cartesian mind-set, separating form from content, text from meaning and self from others.

The separation characterising the Cartesian approach to writing and writing instruction promotes the Cartesian belief in the self as ‘autonomous knower/observer’. Yagelski goes so far as to claim that ‘writing as practiced and evaluated in schools is perhaps the most visible expression of formal schooling’s focus on the individual’ (23). The individualism that schooling promotes, though, is not to be confused with the Romantic version of the individual, always aware of where he stands in relation to the world he inhabits. Rather, writing in and for school is ultimately ‘an expression of the *Cartesian* self’ – a truncated view of humanity cut off from a larger world (23, emphasis added). Mainstream education’s treatment of writing, then, ‘reduces writing to a skill [...] and ultimately distances the act of writing from *living in all its complexity*’ (144, emphasis added).

Yagelski’s claim here – that the education system separates writing from living – is one that haunted me as I read through the student’s memoir. The emphatic line – ‘It was the saddest set of sentences I had ever heard’ – wove together writing and ‘living in all its complexity’ in a way that was impossible for me to ignore. What must it have been like for my student to hear those saddest of sentences in real time? What must it have been like to re-live that experience throughout the course of composing the written memoir? To respond to this student’s narrative memoir as if it were only a disembodied text – a set of words to be read for adherence to convention and form – felt unethical. To do so seemed to ignore the most profound sentence in all of Yagelski’s book: ‘The writer writing is a human being living’ (146).

This connection between writing and living forms the crux of Yagelski’s ontological theory of writing *as a way of being*. As evidenced by the nearly two chapters of Yagelski’s book devoted to language theory, assumptions about the capacities and functions of language form an essential component of an ontological theory of writing as a way of being. The ontological treatment of writing turns its attention away from the text one produces (the writer’s *writing*) to the actual *experience* of writing (the *writer writing*). A large part of this experience of writing has to do with the ‘writer’s awareness of him or herself *at the moment of writing*’, and this awareness depends in part on Yagelski’s assumption that language can only ever approximate experience, rather than re-create it (112). This ‘failure of language’ (Fendler 2012, 6), then, confronts the writer with his limited ability to capture his experience of self, thereby generating a palpable self-awareness in the act of writing. Yagelski summarises this conflict-driven experience of self when he observes:

[...] the self is more present to itself when writing because the inability to fully ‘say’ (write) its being points to the part of being that cannot be said (written). In this regard, the limits of language to capture our experience of ourselves help illuminate our sense of being during the act of writing. (118)

In short, the act of writing – in part because of the imperfect relationship between language and experience – brings a sense of self into focus. Readers see, then, in Yagelski's book how the 'writer writing is a *human being* living'.

Living, though, when considering the work of other writing scholars who treat writing as if it were 'alive' or 'life-giving', implies a dynamic of interconnectivity – the kind that Yagelski claims writing instructors must uphold despite the dominant and dualistic Cartesian paradigm. Grosskopf (2004), a high school English teacher, whom Yagelski cites as claiming, 'It is writing that has led me to feel most alive', offers an explanation of that alive-ness absent from Yagelski's book:

One of the ways in which I phrase 'living life well' for students is *living poetically* [...] there is something invigorating in the poetic acts of sensing the structure of things and gathering the details of our day – however ordinary or disconnected – into something meaningful, beautiful, or terrible; there is something enlivening about taking notice and infusing such details with our appreciation and wonder.

Here, I imagine Grosskopf not to be drawing on the literal genre of poetry in talking about 'living poetically', but more on the Greek word *poiesis*, which means 'to make'. Writing, according to his estimation, is an act of drawing together our experiences of the world, processing and filtering those experiences through ourselves 'to make' something new. This creation that Grosskopf claims allows him 'to feel most alive' is a fusion of self and world that contradicts the dualism of the Cartesian paradigm.

