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Five teachers, five fingers, five narratives

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**FIVE TEACHERS
FIVE FINGERS
FIVE NARRATIVES**

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Abstract

This project will attempt to make pedagogical connections between aspects of contemporary autobiographical theory through teacher stories in the development of individual identity presented in an aesthetic and artistic manner. The project is about writing and sharing, making connections, building, and fostering our own identity as individuals. Comments throughout the project are included as they happened as a part of the overall process. It is not my intent to analyze or interpret each group member's ideas, but to share them as well as document how the process evolved. The goal was to allow all the participants, including myself, a medium to show how this process affected each of us and how we developed an identity.

Five teachers, including myself, reflected on their teaching practice by writing narratives based on the five forms indicated by Preskill (1998) in Narratives of Teaching and the Quest for the Second Self. In this project, each teacher wrote one narrative based on one of the different forms highlighted in Preskill's article, which include narrative of social criticism, narrative of apprenticeship, narrative of reflective practice, narrative of journey, and narrative of hope.

This project utilized a type of action research where participants were involved in reflecting, writing and sharing stories formed from teaching experiences. This sharing process aided in the recognition of identity and identity formation. My main objective was to allow each member to gain personal insights about her development as an individual and teacher. All members of the group were instrumental in offering each

other support, reflection, and an arena to discuss the successes and failures in each other's career. Each member was an important contributor to the project and to the narratives of each person taking part in the project. The goal was to provide living action research about identity formation. I hope this project aided these teachers in a journey of identity exploration. This exploration allowed them to look at the influences in their lives as experiences they must embrace, write about, reflect upon, grow with and learn from as they continue to construct and reconstruct who they are as individuals, teachers, professionals, and women.

Presentation of each member's narratives was also something that I wanted to develop, to allow for each member's uniqueness to become directly incorporated with their narrative. This was done through fingerprints. Each member of the group chose a print from their left, or feminine, hand to transcribe their story into. This would allow each story to be unique to the individual, an expression of the person, the teacher, the woman. I felt that this was their own unique personal expression of their, and only their story. As the fingerprints are individual, so are the stories of the women of the group.

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Introduction

A little kingdom I possess,
Where thoughts and feelings dwell;
And very hard the task I find
Of governing it well.

Louisa May Alcott

My main objective throughout this project was to provide a forum for the participants to share, write, reflect, and grow as teachers and as women. I felt the best approach for the organization of this was to keep detailed notes of our meetings and discussions and characterize each under the identity they best reflected. I then placed all of the relevant and related comments together under each associated identity heading. This allowed all the participants a medium to show how the process affected each and every one of them individually. It also allowed me to weave together their stories and show how we all had experienced events in our careers that were both similar yet unique. I included quotes and comments from my own narrative and reflections to show how I was also involved in this process. I was not just an outsider who made comments after the fact. My comments are included as they happened. It is not my intent to make comments and interpretations after the fact, but to show how all of the participants, including myself, were actively involved in dialogue throughout the development of this project. This project is about our words, our narratives, our sharing. Analyzing and evaluating the content of each member's narratives and comments, and paraphrasing their quotes was not my objective. Instead, I wanted to make connections between the narratives, reflections and experiences of the group members. I wanted to build a kaleidoscope of all their reflections and writings, connecting them together into a written mosaic.

It has become apparent to me that there has been an increased interest in identity recognition. Coming to understand ourselves from the inside has become a more accepted part of the mainstream. More and more people are researching and reading literature on understanding themselves and their place in the world more fully, a process that has become increasingly evident on the shelves of bookstores. As human beings we have

always had questions relating to the meaning of life and are looking from inside ourselves in trying to come to an understanding (Aftel, 1996).

No one can be proclaimed the expert on the human condition, but hopefully we can understand our condition better by sharing our stories of life. Human beings are natural storytellers. According to Aftel, we communicate who we are and how we understand the world through storytelling. A great amount of literature such as that of Carson (1997), Noddings (1997), Preskill (1998), and Witherell (1991) stresses the importance of keeping a journal in aiding our understanding of ourselves. The need for reflection and autobiographical writing is continuing to find a place in our society. In the past, autobiographical writing was not given merit and was considered a type of self-indulgence (Kerr, 1998). More recently, reflective writing has become important in understanding oneself and the world in which we live.

We are driven to understand and bring order to our lives, which we can do through writing, reflecting and sharing stories. These stories are indicators of our human existence. Reflective writing allows us to understand the many ambiguities in life and in all of our daily experiences.

Dewey always talked about the fact that it isn't simply experience, it is reflection on experience that enable individuals to understand that they must continue choosing themselves as they live. Experience itself is just one thing after another, and you try to pattern it by organizing and to make sense of it by reflecting, by turning back on yourself and reflecting on your own stream of experience. You ask yourself, 'How does this world present itself to me? Against my own background, my own biography?' (Ernst, 1998, p. 2)

Narratives are finding importance in the teaching profession, as well as in many other professions. When teachers write their stories they are not limited in definition to stories about teaching, but their writing tends to be candid reflections on life. Who we are, what we do and what we write cannot be separated into teaching stories and life stories. These stories are truly one. Teaching stories include reflections on the past, present and insights into the future. These stories are not just reflections of the teaching condition but the human condition encompassing our history, culture, values and ideology (Carson, 1993).

It is impossible to separate the story from the person. By writing and sharing, stories are brought to the public domain, allowing individuals to make connections in understanding others as well as themselves better. These life texts, as I would like to call them, provide characterizations of the self and can be used as reference material of the teaching/human condition providing great pedagogical insights.

Preskill (1998) in his article *Narratives of Teaching and the Quest for the Second Self* highlighted five narratives of teaching. Julie Wilson chose the narrative of social criticism because of her concerns with the politics of the French immersion program with her district. Jen Matthews chose the narrative of apprenticeship as she is new to the teaching profession, having just completed her first year. Jenine Chen chose the narrative of reflective practice as she is a new student to the Master of Education program at the University of Lethbridge and is struggling to define her teaching style. Trish Draper chose the narrative of journey with the goal of critically looking back over her years of teaching. I chose the narrative of hope, having always struggled with maintaining this emotion in my life.

During the research process, it became obvious to me that the theme of this project was that of identity formation and recognition. I found that through the process of reflecting, writing and sharing our narratives we were developing a stronger identity of who we are. I think that we have a number of different identities that form the person as a whole. The five identities that I came to identify were analyzed and developed through this project. The identities I formulated are physical identity (how we see ourselves), professional identity (who we are as teachers), personal identity (our culture, beliefs and values), gender identity (who we are as women) and authoring identity (how we represent ourselves through words).

With respect to gender identity recognition, the project consisted of five women in varying stages of their careers and life experiences. The group consisted of only women in recognition of the knowledge and experience women have in the area of teaching. I wanted to honor them by giving them a comfortable and public space in which to share their stories. Even though the narratives they wrote did not directly speak to the issue of gender identity, I believe that it is the foundation of who we are and from where we write (Greene, 1998).

With respect to physical identity recognition, we explore, analyze, and understand the external world physically through our five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling. We internalize this information in better understanding ourselves and our place in the world. We can then reflect upon these five sensory experiences through writing.

The physical arena is a magnificent learning environment. It is a school within which, through experimentation, we come to understand what causes us to expand

and what causes us to contract, what causes us to grow and what causes us to shrivel, what nourishes our souls and what depletes them, what works and what does not (Zukav, 1990, p. 22).

How we experience the world through the use of our hands is important in the presentation of the stories the teachers in this project told. Each teacher chose one of the five fingers, on the left hand, to transpose her story into a fingerprint. The left hand was chosen in honor of being identified as the feminine hand (Visser, 1994). I also wanted to represent these stories in a meaningful and visually interesting way. I felt the best way to achieve this was through each member's fingerprint, which is a unique form of identification just like the narratives they wrote.

This project stressed the importance of self-acceptance in maintaining a healthy identity. We need to come to understand our body's individual needs and rhythms, flow with the rhythm of our body and life rather than struggling against it (Carter-Scott, 1998). I believe that reflecting, writing and sharing our human experiences allows us to develop more completely as individuals and as teaching professionals.

With respect to professional identity recognition, teachers become better teachers by reflecting on their practice and sharing their experiences genuinely with others.

Beginning and veteran teachers alike need to explore the emergence of their second selves, to reinvent themselves as moral artists in relation to their experiences as teachers. A valuable way to do this is to read and study narratives paralleling their journeys as teachers and incorporating many of the skills, attitudes, dispositions, and perspectives they need to be effective and engaged practitioners (Preskill, 1998, p. 345).

Regarding personal identity recognition, memories and sharing stories are important in growing as a person and redefining oneself and understanding one's place in the world. Understanding our past gives us the opportunity to rewrite our future. As indicated by Houtekamer, Chambers, Yamagishi and Good Striker (1997), making meaning of our lives is what education and learning is all about. By looking a little bit more closely at the stories that our lives tell, teachers can come to understand themselves and others better (Noddings, 1991). They can reach a deeper understanding of their development as individuals and educators. Teachers can have more intimate relationships with each other because of the sacred stories they share.

Looking at authoring identity recognition, the other teachers and I developed our writing ability through our collaboration. We shared similar experiences, asked questions and commented freely on each other's work. We became more comfortable with ourselves as authors of our own life stories.

Different types of fonts were used for each of the five participants in the project. I found this was the best way to include dialogue and comments on the narratives to each other from these individuals as a visual cue to who is speaking. It also was important to give each author her own identity throughout the discourse of the project, allowing for instant recognition of the dialogue unique to each participant. All comments written by myself will be found in *Trots Light*. Comments by Trish Draper are in *ZapfChau*, Jen Matthews' are in *Architect*, Julie Wilson's are in *Geometr231*, and Jenine Chen's comments are in *BernhardFashionBT*.

This project is an intertext which allows the comments and dialogue of the writers and researcher to become interwoven. The five identities: authoring, gender, professional,

physical, and personal; are explored by all writers in a process of writing, reflecting and sharing. The project is organized in this way to allow me to comment throughout, as well as include individual narratives, reflections and comments from the group interspersed with the chapters on the five different identities. Each section contains elements of this intertext approach. This allows for more flow and accessibility. I found that while all participants wrote their narratives with no overall identity in mind, it became apparent that certain narratives and reflections, although they had elements of all the identities, appeared to better fit into some identities more than others. While there was a great deal of overlap, I did find that individual narratives and comments tended to lean towards or focus on the formation of a particular identity. Jenine's narrative of reflective practice and comments best fit the authoring identity; Trish's narrative of journey followed the gender identity; Jen's narrative of apprenticeship most identified with the professional identity; Julie's narrative of social criticism followed the physical identity; and finally, my narrative of hope shadowed the personal identity.

Through this project, I wanted to give these teachers a voice and place to share their stories publicly. I hope they and those that read these narratives learn more about themselves and their life travels.

Methodology

Great teaching grows out of a clear and often reinvented sense of self, and the most moving teaching narratives chronicle the appearance of a better self as well as a better teacher.