Knowing Yagelski's efforts to eschew the Cartesian framework that undergirds traditional writing instruction, readers can envision how the writer writing is not only 'a human being living', but a human being 'living in all its complexity' (144). To treat writing as a way of being, then, implies that writing is more than an expression of self: '[I]t is an expression of the self, *in reciprocal relationship with the world*, as the locus of meaning-making' (115, emphasis added). Indeed, a more fitting title for Yagelski's book might read, *Writing as a Way of Being-in-the-World*. Writing, in other words, is not an isolated act of self-expression, but rather, as Moffett (1968) quotes Wendell Johnson as saying, 'writing-about-something-for-someone' (8). Johnson's joining of 'writing' to 'something' and 'someone', as signalled by his hyphenation, implies a connectedness between writing and the people and things comprising the world – one that implies living, not according to a self/world dichotomy – but one that embraces living in all its interrelated complexity.

In its treatment of writing as a way of coming to know oneself while also coming to know one's interconnectedness with the world, Yagelski's ontological theory casts an ethical lens on the work of writing instructors. To Yagelski, being fully human implies an awareness of and attentiveness to self, but also an awareness of one's interconnectedness with the world. To treat writing as a way of being-in-the-world is to combat the isolationist, and therefore dehumanising, tendencies of the Cartesian emphasis on the self as autonomous knower. It is to enact change – 'change in how we understand who we are in relation to those around us' (161). In that sense, writing is not purely an instrumental communication act, but rather an ethical act, and writing instruction is ethical work.

To return once more to the anecdote with which I opened this essay, my encounter with Yagelski's book jarred me out of a more instrumental pedagogical

frame to one that I would classify as more overtly ethical. *Writing as a Way of Being* (2011) shifted my attention away from my student's disembodied text – from the writer's *writing* as Yagelski so appropriately phrases it – and refocused my energy and questions on the *writer* and her experience of recounting and expressing such a painful realisation. In making that shift, the Cartesian rifts so palpable in mainstream writing instruction began to repair themselves. There was a moment of communion between reader and writer, as I put my own 20-week ultrasound in conversation with my student's. The form–content binary experienced a momentary healing as the emotions behind the Spartan syntax of that single sentence, 'It was the saddest set of sentences I had ever heard', stopped me dead in my tracks. Finally, writer and text no longer seemed quite so dichotomous. Rather than attending only to the text of this narrative memoir, separate from the writer who had produced it, I conceived of the text as something *with* which this young woman had processed an experience.

In considering the impact of Yagelski's book on my own writing pedagogy, I came to see the implications of his book at a level of individual instruction. With Yagelski's voice playing in the background, I could not help but read my student's memoir in a new light, realising and honouring a set of fundamentally ethical connections between reader and writer, writer and text, and form and content. When considering Yagelski's writing theory in conversation with theories relevant to English's other domain – reading – Yagelski's book acquires the potential to generate even more seismic shifts in mainstream English education at large. In what follows, I imagine English education's potential to cultivate an entire community of readers and writers – a powerful challenge to the Cartesian paradigm in mainstream English education – born out of a conversation between Yagelski's ontological theory of writing and Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading.

Though Rosenblatt and Yagelski take up separate subject matters in their scholarship, a set of striking similarities unite Yagelski's *Writing as a Way of Being* and Louise Rosenblatt's scholarship, namely *Literature as Exploration* (Rosenblatt 1995) and *Writing and Reading: The Transactional Theory* (Rosenblatt 1988). As Wayne Booth notes in his Foreword to Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt's work bears relevance to a question that guides – or at least *ought* to guide – the work of English educators everywhere: 'What finally is the point of reading literature?' This question might very well read, 'Why should we teach reading?', sharing striking parallels with a question that Yagelski takes up in his introduction to *Writing as a Way of Being*: 'Why should we teach writing?'

As I have already discussed in my delineation of Yagelski's ontological theory of writing, Yagelski's response to this question departs from that of mainstream education. Mainstream education operates within a Cartesian paradigm, treating writing as a 'straightforward, rule-governed process of encoding a more-or-less stable meaning in a text' (3). Like Yagelski, who troubles these assumptions in the opening chapter of his book, Rosenblatt (1988) brings them to bear in a section that opens her essay *Writing and Reading: The Transactional Theory*. In her explanation of the 'transactional paradigm', Rosenblatt (1988) begins by noting:

My use of the terms 'transaction' and 'transactional' is consonant with the contemporary twentieth-century shift in thinking about the relationship of human beings to the natural world. In *Knowing and the Known*, John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley pointed out that the term 'interaction' had become too closely tied to Cartesian or Newtonian philosophy. (2)