Stephen Preskill

Action research solves problems to local problems in local settings. Global or generalizable results are not the objective, solutions to given problems is the primary goal of action research. The teacher is very much a part of this process, as research is often conducted in one or more classrooms. It is important that the teacher has training in action research so as to produce valid results (Gay, 1996).

Action research does provide a valid scientific approach to problem solving. It provides a means by which individuals can attempt to improve upon educational practices within their own environment. Action research can provide answers to problems that generally can not wait for the theoretical, generalizable solutions. Because of this, the value of action research is often confined to the individual or individuals using it.

Throughout the process of formulating my own form of action research for this project, I noticed many parallels to the research outlined by Houtekamer et al. (1997). The authors followed the types of action research outlined by Carson (1989): technical, practical, critical, and post-structural. As indicated by Houtekamer et al., I also found that the action research utilized here did not fit well into any of the categories outlined by Carson. Our group did not focus specifically on the theory implied by the technical approach. Nor did we focus on any particular teaching issues implied by Carson's practical approach. Critical action research makes visible the invisible in our teaching, it brings a critical sensibility to our investigations regarding teaching practice. This was not the focus of our research. Finally, post-structural action research investigates tension between theory and practice, our own tensions and conflicts, and the language in which these matters are cast and sentimented; this was not the overarching approach of this research. Instead however, I found that all four aspects came to play a part in how we

conducted the project, how we came to question, understand and make conclusions about ourselves and others; how we came to discover and create meaning for ourselves and each other.

The organization of my research has also been influenced by Preskill (1998). He stresses (in his article) “that narratives of teaching make an invaluable contribution to understanding what it takes to teach well” (p. 344). Novice and veteran teachers alike learn from the stories of colleagues, which allows for self-reflection in their own teaching practice. Narratives act as guides for teachers in understanding themselves and their profession.

Teacher development can occur through reading and sharing stories. Preskill refers to it as the quest for a teacher’s *second self*. As teachers and individuals we can come to understand ourselves professionally and personally by writing and sharing stories of our life experiences in the world of teaching. We are constantly reshaping and redefining ourselves in our attempts at constructing an identity. As teachers we are constantly searching for ways to improve the art and craft of our teaching practice and in growing as human beings. “A valuable way to do this is to read and study narratives paralleling their journeys as teachers and incorporating many of the skills, attitudes, dispositions, and perspectives they need to be effective practitioners” (Preskill, 1998, p. 345).

This group reflected on their teaching practice by writing narratives based on the five forms indicated by Preskill. In this project, each teacher wrote one narrative based on one of the different forms:

1. Narrative of Social Criticism: Focus on both historical and contemporary issues

that prevent schools from fulfilling their democratic promise.

2. Narrative of Apprenticeship: Focus on the struggle and challenges beginners face during student teaching and the first full year of teaching.

3. Narrative of Reflective Practice: Takes the reader inside the mind of the teacher to show how the teacher's standards influence self-evaluations of her practices and how she acts on these evaluations to create a classroom that is just and equitable and humane.

4. Narrative of Journey: An opportunity to reflect on one's whole career, one's whole life. It is a chance to consider once again whom one is, how a career in teaching has contributed to one's identity, and whether the day to day work of a teacher continues to bring fulfillment.

5. Narrative of Hope: Helps to rediscover the purpose and meaning of education and take pleasure in the smallest improvements and the most modest accomplishments of our students (p. 346).

The teachers were provided with a copy of Preskill's article to read and gain insights into the different types of narratives. This assisted them in writing their own narratives as it provided a description and example of each. I spent time with each teacher explaining the process and was available anytime if teachers had questions about their contribution. After they had read the article, each chose the narrative that they wanted to write on. Each teacher wrote one narrative. One narrative was written for each of Preskill's categories.

I selected five teachers whom I have known as colleagues to participate. Each was selected for specific criteria I had in mind. I wanted female participants from various

backgrounds with varying degrees of experience. The five of us formed a writing group to share our stories and reflect upon the writing process. After each teacher had selected a type of narrative to write on, they were given time to write their narrative before the group met with the rough drafts of their stories. There were five narratives to choose from and each teacher selected a different narrative to write about. I collected the stories they wrote and gathered their reflections and insights on the writing process and shared experiences during our meetings. After the meeting, teachers worked independently at completing the revised drafts of their narratives.

After approximately one month the teachers forwarded their revised narratives to me. Each member in the group received revised copies of everyone's narratives. Each member read and wrote comments or insights about the other members' narratives. I encouraged them to write about the things they really enjoyed and how their experiences related to the themes of Preskill's article and to one another's experiences. I encouraged them to ask questions of one another in hopes of causing the writers to reflect more deeply on their emotions and the experiences they had shared with the group. I wanted these comments to be specific to the individual and the narrative rather than general comments of recognition. I hoped that some of the comments related back to our initial meeting, and they indeed did. I wanted the writers to remember that these were very personal stories with a great deal of care and effort made in writing and sharing them. I wanted everyone to take the same amount of care and effort in providing feedback.

I also wanted to use this opportunity for proofreading, which was separate from the comments made on the content. I collected all of the narratives and comments from everyone, and forwarded them back to the writers as a form of feedback. From these

personal reflections, the teachers wrote the final draft of their narrative. The presentation of the final narrative was to be in the form of each individual's fingerprint. Each member of the group was given an eleven by seventeen photocopy of their print. Then, using each of their own enlarged fingerprints, the teachers transposed their narrative into the lines of their fingerprint. Their narrative was to be placed into the lines of their print to create a visually interesting and creative representation of their words. I felt that this was very important as it showed both the uniqueness of each individual and the narrative that they created. I wanted a written expression that was personal to each member of the group, something that they alone could identify and associate with. This was to become their expression of their autobiographical work. I wanted them to transpose their words into a medium that was their own, an imprint of themselves as an individual.

Authoring Identity

Man is eminently a storyteller. His research for a purpose, a cause, an ideal, a mission and the life is largely a search for a plot and a pattern in the development of his life story.

Eric Hoffer

The authoring identity I identified encompasses understanding our own plots, writing style, language use, character choice, point of view, and theme in experiencing and writing about teaching and life. Through this project, my objective was that the writers more clearly identify with their authoring identity. I define an authoring identity as becoming aware of our ability and enjoyment of the creative writing process and the reflection on these experiences through writing. The individual should thus develop a better understanding of themselves through this writing process.

It got me writing and thinking beyond classroom experiences and how it can impact what I am doing right now. Some things that I am not satisfied with and I found if I went back and reflected on things in the past it helped my present teaching. (Jenine's personal reflection)

Personally, I always saw language and written words as simply a form of communication. Even though others see words as a form of creative expression, I struggled with this identity. I had made a clear distinction between those that were “writers” and those that “were not”. I never saw myself as a writer. I struggled through English classes in high school and at university. The correct usage and order in which words are placed on a page, to me, has always been a work of art. Writers are like artists understanding the elements in turning a two-dimensional plane into a realistic three dimensional landscape of colors, shapes and textures. As I stated in response to Trish's narrative,

I applaud you for selecting this narrative to write on. It is most difficult to summarize a life in a few pages of text. Evaluating everything as to its value in your life. It is easier to remember the facts and more difficult to remember the feelings. I hope that looking back has been enjoyable and not difficult. We can learn so much from each other's journeys whether similar or different from our own. I learned a great deal not only

about you, but also about myself in reading your story. Thanks for sharing very personal stories. Would you have done anything differently if you could have? (Caroline's comments to Trish)

The writing group consisted of a mixture of individuals who had well defined authoring identities and others that did not. Certain individuals were confident in their writing ability whereas others were very concerned about their writing skills.

I found the writing to be quite difficult because I was unsure of what I was doing. It was difficult to write about my self. The editing process we went through, everyone editing and questioning everyone else's stories, really helped me. I was able to rework my story, answering questions the editing process brought out. (Trish's personal reflection)

By sharing each other's writing we not only learned from the content of each other's stories about teaching, but learned a great deal about writing and seeing ourselves as authors of our own stories. Everyone learned a little bit more about the process of writing effectively and creatively. "Regardless of our writing talent in our daily lives we are all ad hoc novelists" (Aftel, 1996, p.16). It was interesting how everyone had a unique style of writing. Not only did the content of the stories reveal something about the author, so did the style in which they wrote, as illustrated by my comments to Jen.

I enjoyed the structure of your narrative. It was as though I was walking through the hallways of your school being introduced to the people who have had the greatest influence on you in your development as a teacher so far. I was fascinated by how much you shared about yourself by describing the qualities of others you admire. You never really came out and talked a great deal about yourself directly, but it was very evident in the organization of your narrative. Your writing style is very comfortable and enjoyable to read. Thanks for sharing these stories. (Caroline's comments to Jen)

As suggested by Aftel (1996), experiences we simply talk about differ completely from experiences we put into words on the printed page. Individuals are forced to look more closely and analyze life experiences more critically when they are put into text. The act of writing down life experiences places them into a structured context that may dictate how we regard and understand these events. Memories may fade, but written words will not. Writing down our stories allows us to make sense of our lives.

What I like most about this project is that it made me put some thoughts I'd been having for a long time in order. It forced me to really explain how I felt about certain aspects of the teaching environment in which I work. I realized I was a lot more critical of some aspects of the system and less critical of others. No system is perfect and neither are the people, and by this I refer to all the parties, who are involved in it. (Julie's personal reflection)

Experience is given meaning through language (Aftel, 1996). If we change the words used to describe events, it may change the way we view the event or view who we are. Using different vocabulary to write our stories gives us the opportunity of looking at our stories from different angles or perspectives. It gives us insight into who we are and how we portray ourselves. We can portray ourselves in new ways, not previously considered. We can achieve different meanings to our stories and lives. We can come to understand ourselves and others more deeply by working through the elements of our life stories. By writing from the heart, we can incorporate more emotions and feelings into our writing and be more in tune with the reoccurring themes in our stories and lives. Stories can give us the gift of learning from past experiences and changing the direction of our lives more positively.

I enjoyed the sharing portion of the process. When we all got together at Cari's house to

read our stories, we each took turns sharing our stories and discussed each one individually. It was wonderful just to connect with other teachers at various points in their careers. It was great to see and hear that although our stories are all very different, many of the feelings about some basic issues and events were very similar. It was like a vein running through the whole process. (Trish's personal reflection)

In pursuit of an authoring identity, I believe the writers have learned more about the nature of story and the value it has in understanding the practice of teaching. *“The process we all went through was very interesting. In many respects, it helped me to focus on various events in my teaching career, as well as remember things long since forgotten” (Trish's personal reflection).*

It is important that teachers develop their story writing ability in refining their authoring identity and in effectively communicating knowledge about teaching that can be defined as a legitimate form of research and resource in the education of teachers. In doing this, teachers need to understand what constitutes a story and the place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education (Carter, 1993).

There is tremendous richness in the knowledge found in stories told or written by others about life and the human condition. A story has many different meanings and levels not found in the simple recounting of events or listing of activities. The basic knowledge that teachers have of teaching comes from their practice. Stories allow for this information and knowledge to be shared with other practicing and learning teachers. “It returns teachers to their roots, encouraging them to reflect on their original reasons for pursuing a career in teaching, and it stimulates them to construct for the first time or to reconstruct their personal philosophy of teaching and learning” (Preskill, 1998, p. 355).

We build stories from stored memories, past experiences, cultural differences, expectations and personality. By creating stories we can bring order and understanding to our experiences and life. We revisit conflicts, solve problems and make interpretations. The more we write about our experiences in the form of story the better we can understand ourselves and our teaching. As humans we are always trying to bring order and understanding to our lives; this can be aided through writing. Story writing can be very useful to all teachers, but especially important to novice teachers who are struggling to find a way of organizing recently acquired knowledge about teaching (Carter, 1993). Jen commented on how she wished that she had written about her first year in teaching.

I wish I had kept a journal because I didn't. But this year, I am definitely going to keep a journal it is a goal. I don't think I can look back and remember certain things. Well there are certain things I shouldn't have done and others I did right and I would like to do it again. It is the little details. (Jen's comments)

Throughout the process, this group of writers saw each other's stories as literature. We gave each other feedback in the areas of character, plot, setting, and conflict resolution. As we worked together in this manner, each member saw her story as a frame of her life that could be rewritten or taken in different directions due to the questions and comments group members posed to the narrator. This was evident in Julie's comments and questions about Trish's narrative.

Your narrative seems incomplete. Starting "sharing workshops" is a wonderful accomplishment. I would like to know what your "sharing workshops" are about. What lead you to start them? Implementing programs/workshops is an important stop on your journey that should be elaborated upon. (Julie's comments to Trish)

We became familiar with each member's unique writing style. The narrative patterns varied for each of our life stories. These patterns were a key part of each individual. All members wrote and rewrote their narratives in ways they never thought possible because of the discourse and feedback given by group members. Mitchell and Weber (1999) describe the importance of writing first and second drafts of shared memories. The first draft organizes the memories into a story format and the second draft allows for understanding and interpretation, a clearer picture of the truth. The one-dimensional stories we initially wrote were written into rich narratives through the journey we all traveled together in the writing and sharing process.

If we look at the events in our lives as the elements of a story, we look at the people as characters and experiences as potential plots. If we become more critical of our stories from a literary perspective, we can escape the simple clichés we often tend to write about. We can look deeper into the meaning of our stories, analyzing characters, plots, and events more objectively, thus appreciating where the stories have come from and where they are going in their meaning to our lives. We can reveal who we really are through more meaningful and reflective writing.

In writing my reflective narrative, I have found that my perception of the situation has changed not only since the initial event, but even over the past few months as I have been re-reflecting on my narrative. Key elements have remained the same in my narrative; however, the interpretations of my role and the roles of my students in the narrative have changed. (Jenine's personal reflection)

If we can learn to listen to our own stories, we become more aware of how important certain events have been in our lives. As suggested by Aftel (1996), events that

inspire us to write often have important meaning in our growth and development. If we can look beyond simple patterns in how we often play the same old stories over and over in our lives, we may be able to look at and rewrite characters and plots more effectively. If we can read our life stories as we do a plot, we can then step back and look at the events more openly. We can see the themes more objectively and then take charge of how the events will unfold and in which direction.

“Whether inventing, reading, or listening to stories, reading or writing journals and autobiographies, conducting oral history interview, or engaging in therapeutic dialogue, the teller or receiver of stories can discover connections between self and other, penetrate barriers to understand, and come to know more deeply the meanings of his or her own historical and cultural narrative” (Witherell, 1991, p.94).

Powerful narratives can aid us in developing who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we interpret our life experiences. As stated in Trish’s comments about my narrative, *“I love the way you connected everything. The thread of hope runs through it all. Excellent! This is great. You are a wonderful writer! What a gift! Don’t change a thing!”* (Trish’s comments to Caroline)

As a mystery unfolds in a good novel, so do mysteries unfold in our lives. That is not to say that each plot has a neat beginning, middle and end. The plots that we write for ourselves often do not have any ending that is concrete as we continue to live and grow. They are often left open ended and often grow or change to reflect the image of ourselves, the passage of time and gained wisdom.

Our identity is defined and forged through a process that must come over time.

Life results in the formation of our own plot making process. We are entangled in many plots throughout our lives, many of which occur simultaneously. Where we are in our life at any given point determines which plot we put greatest emphasis upon. This is evident in the stories written by teachers in different stages of their lives and careers.

Narrative of Reflective Practice

Reflective Memoir on Classroom Practices: East Meets West

Marie was from Europe, whereas most of the other students in my ESL class at the university extension program were from Asia. I remembered Marie because she appeared to enjoy and appreciate the class environment that I provided. She drank in language, questioned for learning, put all her effort into getting the most from the course, and never complained about the interactive activities we did for the purposes of improving all aspects of language. She sparkled with anticipation before each new activity. To me, that sparkle meant, "Great! We get to do something fun!" If we didn't do some fun activity, there was still no lack of enthusiasm in her expression. She threw herself completely into the language-learning process as she did life, getting the most out of everything that happened inside the classroom as well as outside of it.

On the other hand, I knew that at times other students questioned the rationale behind the various interactive activities which made up the meat of my lessons. They often told me that they didn't want to speak to other non-native speakers. I thought they wanted to be spoon-fed, that they didn't want to interact, that they didn't want to think for themselves. However, I persevered. I was frustrated, but I continued going to class with a smile. Was I going to class with a sincere smile? Was I being authentic? Could the students pick up that even though I did care about them, I was frustrated with them? I knew the students didn't always appreciate what I was doing with the class, but I didn't know how to give them what they wanted. However, I did know that there was a discrepancy between our expectations of each other.

Since I knew that the students were having difficulty with my 'Western' approach, why didn't I find a way at least to ease the transition between the two radically different methods of learning? How

could I have made things easier for them? Why couldn't I put myself in their shoes? Why didn't I want to? I had an agenda: to teach them how to become effective communicators and independent learners. Was it a goal to be achieved at all costs? At the close of the class, Marie told me how much she appreciated the class and how much she had learned. I had 'nice' comments from other students as well, stating that they had learned a lot, and that the course had been useful, but mostly that they had liked me as a person. Nevertheless, I felt disappointment from many of them.

One reason was because they had so many classmates from their same language background in the class. This frustration was compounded by my emphasis on communication and an interactive style of learning. As well, they felt they had not learned nearly enough. How could they have learned anything? They had to talk with each other and not to native English speakers. One student revealed that he/she understood my dilemma in the classroom: "It's good, sometimes is boring the course, because in the course you need separate the students that don't have experience in American system of Education (sic)."

Teaching that class was a real struggle because I gave the best that was in me, and I did everything that I knew was right to do, and they didn't value what I gave. Within a few short weeks after the class, however, I evidenced miraculous changes in their attitudes and perceptions as all but one or two students of the 18 students contacted me and expressed regret for not having appreciated the class as much as they felt they should have. Many of them went on to the next level and discovered that they missed our interactive and lively classes. As well, some even discovered that their language ability was much higher than their classmates coming from other programs or classes. Other students had gone home to Asia and were shocked at the comparison between themselves and others who had spent even longer periods of time overseas.

They had indeed learned, and learned much more than they had imagined. That was when I became thankful that I had not caved in, not resorted to teacher-centered methods of teaching, and had trusted myself as a teacher, despite the inner turmoil I had faced as I taught that class. This caused me to wonder how to engender trust in my students along the way. Why did it take them so long to appreciate the process I was taking them through? Is it important that they do appreciate it? Perhaps not, but I surely could have made a place for a transition between the two education styles. Is there such a dichotomy between teacher-centered and student-centered classrooms so that there is no place in between? Why could I listen to the students, but not feel what they were going through and give them a place to be while they were going through the stress of change? Why couldn't I have given them a middle ground, safe, familiar ground? Why couldn't I bring them to a place where they could see the rationale behind what we were doing? Nel Noddings (1997) writes, "We cannot force people to awaken, however. Instead we have to invite them, share with them the miracles and joys we have experienced and listen to theirs" (p. 180).

Jenine Chen

Gender Identity

There is no objective reality.
We don't see the world as it is,
we see the world as we are.

Anonymous

It has been my experience that many women struggle with their gender identity. With the changing and ever increasing roles that women play in society this is not surprising. Women are constantly struggling with the demands of family and work. In the past our gender identity was understood as that of mother and homemaker and now it is not so clearly defined.

University brought back the determination. I had to do this! I had to graduate! During my second year of University I became pregnant. My emotions were in an upheaval. I almost felt a sense of loss, that maybe the journey was going to be over, but the determination came back. Now I had more of a reason to become a teacher, so I could provide a better life for my son. (Trish's narrative)

Previously, women were not given the opportunity to further their education to pursue careers, and as a result women took on the role of mother and homemaker. Women's identity has been generally defined in relationship to marital status and child rearing. Having not yet defined myself in the role of mother, I have always been surprised and somewhat insulted when some of the first questions women ask each other are: Are you married? Do you have children? How many children do you have? How old are your children? What are your children's names? These inquiries are often made before career related questions are asked. I now understand that our ability to have children is what ultimately brings us together and makes us distinctly different from being male. Our gender identity is inseparable from our ability to have children.

As indicated by Greene (1998), women's identity has been defined by the male gender and in relationship to what it means to be male. Is to be female the opposite of being male? Obviously this is not the case. Women are now in a position of defining

what it is to be female outside of the definition of being male. Gender identity is not easily accomplished and has become a process of personal discovery for many women (Kerr, 1998). Gender identity formation and redefinition for women could be addressed through autobiographical writing.

Gender studies can help us pay attention to when and where women autobiographers seem to have trouble with their narrative. But the answer to the question of why we like to read it, and why individuals sit down at desk or table and begin to tell their story, lies not in theory but in cultural history. It has to do with where we look when we try to understand our own lives, how we read texts and what largely unexamined cultural assumptions we bring to interpret them (Kerr, 1998, p. 4).

Even though most of the narratives written by this group did not specially address the issue of gender identity, gender influences perceptions and understanding of who we are, what we share with others and write about. It is because of this that gender identity formation is an important element to this research.

I found similar results to that of Houtekamer et al. (1997), who noticed that the writers expressed in their stories a sense of homelessness and desire to belong. The writers in this group were also looking for a place to feel comfortable in sharing beliefs, fears and successes in their roles as teachers and women. This safe place to share common experiences aids in a sometimes difficult and confusing gender identity formation process.

I've experienced times when I had a real lack of hope in my life and found it an utterly miserable place to be in. It was a personal lack of hope, not a professional one. I don't like the person I am

when I am lacking hope, but feel like it's impossible to go back to the place I was when I had it.

Then suddenly, without my willing it, waves of hope wash over me unbidden, and I am closer to where I was before and waiting for more and more waves to come wash over me as time goes by.