That Rosenblatt aligns her thinking with the ‘twentieth-century shift in thinking about the relationship of human beings to the natural world’ bears striking similarities to Yagelski’s claims about what writing might do in light of its potential to cultivate one’s sense of being-in-the-world. Rosenblatt’s rejection of the term ‘interaction’ as overly Cartesian in its implied philosophy aligns her with Yagelski’s enterprise to undermine the Cartesian assumptions underpinning mainstream writing instruction most evident in his central claim that writing instructors ‘should strive to teach in ways that foster a sense of self as fundamentally interconnected to all other selves and to the landscape we inhabit’ (20).

Though not all of Rosenblatt’s work evinces an outright rejection of the Cartesian mindset, many of her claims about reading literature imply that she is working from a framework very different from that of a Cartesian–Newtonian philosophy. Like Yagelski who troubles the form–content binary of mainstream writing instruction, Rosenblatt (1995) calls for a scrutiny of teaching practices and assignments so that ‘students are not given the idea that the formal relations in a literary work exist apart from, and are merely superimposed on, something called the *content*’ (47). Rather than seeing literary form and content as separate, Rosenblatt argues that the reader’s *experience* of the literary work – an emphasis that aligns her once more with Yagelski’s focus – rests on ‘how organically interfused’ these two dimensions of the work are.

As suggested by her rationale for rejecting the term *interaction* in place of *transaction*, though, Rosenblatt’s explanation of a transactional theory is perhaps her most overt divergence from the Cartesian stance. Like Yagelski, who posits that writing is more than a ‘process of encoding a more-or-less stable meaning in a text’, Rosenblatt (1995) decries the treatment of reading as ‘interaction’, understood in New Critical terms as ‘the printed page impressing its meaning on the reader’s mind or the reader extracting the meaning embedded in the text’ (26). Transaction, on the other hand, which Rosenblatt understands as more ‘organic, as in the ecological view of human beings in a reciprocal relationship with the natural environment’, entails a making of meaning that ‘emerges as the reader carries on a give-and-take with the signs on the page’ (26). For Rosenblatt, then, the text is not some sacred object resting on a pedestal apart from, and above, the reader. Meaning does not reside ‘in’ the text, nor does it reside in the separate mind of the reader. *Both* reader and text are essential to the transactional process of making meaning.

The dialectic exchange between reader and text suggests that the reader does not read *the text*, but rather reads *with* the text, positing a relationship between person and text quite similar to the one Yagelski delineates in his ontological approach to writing. Working from a Cartesian perspective that separates writer from text, mainstream writing instruction speaks of ‘writing *the text*’, making textual production the focus of most school-sponsored writing instruction. However, an ontological theory of writing, which conceives of writing as an experience of self in the world, designates this experience as the central aim of writing. The text functions as a means or a tool in this process, not as the final product. Thus the ontological writer, like the transactional reader, rather than writing *the text*, writes *with* the text.

Thus, both a transactional theory of reading and an ontological theory of writing, though distinct in their foci, bear striking resemblances to one another in their shared rejection of a Cartesian–Newtonian philosophy. Whereas Yagelski challenges the Cartesian philosophy for overtly ethical purposes, claiming that mainstream writing instruction’s conveyance of a dualistic way of being in the world ‘is implicated

in looming social, economic, political and environmental crises', Rosenblatt's scholarly contributions appear to lack such an explicit ethical agenda (3). Reading Rosenblatt side-by-side with Yagelski, which shows the similarities between the two, allows Yagelski's book to illuminate an otherwise tacit ethics in Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*.

Reading, as Rosenblatt conceives of it, might be considered its own way of being-in-the-world. In his quest to point out the possibility of operating in a non-dualistic relationship between self and world, Yagelski calls upon Sartwell's command that we 'start thinking of [language] as a craft by which we sense our connections to earth' (96). In many ways, Rosenblatt's reader embodies this connectedness that both Yagelski and Sartwell suggest is an inherent feature of language. In her chapter outlining the literary experience in *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt (1995) begins with her perspective on language, noting:

Those who think of language as simply a self-contained set of signs linked to sounds ignore the essential third element, the human being who must make the linkage between them if there is indeed to be a meaningful word. Language is socially evolved, but is always constituted by individuals, with their particular histories. (25)

Language in Rosenblatt's transactional theory operates on an assumption of connectedness between words and human beings who bring with them a set of histories, which are themselves connected to persons, places and objects. In that sense, Rosenblatt, like Yagelski, sees language as a 'craft by which we sense our connections'.