Having gone through this divorce this past year, I found I went through such deep times of hopelessness and could never imagine a time when I could feel the joy of living again. But now, I do. Every day I feel stronger and better than the day before, happier and more filled with hope.

(Jenine's personal reflection)

The women in this group made comments about the importance of feeling secure in sharing their stories. They found security in the comfort of a writing group that consisted of only women. Even though none of the women had met previously, they felt comfortable in the sisterhood of shared experiences.

All of the women contributing to this research project were in different stages of their lives and careers. The date that we met to share our narratives was dictated by one member who was just weeks away from giving birth to her first child. The eminent birth helped bond the group on the gender level. During breaks from discussing our narratives we shared wives' tales and stories associated with being pregnant and childbirth. We spent time swinging wedding rings over each other's stomachs and wrists in determining the number and gender of the children we were going to have. It was also noted that red haired babies were born to women who experienced a great deal of heartburn during pregnancy. Female babies were born to women who experienced terrible morning sickness and male babies were guaranteed with a fetal heartbeat not exceeding 140 beats per minute.

There were many issues that were gender related that helped bring cohesion to the

group. All of us were experiencing change and redefinition in our gender identities. Julie was only married for a year and weeks away from giving birth to her first child. Jen was recently engaged and in the process of making wedding plans. Jenine had recently been separated from her husband and in the process of getting a divorce. Trish had spent a lot of time over the last few years dealing with relationships, having been married twice and raising her pre-teen son. I wanted to start a family and was faced with the prospect that it might not be possible. I was dealing with a lot of worry, guilt and frustration over my failed attempts to get pregnant. Soon after our meeting, however, I found out that I was five weeks pregnant.

I specifically chose women writers for my project because as indicated by Maxine Greene (1998), “We realize now that it is not only the inclusion of women as a category that is important. It is the stories of women, the accounts of their lived lives, their work lives, their sexual lives” (p. 19). As indicated by Carter (1993), reflective writing and teacher talk has not been sanctioned in the past as a legitimate form of research. Research conducted by women in this area may have not received the recognition it deserves. It is important that women’s words be heard. Kerr (1998) states that for the woman autobiographer the major question becomes how to see one’s life whole when one has been taught to see it as expressed through family and bonds with others. These words can dramatically impact society, established institutions, and how women define themselves. Women feel a struggle for fairness in the expression of ideas and opinions. This fairness can be accomplished through recognizing research that has been conducted by women. “We need to make audible and visible the diverse ways in which identity is negotiated in our country and the manner in which it is affected by fairness, equity, opportunities for

free expression and by the existence or non existence of democracy” (Greene, 1998, p. 19). As I indicated in my personal reflection about the writing process,

The discourse was very rich among a group of individuals who did not know each other, had never met and had such varying teaching backgrounds. I think it had a lot to do with the fact that we were all women. We felt very comfortable in this situation. None of us had previously been involved in such an experience and we enjoyed the sisterhood that was established. Whether or not women voice their concerns about the discrimination they experience in society they do acknowledge it. This was a stand for what we believed in and who we were. We reaffirmed and acknowledged our feelings and experiences about being women in the teaching profession. (Caroline's personal reflection)

Narrative Of Journey

The Journey

I leaned back and flipped another page of the book. A smile spread across my face as I gazed at the photos and papers...in my memory book. I am so glad I started this book! I guess I decided to do it because I am such a visual person, and I need a place to put my ever growing collection of little things my students have given me over the last several years.

When I think back, I guess I have always wanted to be a teacher. I have always liked school, but have always had to work at it. This journey has had its share of difficulties, but something always kept me going. I guess it must have been determination or maybe it was in spite after a counselor told my parents to lower their expectations for me, as I would probably only be a waitress. I do not like people telling me that I can not do something. It makes me want to do it even more, just to prove them wrong!

I can not remember a time when I did not want to be a teacher. It has always been in my mind even when I took a two year diversion to take Fine arts and design. This turned out to be a time and place to grow up. Being a starving artist for two years created a great desire for money, so I ignored my heart and went to work for the phone company.

The corporate world lacked everything I loved. Something kept telling me this is not where you belong! I decided to continue on my journey. I had big fears about a large University so I began in a smaller, warmer community college. Eventually, I did make the transition to the University of Alberta. This is where early childhood became my passion! I knew I had found what I'd been looking for. It was almost a feeling of fulfillment.

University brought back the determination. I had to do this! I had to graduate! During my second year of University I became pregnant. My emotions were in an upheaval. I almost felt a sense of loss, that maybe the journey was going to be over, but the determination came back. Now I had

more of a reason to become a teacher, so I could provide a better life for my son.

Graduation was a real triumph. I actually did it! Even with a baby and a bad marriage! I remember one special experience, on one particular day after an exhausting time with my son. I opened the mailbox and found a letter from the University. Oh great, I thought, They want more money. I opened it to find I had won the Pearl Turner Memorial award for excellence in early childhood education. I cried. I knew then teaching and early childhood was where I belonged.

Once I graduated, my son and I moved to Black Diamond and I started applying for teaching positions everywhere! At that time jobs were scarce, but I was lucky enough to get on the Foothills School Division substitute board. I subbed everywhere! It was an excellent opportunity and an experience I believe every new teacher should have. As a substitute you get to try out many different grade levels with out the commitment. Through subbing I Learned what grade levels I Loved and which ones were a challenge. From substitute teaching I moved on to a learning support position. I worked with children who had a variety of learning difficulties in math and reading. Although this position was fun and I loved the school and staff I was working with, I longed for my own classroom. I had several interviews but was unsuccessful because I am not very good at talking about myself. So when I applied for the kindergarten teaching position I decided to put on a show, so to speak. So I wrote a sample unit on bugs! Showing what I would teach and how. I got the job. The principal told me he had never had such a fun wonderful interview before.

My first year of teaching was in a team teaching setting with another first year teacher. This was like the blind leading the blind! I certainly learned the fine art of compromise, but did not enjoy the experience. The class was huge! We had 30 kindergarten children in one room. It was crazy! Think of 30 children all 5 years olds and none of them can tie their shoes! It took forever just to go outside for recess! The year went well despite the fact that my team teacher and I did not

really see eye to eye.

My second year in kindergarten was wonderful! I felt like I had come into my own style. I had the freedom I needed to experiment and learn. My teaching partner had decided to move up to grade 5 and teach French and science. The principal asked me if I wanted to stay in the kindergarten. The class was smaller by half, about 15 kids, so I was very excited! I read tons of books over the summer and wanted to try out everything! It turned out to be a fabulous year and it earned me my continuing contract. I was thrilled! I somehow knew I was on the right track.

*I learned each year is always full of new learning experiences and is always brimming with magic and possibilities. I love kindergarten in particular so I decided to share what I love. I hoped there were others who felt as passionate as I do about teaching. So I started sharing workshops with other kindergarten teachers in Foothills school division. The workshops started quite by accident as all good ideas tend to do! I was given the job of booking a guest speaker for a kindergarten teachers meeting in the spring. Unfortunately, the person I booked ended up canceling a few days before we were to meet. I was in a panic so to "save myself," I sent a letter to each kindergarten teacher asking her to bring some of her favorite ideas, books, themes etc., to share with everyone. I was pleasantly surprised at how well it all turned out! Almost everyone told me how much they enjoyed the sharing and the ideas. The chance to talk with colleagues who are in similar situations. It was a wonderful experience. The response I got from these workshops was what led me to taking a big step and offering the workshop at the year 2000 teachers convention. Here's hoping it's a success! The response I got from many of the ideas I shared, led me to writing for a teacher's magazine, *The Mailbox*. It was a great feeling knowing that my ideas were worthy of a national magazine!*

I love what I do! I truly believe God gives everyone a gift and everyone has a calling. The journey I have always been on lead me to my calling and my passion... teaching little people!

Trish Draper

Professional Identity

A good teacher is important, but sisters and brothers in practice are the main ingredient for success. You cannot achieve enlightenment by locking yourself in a room.

Glenn Hudak

Most of the teachers that I worked with during this project did not have a well formed teacher identity when they entered the profession. Many simply fell into teaching, having never previously seen teaching as part of their future. Even though the circumstances of why each became a teacher varied significantly, they all proclaimed that they loved teaching and that it was their destiny. Jen stated, “I loved school all my life. I especially enjoyed junior high school. I always identified well with kids that age.” She entered the education faculty after obtaining a diploma in drama. She wanted to be more than a starving actress and teaching drama has given her the opportunity of utilizing and sharing her talent with others.

Julie entered the profession once she obtained her French degree and after not really knowing what she wanted to do. “School was the best thing I knew. I had always been going to school. My year starts in September and ends in June. [School] was a known entity and I knew it well. I can see the difference I have made. It is very rewarding. I surprised myself because I never thought I would enjoy it.” Jenine stated, “I fell into it because I wanted to travel overseas and teaching was the best way. My father is a teacher and he had great influence over me and I love it now. I really didn’t know what I was doing and felt very cut off from other people in knowing what I should be doing. I learned by doing and talking to other teachers.”

I also entered the profession through the back door, first getting my business degree and writing and presenting educational programs for Alberta Culture. The only one of us with a clear teaching identity before entering the profession was Trish. “I have always been a teacher I think. My mother tells me I use to organize the kids in the neighborhood all the time to play school. I love it to death.” Even though she had a clearer professional identity at the beginning of her career, it did not seem to be set in stone. She had the same types

of insecurities, questions and drive for continued professional growth and professional identity formation as did the rest of us.

Even though we are all at different stages of our careers with varied backgrounds and experiences, we had a very clear understanding of the difficulties endured by our first year teacher, Jen. We identified well with and had many comments to make in regards to being a practicum student and entering our first year of teaching. Those experiences still impact our growth and development in the profession years after the fact.

I am emotionally scarred from my first year. Now I see myself more as who I am but not all I am because I don't put everything of who I am into the classroom. [Practicum teachers] should focus on giving us ideas on how to improve because you do not have them; because you do not have the experience. You just can't say your lesson plans are weak...well tell me how to make them better. Show me. Show me yours. I never saw any of my practicum teachers resources.

(Julie's comments)

Our professional identities have been greatly influenced by the number of years we have been teaching and the varied experiences we all have had. It was interesting that Jen's narrative (the first year teacher) spoke mostly about the teachers she has encountered and the qualities she admires in them. Even though the reader was able to get insight into Jen as a teacher, it was through her observations of other teachers that we learned about her. She spoke very little about her own experiences and feelings. This may be due to the fact that she has not yet begun to form a professional identity or is at least in the infancy stage of development. She does not have enough experience or knowledge to make comparisons or reflections on her practice or feelings.

I was very open with how insecure I was and how little experience I had. In my practicum, [the practicum teacher] focused so much on my lesson plans I forgot I was suppose to be teaching the kids because I was so worried about what he was thinking and what he wanted, so I never had any relationship with these kids. I was just trying to stay afloat. I was trying to learn the material so badly. It was an awful experience and it was my last practicum. It was the taste in my mouth when I started teaching. I can't get through (my first year) without support, so I was so lucky to be at the school I was at. The staff is so helpful. (Jen's comments)

Julie stated to the group,

I think you learn from your own mistakes. I am not going to do this, this year. My first year I was too much my way or the highway. It was coming from my own insecurities and I was more flexible the second year. Teaching all those different grades has been schizophrenic, but at the same time it teaches you a number of different strategies. I think it is very common for first year teachers to be teacher centered. You are surviving, you are trying to figure it out and students are getting an education some times in spite of what you are doing because you are so focused on yourself.

Now I know I am much more student focused. I will totally change what I planned because I see what the class needs that day. I am much more aware of what they need and less what I need to teach. If something did not work, I would try it again a different way. But it is very frustrating being a first year teacher because I had many questions but I didn't want to ask too many questions because I did not want to look as though I did not know. But, I didn't know. I

was lucky that my husband taught at the same school. I asked him questions, I would not ask others. I would go try things he suggested but it was his style and not mine. (Julie's comments)

Our professional identity is constantly changing as we gain more experience in the field of teaching. Education is in a constant state of change and as students grow and learn, so should the teachers. What is the healthiest and most effective way of growing in the profession? Experience alone is not sufficient as there are many very experienced teachers that have grown very little. Professional growth is more than sitting back and letting the years pass, it is about nourishing ourselves and others as we grow. It is about being actively involved in our professional identity formation. We all agreed that one of the best ways to do this was by reflecting on our own teaching practice, sharing our stories and listening to the stories of others.

Often times teacher talk is not sanctioned as a legitimate form of professional development. Discourse between teachers should be encouraged and more opportunities given to teachers to share stories. "When school faculties develop the skill of dialogue and discussion, they learn how to transform their talk into meaningful communication that improves relationships and makes a real difference for student learning" (Gamston & Wellman, 1998, p. 30). This project allows me the opportunity to legitimize this form of professional development in the formation of my professional identity and that of others.

I really enjoyed meeting the other participants. We all have very diverse teaching experiences, but I was very pleased to see how much we all had in common. I particularly enjoyed listening to our first year teacher. We all try to seem so confident that first year. I felt like I was the only one who had insecurities about my teaching. I appreciated her honesty, and it was nice to see that we all had those feelings of doubt. It also helped me to see just how far I have come as a

teacher and that the process of becoming a good teacher is never-ending. (Julie's personal reflection)

I have now been teaching for about seven years, and this is the first year that I have not had a formal evaluation written on my teaching practice. I was evaluated the first year because I was new to the profession, the second year for my continuing contract; the third year for my permanent certification in Alberta, the fourth year for my role as principal/administrator, the fifth year for my continuing contract with a British Columbia school division, and the sixth year for my permanent BC certification. I would often complain and joke that I was the most evaluated teacher in the profession.

There have been many debates on the value of evaluation. It is not a conducive method in which to learn and become a better teacher. It is more about one person imposing their beliefs of educating students onto another. It is not about creating an open environment of mutual learning, respect and understanding that can be established through reflective writing and discourse in the establishment of a professional identity. Jen distanced herself from the process of self examination which did not aid her in the formation of her professional identity.

My lesson plans were either too vague or way too complicated; my evaluations were never in line with my objectives; he constantly questioned my knowledge base on the subject I was teaching the kids. Our relationship quickly had become one of intimidation which led to my self doubt. He intimidated me, not openly in front of anyone but behind closed doors, to the point that I didn't trust anything that I wrote, read, or said. I would stutter when I was asked simple questions by my

students, and my daily reflections were general and without feeling or opinion.

(Jen's narrative)

In working for a new school division this year, I was surprised and somewhat grateful that a formal written evaluation was not conducted on my teaching practice. I understand that teacher's professional growth plans have replaced the formal written evaluation of teachers by administrators. At the end of the year, I was offered and accepted a continuing contract without anyone making judgment or evaluating my teaching style. The absence of a formal evaluation was great, no pressure, no one lurking around or sitting at the back of the class frantically taking notes about my questioning technique or behavior management protocol.

However, without a formal evaluation, I did not have that piece of paper to add to my portfolio or the opportunity to shine for my administration. Look....see what I can do! I can pull a rabbit from a hat, saw a woman in half and pull an endless string of colored scarves from my nose. Look....see what I can do! Create detailed unit plans, design varied and interesting lessons, motivate students, be able to reach students of all learning styles, use questioning effectively, have an organized and ergonomic classroom, develop well established classroom management techniques, and be involved in a multitude of committees and extra curricular activities.

For me, there was no one there to say you did a great job! We are giving you this continuing contract because your administrator says, through his written evaluation, that you are a great teacher. Was I worthy of receiving this continuing contract? I believe I was, but no one really knows what kind of a teacher I am. Does this not leave an opening for problems in the future if a teacher is not competent in the profession? After thinking

about it, I realized that it was not the formal written evaluation or the process that I missed, it was the interaction, discussion, feedback and reaffirmation about my teaching practice with a teaching professional that I needed and craved.

I know as teachers we always question ourselves and battle with self doubt. We crave feedback about the job we are doing. It is not about needing praise for a job well done, but about reassurances of our teaching abilities. We need this feedback in our continued growth as teaching professionals. I have found this writing group provides reassurances that we have similar questions, fears, insecurities and strengths as teachers and human beings. (Caroline's personal reflection)

There is a great deal more at risk professionally and personally when someone else is in a position of power over you, in judging your teaching ability. All of us felt great empathy towards Jen because of the story she wrote and shared. It stirred up many uncomfortable feelings and memories for us. It made me realize that for many, the practicum or first year teaching experience is not a positive one but very negative and harmful for many teachers. There must be a better way of nurturing new teachers and helping them form a professional identity. Jen considered leaving the teaching profession because of the harsh words of one practicum teacher. In response to Jen's narrative I wrote,

The experience you shared at the beginning of your narrative made my heart break. It made me think a great deal about evaluation of teachers. I know that with professional growth plans we have moved from a system of evaluation to that of supervision, which I hope will eliminate situations like the one you experienced. Your narrative emphasizes the point that there is no such thing as "constructive" criticism. Criticism is simply criticism whether it is disguised as constructive. (Caroline's comments to Jen)

In response to Jen's narrative Julie wrote,

I had very similar feelings during my practicum year. You cannot get an accurate idea of what teaching is about at university and during your practicum you are very focused on simply surviving/passing. It is also very difficult to remember that your practicum teacher's opinion is just one person's opinion, and that your practicum advisor at university is there to support you if you feel that your practicum teacher is not. I also like how you compare your practicum experience to your first year of teaching. It goes to show the importance of receiving positive feedback, something that as teachers, not just as teaching students, we must always keep in mind. (Julie's comments to Jen)

The absence of interactive evaluation made me think seriously about the weight placed on teacher professional growth plans in holding teachers accountable and providing the opportunity for professional identity formation. I don't think teachers are aware of the significance of these plans. If professional growth plans are the only means in which a teacher will be held accountable, I am very concerned with what defines professional development and who defines professional development for individuals within schools, school divisions, teaching associations, and teacher education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. My experience has shown me that there is a significant difference between what is considered professional development at these different levels of education.

What then is the definition of professional development? Who should define my professional development? I should be able to define my own professional development as a professional and in pursuit of my professional identity. I strongly believe in the benefits of professional growth plans, but I am very concerned with what constitutes professional development.

Often in the teaching profession we have defined professional development in the form of one or two day workshops. Quick fix tips or lectures on how to do this or improve that. Often times these workshops become sales pitches for a particular kind of educational product. “Most teachers and administrators tend to view outsider knowledge about teaching as ‘real’ knowledge that embodies true expertise about instruction, evaluation, and learning, and insider knowledge as somehow less important, perhaps because it is so accessible” (Gallas, 1994, p. 11). Professional development does not need to take this form or structure. We cannot package up our profession into a variety of one or two hour seminars. Professional development presented in this way is often disjointed and lacks continuity. Workshops do not allow for individual needs and differences. Thankfully, teachers are looking at professional development in a different light. As stated by Ackerman, Maslin-Ostrowski and Christensen (1996),

Professional development programs are increasingly moving away from presentations by experts and toward programs that involve administrators and teachers as facilitators of their own renewal and growth. One method that we have been using to encourage educators to take responsibility for their own professional development (and that of their colleagues) is the case story. It is an approach of the conventional case study method with the tradition, artistry, and imagination of storytelling (p. 21).

Professional growth plans are a better approach to professional development and identity formation for most. Through the narratives and reflections made by the group, it became apparent that the old methods used for teacher evaluation were not effective in developing a professional identity. The move from formal teacher evaluation to the

development of professional growth plans has given teachers the opportunity to look at their own professional growth in a meaningful manner for them. This, I feel, is a step in the right direction. Allowing teachers to develop their own professional growth plans will automatically foster self-reflection and discourse between teachers. However, the implementation of these plans is not without difficulty or controversy. Even though Alberta Education has provided guidelines for the design of teacher professional growth plans, the format of these plans differ significantly. Differences occur between school divisions and between schools, even within the same division. I have gone to many workshops about the structure of professional growth plans and the focus has always been on what they should **not be** and not on what they **can be**. The reflective writing process could be an important part of teacher growth plans in pursuit of identity formation, as indicated by the participants of this project.

The government sees professional growth plans as a means of holding teachers accountable for their professional development, but many teachers were already doing many professional growth activities without the mandate. The mandate insulted many teachers by implying they were doing a poor job in the advancement of their profession and needed to be told what to do to make it better. The true value of growth plans should be based on the answers to the following questions:

- What is the value added by growth plans to the overall teaching and learning process?
- How has it improved education?
- How has it benefited students?
- How has it benefited teachers?

This project gave a small group of teachers an opportunity to define their own

professional growth through reflective writing and discourse, as highlighted in my personal reflections,

We had all been looking forward to the opportunity of *sitting down and discussing* educational issues with colleagues. There are not many opportunities for this during the year when we are busy teaching. We are so busy dealing with students and parents issues and concerns that we rarely have the chance to voice our concerns, feelings and needs about ourselves and the profession. We all saw this as a great professional development opportunity. A chance to learn from one another's *successes and failures*. We all recognized that it gave an excuse for reflecting on our teaching practice critically and learning from our analysis and the analysis of others. (Caroline's personal reflection)

The problem lies in the fact that teachers are not allowed ownership of these plans. Many teachers simply do them to get them done, with no effort or concern. It is about checking off their name in completion of the plan. Unfortunately, there was probably very little professional development that occurred in the development of these plans. Teachers do not feel empowered by the process. Professional growth plans are a good idea, but they can only be as good as the structure that supports them. As indicated by Noddings (1997),

.... we make a sad and deep error when we try to convert all teachers to a particular way of thinking or to a particular set of methods. Instead we should help teachers to do the best they can with their own educational philosophies and their own beliefs. We should help them to build on their own strengths, just as we hope that they will build on the strengths of their students. A genuine pedagogical pluralism ought to be encouraged in our schools. Engaged in dialogue, encouraged

to reflect on their own practice but allowed to keep their own beliefs, teachers might well begin to revise their methods and extend their pedagogical repertoires (p. 173).