Rosenblatt interprets reading as not only a way of transacting between the individual reader and text, but also a whole host of other people, objects, events and environments that comprise the reader's experience. Posing the question 'What, then, happens in the reading of a literary work?' Rosenblatt (1995) responds, 'The reader, drawing on past linguistic and life experience, links the signs on the page with certain words, certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes...' (30). That is, the reader brings a set of unique and personal experiences to a text, and together, with a set of cues contained in the text, reader and text transact to generate some new meaning. Reading is about making meaning by means of 'links' or connections between the language of a text and a reader's experience. To function as the reader in Rosenblatt's transactional theory, then, is to read in Yagelskian terms as 'a way of being-in-the-world'. To read is to reaffirm one's connectedness with the world.

Although a close reading of Yagelski's and Rosenblatt's work brings their theories into conversation with one another in a way that highlights the ethical potential of both theories for English education, research on the connection between reading and writing could conceivably compound this ethical potential. My students and I actually took up this concept of a reading/writing connection in my online writing course. Together, we read Nelson's (2007) review of what she has referred to as the 'reading-writing nexus' in written discourse, focusing on the cognitive connections between reading and writing, as well as the shared meaning making between reading and writing participants. These cognitive and sociocultural interpretations of the reading-writing connection could not account, however, for the more ethical spin that Yagelski and Rosenblatt together lend the reading-writing connection.

In considering Yagelski's account of what occurs as a person writes and Rosenblatt's account of what occurs as a person reads, one begins to envision a

community of connectedness – a powerful counterforce to the Cartesian emphasis on the autonomous knower. Yagelski's implicit question in Chapter Four, 'What, then, happens as I write this chapter?' returns the following response:

I am connected to this moment [of sitting in a coffee shop writing] and those other moments I have been trying to describe and indeed to all those other selves I've mentioned and many I have not mentioned and the things around me now and those that were around me then and even you, the reader I am imagining who will, I think, at some point really *be* a reader of this text and thus be connected to me as well in a very real way through your act of reading at some future date, which means that this moment of writing right now somehow encompasses that future moment, too. (104)

Yagelski's description of one specific moment in his writing experience is rife with connections. In a single sentence, he manages to link together a combination of eight entities, ranging from moments, to selves, to tenses. What I find most compelling about Yagelski's passage, when read side-by-side with Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, is that he invokes the reader, imagining his reader as 'connected to me', the writer, and also as a point of connection between present and future. Knowing that Rosenblatt's reader is drawing on 'past linguistic and life experiences' and bringing 'certain images of things, people, actions, scenes' to the written text, one can imagine an even vaster web of connectedness in Yagelski's passage on writing. Together, Yagelski and Rosenblatt allow English educators to imagine a community of writers *and* readers, along with the people, places, and moments connected to them – an image that counters a focus on the Cartesian self, divorced from others and the world.

In responding to my student's memoir, I began to see that community form. Although the text of her memoir certainly triggered reading and writing connections consonant with Nelson's (2007), my reading of her text as something with which she had written as a way of being-in-the-world, elicited a more deeply emotional connection as well. As I read as a way of being-in-the-world, my world and my student's worlds converged, and I responded not as an autonomous knower/observer, but as an empathetic human being. As I, the reader, put my own history as a mother in conversation with my student-writer's account of her loss, I knew I had to do more than respond to the organisation of her writing, her fidelity to the conventions of memoir and so on. I knew I had to respond as one mother to another – one whom I had never met face-to-face – with a note of compassion. To do otherwise, seemed like an ethical compromise.