Teachers are constantly asking questions about programs and their place in the educational system. This questioning is important directly to our professional identity formation. Even though teachers concerns are overshadowed by the expectations and demands placed on them by outside influences, it is clear from the narratives that teachers see the most important aspect of education as meeting the needs of the students. Even though all of the narratives were on different topics and our stories and experiences so diverse, we all questioned our place in the educational system and our professional identity within different contexts.

Jenine mulled over the following concerns in her narrative,

In the beginning, I felt like I knew the "right" way to teach students how to be effective communicators and independent learners. To me, the students' lack of willingness to embrace this independent style of learning revealed a deficiency within them. However, at this point in the process I feel that I was mistaken. The style of learning that you have (whether because of personal preference or cultural background) is neither right or wrong. However, if the teacher wants to help the students accept a wider range of styles, the onus is on the teacher to provide a means through which the students can come to the place of such acceptance. Once a means is provided and students still choose not to walk along this path, then the onus is on them. (Jenine's narrative)

In response to Jenine's narrative, I voiced these comments,

I don't see this as an ESL issue and I know that all teachers have struggled in finding

their place along what I see as a spectrum with teacher centered and student centered styles at either end. I think that most teachers fall some where in between both extremes depending on experience and situation. My teaching style varies slightly from year to year, school to school, subject to subject and class to class. I know that as a beginning teacher I taught in a teacher centered style because I felt a little out of control. To gain a feeling of control I took charge of the teaching/learning process. As I became more confident and experienced, I realized the importance of students being intrinsically motivated. (Caroline's comments to Jenine)

Teachers need to feel empowered by their own professional development if it is to be authentic and meaningful as evident in the narratives and discussions of this group of teachers. Professional development needs to support or help reshape the professional identity of teachers. In doing so, it is important not to confuse **what is** empowerment with **what is not** empowerment as indicated by Renihan & Renihan (1992).

Empowerment is not kidding teachers into thinking preplanned initiatives were their ideas (that is entrapment). Empowerment is not holding out rewards emanating from positive power (that is enticement). Empowerment is not insisting that participation is mandated from above (that is enforcement). Empowerment is not increasing the responsibility and scope of the job in trivial areas (that is enlargement). (p. 11)

When teachers feel empowered, true professional identity formation can occur. Teachers feel in control of their professional growth and confident in their knowledge about teaching. This was evident in Julie's comments to the group,

The other grade one teacher I would consider her a master teacher. I found I was learning a lot from her. On the other side of me was a first year teacher who was coming to me and asking me

questions. I was answering her questions. By being able to answer her questions I knew I had learned things and become a better teacher. It made me feel for the first time that I had experience under my belt. I was learning from one teacher and teaching another which was a very interesting experience. (Julie's comments)

As indicated by Zola (1988), when teachers come to a position of examining their own understandings and practices they learn more about child growth and development, curriculum, learning and teaching. They are in a position of being able and wanting to share with other teachers. This was evident in Trish's comments to the group of writers,

They are all good teachers, some are even what I would call great teachers, but I learned they were no different from me and I was no different from them. I learned to trust myself and my ideas. I also learned through teaching that my colleagues are my greatest and most valuable resource people, but I am a resource for them as well. You will be and probably are a resource person for people in your school too! Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do. (Trish's comments)

Teachers can become involved in a process of analysis and evaluation of their teaching practice through reflective writing and teaching narratives. "A valuable way to do this is to read and study narratives paralleling their journeys as teachers and incorporating many of the skills, attitudes, dispositions, and perspectives they need to be effective and engaged practitioners" (Preskill, 1998, p. 345). It is essential that teachers be given the opportunity to share and listen to the stories of others. Through this discourse we can better understand ourselves and our teaching practice. Dialogue allows us to come face to face with other viewpoints. Our understandings can be challenged and reformulated to improve our teaching. "We like to try on new identities because we crave

the confirmation of like experiences, or the enlargement or transformation which can come from viewing a similar experience from a different perspective” (Kerr, 1998, p. 6).

I understand intuitively that I have grown in my profession by listening to the stories of other teachers and students and in the telling of my stories to others. My own and others’ stories and memories have shaped me as a person and teacher and influenced my daily teaching practice and I think this has been the case for the other teachers involved in this project as well.

As indicated by Jenine in her response to Trish’s narrative,

I think it's wonderful to hear how open you are about sharing ideas. I think this is one of the most important things for me professionally -- to be in an environment where sharing takes place, continual learning, continual improvement. I wonder how to engender this kind of sharing throughout the system? I guess it's a risky thing to do -- putting your ideas up for evaluation all the time. It has to be done in an accepting atmosphere, a trusting atmosphere. (Jenine’s comments to Trish)

Stories we tell and hear from others can change the direction of our lives and can help us understand the meaning of life. Stories are thought provoking and there is legitimate accountability in this form of professional development and professional identity formation. By listening to the stories of others we can get a good understanding of what teachers know, how teachers organize the knowledge they do have and how teachers knowledge changes over time and experiences. This source of knowledge will never diminish as the bank of my stored memories and shared stories grows over time. As Jenine commented to Jen,

I was interested to see how you could see the strengths in each of the teachers you've been in

contact with. I've also come to the conclusion that each teacher has something special to offer that is unique and that there is no one 'right' way in teaching. I am realizing what a constructive process valuing is -- valuing others, their contributions, their abilities. (Jenine's comments to Jen).

Stories and discourse are a rich source of continuing professional development. It is a safe, non evaluative, flexible, open-ended, individualized platform to think about, reflect, analyze, write and articulate educational beliefs, understandings and practices. We are careless in the teaching profession in not recognizing the wealth of knowledge accumulated by the individuals within our own profession.

What I learned each year is always full of new learning experiences and is always brimming with magic and possibilities. . . . So I started sharing workshops with other kindergarten teachers in Foothills School Division. The workshops started quite by accident as all good ideas tend to do! I was given the job of booking a guest speaker for a kindergarten teachers meeting in the spring. . . . I was pleasantly surprised at how well it all turned out! Almost everyone told me how much they enjoyed the sharing and the ideas. The chance to talk with colleagues who are in similar situations. It was a wonderful experience. The response I got from these workshops was what led me to taking a big step and offering the workshop at the year 2000 teachers convention. (Trish's narrative)

Teaching is a complex reflective practice. There is a relationship between the development of teaching skills, understanding oneself as a teacher, narration and reflective practice. Narration and reflective practice form a holistic approach to professional development and professional identity formation. Teaching stories become life stories. It is difficult to separate the teacher from the individual. We are constantly

reconstructing ourselves in our teaching practice through reflection and discourse. “We all practice the craft of autobiography in our inner conversations with ourselves about the meaning of our experience, and those conversations, no matter what language we use, are fundamentally theological or philosophical” (Kerr, 1998, p. 178). Reflective practice is a process of searching for a professional identity and there needs to be support of professional identity formation.

The value of this project really became apparent when all of the people taking part met in person. . . . I went into this thinking that I was the only one that would have a difficult story to tell. Everyone has had their doubts and insecurities in their career; even after years of experience.

This project was an inspiring one for me. . . . Meeting and discussing my experiences with other, more experienced teachers was extremely rewarding.

(Jen’s personal reflection)

I want teachers to feel empowerment and take ownership of their professional growth and identity. Through this project I am giving myself and others this control in legitimizing the writing and sharing of teacher narratives as aiding in professional growth of oneself and others. Rather than seeing these reflections and stories as self-absorption, these stories are important in professional development. As indicated by Witherell (1991), it is important that the educational system encourage dialogue and connectedness between teachers in an effort to promote healthy development and learning.

In a quest for authentic professional development, it is essential that teachers be given the opportunity to share and listen to the stories of others. Dialogue allows us to come face to face with other viewpoints. Our understandings can be challenged and

reformulated to improve our teaching.

Getting to know your colleagues is crucial, and can be difficult because teaching can be a very isolated profession (everyone locked away in their own classrooms). You can grow as a teacher by taking from those who provide good examples of teaching, but it is also valuable to pay attention to those who don't do things as you would, and learn from that. (Julie's comments)

Narrative of Apprenticeship

to correct any wrong I have made in the past year and work towards refining my idea of effective teaching.

one person's judgement was not enough to keep me from doing what I have always wanted to do. As I approach my second year of teaching, I am determined

Now I can't wait to get up in the morning. With a little perseverance, I built rewarding relationships with both students and teachers.

I believe that a lot of my success came from the strength passed on to me by others and my own triumph grappling with my practical nightmares.

will need to narrow my focus and produce a higher quality of work. As I reflect on my first year of teaching, I would have to say it was success full.

teacher that I could handle the work load. My colleagues were impressed with my work ethic, but rarely encouraged me to do. In the future, I

this past year was both rewarding and overwhelming. I immersed myself in many extracurricular activities, probably too many. I learned I know that I was spread too thin. In the future, I

me when I think of Clyde is his ability to follow through with whatever he says. All students took him seriously. What struck out for me was that I was spread too thin. In the future, I

Clyde dealt effectively with students who were making bad decisions or in a modified prep program. I am aiming for Karen's energy. Clyde wanted a great deal with the discipline issues in our school. From start to finish

she put tremendous energy into everything she did, always putting her staff and her students first. I learned from her. She inspired me to be more prepared and organized. The last two people I must mention are my principal, Karen, and my

assistant principal, Clyde. Karen's focus was ever gentle, literally. She multitasked like no one I had ever seen. In spirit, she was doing so much so I could stand I can't be involved as I wanted to be. This was all brought on by my own insecurities and

lack of experience. After four months I could hardly put into words how much I learned from her. I found myself always seeing her advice and reassurance. I felt something wasn't right. She always made time for colleagues and students. At I look forward to my second year of

she astonished me with her organization and tenacity on this project. At times I felt as though I wasn't doing as much as I could have. I was fortunate enough for four months out of my year to co-lead a musical with my friend, the band teacher.

teaching and many years to come, I will strive to be as kind, patient and generous as Janice. I was fortunate enough for four months out of my year to co-lead a musical with my friend, the band teacher.

compassionate she was with her students and they reciprocated that sentiment. Janice was the head of the language arts department. She was young, open, and generous. Although many of these people and there are a few who definitely stood out.

Each one of these resembles an aspect of being a teacher that I would like to assimilate. Janice was the head of the language arts department. She was young, open, and generous. Although many of these people and there are a few who definitely stood out.

I met most of the other teachers and administrators with whom I was asked simple questions by my students and school that day. I believed what he told me. I believe that I was a really decent teacher. My students were either too vague or way too complicated. My evaluations were never in line with my objectives. He constantly

questioned my knowledge base on the subject. I would shelter when I was asked simple questions by my students and school that day. I believed what he told me. I believe that I was a really decent teacher. My students were either too vague or way too complicated. My evaluations were never in line with my objectives. He constantly

on how well I had criticized. For whatever reason, I could never get anything quite right. My lesson plans were either too vague or way too complicated. My evaluations were never in line with my objectives. He constantly

what I wanted to say at the end of the day. I had already disappointed myself professionally. I wasn't about to finish his image of me as a person. After all, he had commented frequently

to me. Don't let him see you cry. I managed to muster up. I just can't believe I'm finished. Well, it wasn't exactly

all away from me. Middle of my first year. I had been by Tommie Matthews

you just might not have realized it. I had been by Tommie Matthews

Figure 3

My First Year: A Reflection

"You just might not be suited to teaching. There are other occupations that would generate less stress than teaching."

I couldn't believe it! I had been through three months of torment with this man, worked harder than I ever had to meet his expectations, and now, on my last day of practicum he was advising me to throw it all away! Inevitably, I felt my face heat up, my stomach lurch, and tears escape from my eyes. Do not let him see you cry, I told myself

"Is something wrong?" he asked tentatively.

That was all it took. I started to cry full-heartedly.

"Ah, I'm not really good at handling these kinds of things," he said.

No kidding! I managed to muster up, "I just can't believe I'm finished." Well, it wasn't exactly what I had wanted to say at that point; at least I hadn't insulted him. I had already disappointed him professionally; I wasn't about to tarnish his image of me as a person. After all, he had commented frequently on how well I took criticism. For whatever reason, I could never get anything quite right. My lesson plans were either too vague or way too complicated; my evaluations were never in line with my objectives; he constantly questioned my knowledge my knowledge base on the subject I was teaching the kids. Our relationship quickly had become one of intimidation which led to my self doubt. He intimidated me, not openly in front of anyone but behind closed doors, to the point that I didn't trust anything that I wrote, read, or said. I would stutter when I was asked simple questions by my students, and my daily reflections were general and without feeling or opinion. My students were never the problem. They were very good to

me, and we could have had a lot more fun if I had felt as though I actually *deserved* to be there. I regret caving in like I did.

When I left the school that day, I believed what he told me; I believed that I wasn't capable of teaching. I was wrong.

I managed to get a job teaching drama and language arts at the junior high school level. In the midst of my flurry to learn and fix up my classroom throughout the summer, I met most of the other teachers and administration with whom I would be working in the fall. Immediately, I knew I was among great people. I found support and guidance through many of these people and there are a few who definitely stand out. Each one of them resembles an aspect of being a teacher that I would like to assimilate.

Janice was the head of the language arts department. She was knowledgeable, creative, and talented; I learned very quickly once school started how compassionate she was with her students, and they reciprocated that sentiment. I found myself always seeking her advice and reassurance if I felt something wasn't right. There was never a time when she turned me away because she was too busy. She treated all staff and students this way. As I look forward to my second year of teaching and many years to come, I will strive to be as kind, patient, and generous as Janice.

Paige was the band teacher. I was fortunate enough for four months out of my year to co-direct a musical with Paige. She astonished me with her organization and tenacity in this project. It was definitely a wake up call for me to work with someone who was always one step ahead of everybody and everything. At times, I felt as though I wasn't doing as much as I could and I wasn't as involved as I wanted to be. This was all

brought on by my own insecurities and lack of experience. After the four months, I could hardly put into words how much I learned from her. She inspired me to be more prepared and organized.

The last two people I must mention are my principal, Karen, and my assistant principal, Clyde. I was so fortunate to be able to work with two people who are so talented at what they do and work so well with each other, as well as everyone around them.

Karen's focus was everywhere, literally! She multi-tasked like no one I had ever seen. No matter what time of the day you saw Karen she was always doing three or four things and doing them effectively. She put tremendous energy in everything she did, always putting her staff and students first. I am aiming for Karen's energy. Clyde worked a great deal with the discipline issues in our school. It was his first year there, and he was determined to implement an effective discipline plan for the school; he did. From start to finish Clyde dealt effectively with students who were either making bad decisions or in a modified prep program. What stands out for me when I think of Clyde is his ability to follow through with whatever he says. There was not one student that did not take him seriously in this school. He proved to be a tremendous support to the teachers and support staff. Following through and being effective in classroom management is where Clyde is my role model.

This past year was both rewarding and overwhelming. I immersed myself into many extra-curricular activities; probably too many. It was almost as though I was still trying to prove to myself and my practicum teacher that I could handle the work load. My colleagues were impressed with my work ethic, but really encouraged me to cool it.

They knew and I knew that I was spread too thin. In the future, I will need to narrow my focus and produce a higher quality of work.

As I reflect on my first year of teaching, I would have to say it was successful. I believe that a lot of that success came from the strength passed onto me by others and my own triumphant grappling with my practicum nightmares. Now I can't wait to get up in the morning. With a little perseverance, I built rewarding relationships with both students and teachers. One person's judgment was not enough to keep me from doing what I have always wanted to do. As I approach my second year of teaching, I am determined to correct any wrongs I have made in the past year and work towards refining my idea of effective teaching.

Jen Matthews

Physical Identity

Lift up your hand, spread your fingers and look hard at your palm. The lines, bold and faint, the ridges, the intricate patterns...all of them tell a story that is distinctly your own.

Judith Hipkind

I have come to understand the importance of narratives in shaping and influencing me as a teacher and have found a tremendous need to listen to and present these stories in a visually interesting and meaningful way. In this project, I wanted to make connections between the stories that are written by teachers and the stories that the writers' hands tell. I wanted the writers to have a better appreciation of their physical identity. Life stories of individuals are told through hands. Stories are written on the line of a page, and stories are told by reading the lines of the hand.

In working with my own fingerprint, I found that there was much I didn't know about myself even from a physical standpoint. I'd never looked at my fingerprints before, and when writing my story in the lines, I was amazed at the wonder of creation. Such an intricate and detailed pattern that I overlook every day. It makes me wonder about the other things I'm overlooking.... (Jenine's personal reflection)

We use our hands to express ourselves. We show love and caring towards others through our hands with gentle touches and holding. We show anger and distress through our hands by pushing, shoving and hitting. We show our creativity and self expression through writing and art.

Visser (1994) indicated that hands are used in greeting people. Anthropologists refer to greetings as *access rituals*. As individuals meet, they greet each other with a hand-shake or wave. By doing this they are welcoming another individual, allowing him/her to become closer. The greeting is a public demonstration of acceptance. Hand shaking and waving in the past referred to honor, friendship and the formation of a contact as well as a sign of peace. The act of writing the teaching narratives in the hands of the teachers that are telling these stories symbolizes the use of hands in greeting and

welcoming others into their lives and in sharing their stories in a public demonstration of acceptance.

Even though many people believe that our bodies are symmetrical with the left side mirroring the right, that is not the case. As indicated by Visser (1994), throughout history right and left have referred to the different sexes with the male, representing the good side, being the right and the left, or evil side, representing the female. Women were considered irrational, dark, marginal, cold, deceitful and generally sinister like the left hand. Men were considered important, honest, straightforward, and intelligent like the right hand. This may be why there is a prejudice in favor of the right side and against the left. It was for this reason that I had the women transpose their words in the lines of a fingerprint from the left hand. This act was in recognition of the left hand, the feminine side. It represents the equality that should exist between the genders, their words and their hands. One is not complete without the other.

As highlighted by Visser (1994), in most cultures the right hand is considered more significant. In English culture it represents power, truth, permanence, reliability, dexterity, acceptability, immediacy, and correctness. On the other hand, the left hand means sinister, weak or worthless. In French *droit* means straight and just, and *gauche* is the opposite and means gawky. *Mancino* in Italian means left handed and treacherous. The comparison of good and evil are related to hands, with the right hand being good and the left being evil. The use of the left hand is used in many cultures in ceremonies dealing with death. In cultures where hands are used to eat with, the left hand is not used as it is considered dirty and unworthy of such a task. Gesturing with the right hand is superior to gesturing with the left hand. Left handedness is often referred to as outside the norm.

Most left-handed individuals have known the pressure of trying to conform to using the right hand.

As suggested by Visser (1994), even though in modern wedding ceremonies both the male and female exchange rings, in the past in Anglo-Saxon marriages only the women received a ring to be worn on the fourth finger of the left or female hand. It is interesting that in recent times we have found out that the right hand is controlled by the left side of the brain and the left hand controlled by the right. Speech is controlled by the left and the more we know about the left brain and its tasks the less we seem to know about the functions of the right side of the brain except for its spatial capabilities.

I believe that humans are obsessed with body image. What is considered acceptable or desirable is defined by the culture in which we live. Even though there are differences between cultures, the body is used by all in an expression of morals, preferences, ideals, and social structures. Cultural expectations and differences influence our physical identity. Our physical identity significantly influences the understanding of ourselves, the world, our reflections upon it and the stories we write and share with others.

The five senses, including touch, help us better understand and experience the outside world. Through time people have turned to the shape and lines of the hand in providing answers to their lives. The lines of the hand are a type of map showing us the direction in which our lives will take us.

Hands are important tools in expressing ourselves. Our hands and the lines on them tell our life stories like the lines or rings in the trunk of a tree. The lines show times of drought, disease and prosperity. Like the narratives that teachers tell, everyone's hand

and fingerprints are uniquely our own, but in all the differences one can find commonalities between hands and stories.

Hand prints have importance in our lives, whether or not we believe in the information offered by reading palms, which does not only include reading the lines on the palm of the hand but includes all dimensions of the hand. When babies are born in hospitals, imprints of their hands are made as a form of identification. When we enter elementary school, again we make imprints of our hands to give to our parents as gifts. Like celebrities in Hollywood, we make our mark by placing our hands into wet cement when pouring a new sidewalk or driveway. As we grow older, we occasionally go and place our hands into the prints we left behind years before. The stories, like the prints, are marks we can leave behind as a form of identification. Years later, we can revisit these stories, by placing our hands back into our prints, and reflecting back on the importance and significance these words have had in our lives.

As indicated by Whitaker (1998), for thousands of years and over many cultures people have been intrigued with understanding the meanings of the lines on the hands. The hand revealed a map that showed the direction of one's life and provided a form of physical identity. The lines provided insights into an individual's character and personality, intelligence and temperament, talents, personal needs, and health. This provided clues in how past events shaped present opportunities and how today's actions influence future events, opportunities for success, and life challenges. This becomes a story of physical identity.

The writers were intrigued with transposing their stories in a fingerprint that represented their personality and represented them physically. Even though the process

was labor intensive, they liked the creative nature in which their words were represented.

When writing my narrative, I found it very difficult to narrow my focus. I was always keeping in mind the fact that it would have to be rewritten in the form of a simple fingerprint. This helped me to edit. (Julie's personal reflection)

Fingerprints are used as the ultimate and most accurate form of physical identity in today's society. Fingerprints, like the teachers' stories, are uniquely our own, but have common characteristics. As pointed out by Hipskind (1998), the three basic types of fingerprint patterns include the arch, the loop and the whorl. Many believe the pattern and the finger it is located on gives insights into personality. The writers chose a fingerprint on the left hand in tribute to its feminine label. They chose the fingerprint that best fit their personality in which to write their story. It was a wonderful coincidence that everyone selected a different finger. As a result, this project literally represents a handful of stories.