Yagelski and Rosenblatt together, then, carry tremendous potential to transform how students and teachers of English position themselves as readers and writers in relation to the world. Reading and writing, in light of Yagelski's ontological theory of writing and Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading, function as much more than reflections of the autonomous self. Rather, they function as manifestations of an individual's relationship to other people, places, and things. Not only does Yagelski's *Writing as a Way of Being* advocate for these connections, but it also – as evidenced by the powerful statement that his work makes in conversation with Rosenblatt's – makes possible such connectivity. To conclude, then, I imagine what Yagelski's voice might do to the field of English education, which, despite its claims to reform, has remained largely unchanged.

Scholars have conceived of the history of English education as one of tradition and reform – the title that Applebee (1974) chose for his book-length history of the

field. Yet in 2005, Yagelski published an essay arguing that English education has changed very little despite its claims to reform. Responding a year later to Yagelski's essay, Robert Tremmel (2006) argued that 'real change' in English education, the kind Yagelski calls for, will remain unlikely without understanding the processes of Cartesian–Newtonian thinking. The Cartesian paradigm, implies Tremmel, has thrust English educators into a 'fixity of habit' (Dewey 1916, 48) that has eclipsed the possibility of fresh thought and disposition in English education. Interested in 'helping English teacher educators discover new grounds for thought and action', Tremmel concludes his essay with four professional practices that he sees as powerful heuristics for realising the kind of change Yagelski (2005) imagines. The first of these heuristics – dialogue and hermeneutic conversation – is one that Yagelski's book *Writing as a Way of Being* both invites and makes possible, thereby answering Tremmel's and Yagelski's earlier calls for change in English education.

Dialogue, as Tremmel (2006) characterises it, is a convergence of diverse perspectives, not for the sake of arguing and negotiating pre-established perspectives, but rather to achieve new insight. He likens dialogue to Rosenblatt's (1978) notion of 'transaction' in which text and reader do not remain separate but rather 'co-condition each other to bring something new into being' (28). To illuminate his understanding of dialogue further, Tremmel cites Gadamer's (1975) perspective on the topic: 'To reach an understanding with one's partner in a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one's own point of view, but a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were' (341). In Tremmel's references to both Rosenblatt and Gadamer, we gather that dialogue can actualise the inherent interconnectedness or communion of human beings that generates an entirely new set of possibilities. In that sense, dialogue is both joint and transformative. Tremmel's presentation of dialogue, then, departs from the dualism comprising Cartesian–Newtonian thinking, functioning as a powerful heuristic for English educators to break outside the mould of the Cartesian–Newtonian paradigm in ways that might be truly transformative for the field.

Yagelski's *Writing as a Way of Being* treats writing in much the same way as Tremmel imagines hermeneutic conversation. Writing, when approached ontologically, after all, 'becomes a collective process of inquiry'. The experience of writing, says Yagelski, becomes 'a collective act of being together in the world' for the sake of 'chang[ing] each other and the world' (161). Writing, like dialogue or hermeneutic conversation, is an act of coalescing for the sake of transformation. But while Yagelski's book sheds light on how an ontological approach to writing might transform the human being's sense of self and the way individuals relate to one another, it does little to elaborate explicitly on the way in which an ontological approach to writing might transform the field of English education.

As I reflect on the ways in which Yagelski shaped my practice as a writing instructor in a teacher education programme and the manner by which he illuminates the ethical potential of theories from seminal scholars in the field, I see in Yagelski's book a powerful actualisation of Gadamer's delineation of dialogue. That I picked up Yagelski's *Writing as a Way of Being* while grading my student-writer's work might have been happenstance, but it was a moment of perspective in which 'I could not remain what I was' as a writing instructor. Rosenblatt's transactional theory, too, when put in dialogue with Yagelski's ontological theory of writing, cannot help but take on a dimension that lends ethical exigency to two

actions at the heart of English education: reading and writing. In that sense, Yagelski's book actually brings into being the interconnectedness he professes. Yagelski, true to all that he advocates for, 'teach[es] in ways that foster a sense of self as fundamentally interconnected to all other selves and to the landscape we inhabit' as his theories interface in powerful and transformative ways with a landscape of English education, peopled with teachers and scholars alike. In an era of standardisation and accountability, an era that champions the Cartesian self as autonomous knower, *Writing as a Way of Being* may be the room of mirrors all of us in English education need – a space that enables us to see what we are while envisioning what we might become.

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