Trish wrote her narrative in the print of her index finger, which is a whorl, as it best describes her personality. Individuals with whorls on their index fingers are described as having success in their careers and should be in business for themselves. They tend to like to do things their way to guarantee they are done correctly (Hipskind, 1998). Julie wrote her narrative in the print of her ring finger, which is a loop, as it best describes her. Individuals with loops on their ring finger are described as enjoying working with their hands, especially in an outside environment. These individuals are comfortable, harmonious, peaceful and natural (Hipskind, 1998). Jen wrote her narrative in the print of her little finger, which is a loop. Individuals with loops on their little finger are described as having good insight into the human condition and give helpful advice.

They are very particular about detail and enjoy to talk. They have a need to help others and are excellent communicators (Hipskind, 1998). Jenine wrote her narrative in the print of her middle finger, which is also a loop. Individuals with loops on their middle finger are described as being creative and open to new ideas. They are strong-minded but love to debate and discuss varying ideas and philosophies. According to Hipskind, they generally have a live-and-let-live attitude towards life. I wrote my narrative in the print of my thumb, which is a whorl, which I believe describes me well. Individuals with whorls on their thumb are described as thriving on accomplishing tasks and overseeing obstacles in their way. They have a tremendous need to be in control of events in their lives.

Millions of people travel to Hollywood to place their hands in the prints of their favorite personality or celebrity. In doing so they feel they have made a connection to those people, their lives, their stories, their past. I hope that by taking the teachers' prints and writing their stories in the lines of their hands, other teachers can read these stories and place their hands into the hands of other teachers in feeling a part or making connections with their lives and teaching stories.

Narrative of Social Criticism

French Immersion in a Small Town

I am a big city gal who came to a small logging town five years ago to teach, of all things, French Immersion. My experience as a French teacher in this setting have opened my eyes to small town politics and how the importance of an educational programme's reputation can eclipse the needs of the individual student.

The French Immersion programme in my town has the reputation of being elitist. I would agree with this perception. It didn't take me long to realize that some parents of children in the programme were not primarily concerned with their children becoming bilingual and more aware of French culture, but were more interested in being able to say their child was a French Immersion student. To some it seemed to be more an issue of prestige than quality of education. Very few French Immersion parents have taken any initiative to learn even basic French themselves, thus it is very difficult for them to academically support their children at home, particularly when their children reach the higher grade levels and the language becomes more complex. On many occasions I have received notes or phone calls from parents excusing their children for having incomplete homework because they, the parents, could not help their children with it.

The French Immersion programme is elitist in another way as well. You do not find students with severe behavior or learning problems in the French Immersion programme, at least not to the severity that is becoming more and more common in the English stream. Learning Assistance is a best underdeveloped, which is due mostly in my opinion to the denial which exists among French Immersion administration that children enrolled in the programme do not need extra help because they are an academic cut-above. This year I taught first grade, and one of my students experienced severe language acquisition problems throughout the entire year. Her recognition of common French vocabulary was

extremely weak, but was moderately stronger than in English. Due to my personal frustration over the quality of learning assistance provided at the school, I approached my administrator (also the Learning Assistance teacher) about the possibility of discussing alternative educational routes with this student's parents. I was told that I could not even suggest the child be removed from the programme, due to the fact that French Immersion suffers regularly from attrition, thus high student numbers need to be maintained in the lower grades in order to assure sufficient student numbers at the high school. I felt, in this instance, that the programme was being put before the educational needs of my student.

The goal of the programme is to make effective French communicators out of English students, but I question the term "immersion" when the only environment in which the students are exposed to French is in the classroom. Students rarely choose to speak French during recess and lunch, and need to be constantly encouraged to socialize in their second language by their teachers. The few students that appreciate the joy of a second language take pride in their education, while the majority eventually come to treat it as a burden.

I am fortunate enough to have taught in the programme at grade one, and also at grades five to ten. I was very impressed with how quickly and enthusiastically my first grade students picked up the language. I was, however, equally disheartened by the performance in French of most of the students at the high school level. In general, I found their written grammar to be quite weak and their spoken French continued to be riddled with incorrect direct English translations. Indeed the best of the Core French students I taught at the high school were better at conjugating verbs than the average Immersion student. When I asked my grade nine and ten students how many intended to pursue French after graduation, only five out of nineteen students raised their hands. As the language became more complicated and expectations were increased, most students became frustrated and lost interest.

As for possible solutions to the problematic issues which exist within the French Immersion Programme, I have only two. Most importantly, the programme must continue to become less exclusive if it is to survive. We need to balance increased expectations for the ultimate level of bilingualism among students in the programme with more effective learning assistance for those that struggle but are able to achieve success with properly trained school support and parental involvement. Finally, I believe French Immersion in my community should only continue if the integrity of the programme can be maintained. Otherwise it is, in my view, a waste of money and great source of friction, in a very Anglophone community.

Julie Wilson

Personal Identity

Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.

Helen Keller

No kidding! I managed to muster up, "I just can't believe I'm finished." Well, it wasn't exactly what I had wanted to say at that point; at least I hadn't insulted him. I had already disappointed him professionally; I wasn't about to tarnish his image of me as a person. After all, he had commented frequently on how well I took criticism. For whatever reason, I could never get anything quite right. (Jen's narrative)

The above quotation shows that it is difficult to separate the teacher from the person. If we criticize the teacher, we criticize the individual. Most teachers put everything of themselves into their career. This was very evident in the narratives and discourse between group members. The personal identity of the teachers became clear in their writing and their journey towards continued development in this area evident. There was personal growth through the process of writing and sharing of experiences in this project.

Teaching is not simply a job, but it is a way of life and a reflection of the person. We are all unique and special individuals as well as unique and special teachers. We all have something important to offer the students in our own style and approach to teaching. As I indicated to Jenine,

In your narrative, you definitely shared that teaching is an expression of ourselves. A situation where it is nearly impossible to separate the teacher from the person. It is the teacher/student relationship that is the foundation of all learning and that one style of teaching is not necessarily superior to another. Different teaching styles is important in reaching the needs of all the different learning styles. It is about finding your style - teaching or learning - and working with it rather than against it. There can be a balance between teacher centered and student centered styles of teaching. What style works

best for you will make you an effective teacher. (Caroline's comments to Jenine)

There are many lessons to be learned about being a teacher and a human being. Even though some of the lessons are difficult, they are essential in our development. This project allows the teachers to explore lessons they have learned. Teachers are students asking questions and finding the answers to life. This learning process brings true value to our existence, even though we never really master life.

“You are enrolled in a full-time informal school called ‘life’. Each day in this school you will have the opportunity to learn lessons. You may like the lessons or hate them, but you have designed them as part of your curriculum” (Carter-Scott, 1998, p. 22).

Life can be compared to travels we make following the map outlined by our soul. Narratives directly relate to these travels. We can jot down the sights we have seen and experiences we have had in our travel log. We start this journey at the location of our birth and look towards the North, South, East and West in determining which road to follow. As stated by Scharr, “The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination” (Scharr, as quoted in Clemmer, 1999, p. 21).

Not only do our reflections of experiences change fundamentally who we are, but so does sharing and listening to the experiences of others. These experiences become part of our knowledge base even though we may have not experienced them first hand. We are all in interaction with each other, and every new encounter redefines our understanding of reality and the future. I had never thought about a career in education until I met one individual who was considering traveling in that direction. She convinced me, and then my husband, to exit the freeway down that off ramp. She missed that exit,

turned down the next and never went on to become a teacher.

The map we follow provides directions on how to be human, how to live a fulfilling and meaningful life in pursuit of a personal identity. Lessons are learned from the potholes, detours and road construction that occur along the way. We can only hope that we do not end up making a wrong turn down a dead end road and being forced to pull a U-turn.

“However, when we choose the road less traveled, we’ll reflect back years later and say that, while we wouldn’t want to live through the pain again, it was nevertheless an important turning point. It was one of the best things that happened to us. It seasoned and strengthened us” (Clemmer, 1999, p. 14).

Our life travels can be very challenging and difficult as we make decisions on which direction to follow. “Ultimately we learn best from ourselves, that little voice that tells us when what we are doing is right” (Julie’s comments).

Everyone has his/her own unique lessons to learn in understanding oneself, but it is in the reflecting upon these lessons and in sharing these stories we can learn to handle the more challenging bumps along the way. We can only comment on our experiences and hope they are helpful to others on similar journeys down the road of life.

Initially, I went into this project feeling as though I had so much to learn from the experienced teachers who were participating. This definitely proved to be the case. However, they also were able to learn from me. I believe it brought them back to when they first started teaching and made them realize how far they had come. I would like to think that we all walked away from this experience having learned a great deal from everyone involved. I certainly did. (Jen’s personal reflection)

We all need to follow this map in traveling the road of personal growth and understanding. Even though our path and experiences are different from one another, we can learn and share many traveling tips with each other, as highlighted by Julie in her comments to Trish;

I like how you explained the various stops along your journey. . . . One stop leads to another, and had you missed a stop, you may have gone in another direction, though I do feel you probably would have ended up a teacher any way, because you were always so drawn to it.

(Julie's comments to Trish)

Our body is the vehicle that we travel down the highways and byways of our life. It is important this vehicle is well maintained with regular and frequent check ups. The relationship that exists between our body and mind is fundamental in our travels down the road of life. This relationship, good or bad, will have a great deal to do with the quality of our life experiences. Many are satisfied and others not with the vehicle that transports them through life. It is important to understand how to drive and care for the vehicle we have been given to map out our travels whether it be a sports car, luxury sedan, motor home or convertible. Enjoy the road trip known as life and be open and honest to yourself and others. As reflected by Jenine to Jen,

Your narrative was so honest and open. Although I haven't experienced anything so extreme, I could relate to the feelings and the struggles you described. I really admire you for going through that time with so much dignity, strength, and self-knowledge. I hope that I will be able to do the same. My problem is that I supply my own critical environment! I can become so critical of myself that it's crippling! Reading your narrative helped me re-realize how counterproductive it is to believe the criticism -- my own or others! (Jenine's comments to Jen)

Life is an adventure worthy of exploring and the answers we seek lie not outside of us but within and can be explored through reflective writing and sharing with others.

I enjoyed this process of discovery about myself through reflection. I found it particularly valuable to do so in a collaborative way with other teachers. I felt such encouragement finding out that other teachers had similar struggles in their teaching. (Jenine's personal reflection)

It is important to remember that how we perceive others has a lot to do with how we perceive ourselves. We view ourselves and others based on our past experiences, feelings and thoughts. Like looking in the rear view mirror or side mirror of a vehicle which states the warning, *objects may be closer than they appear*, each experience and meeting with others reflects back an opportunity to explore our own relationship with ourselves.

When I think back, I guess I have always wanted to be a teacher. I have always liked school, but have always had to work at it. This journey has had its share of difficulties, but something always kept me going. I guess it must have been determination or maybe it was in spite after a counselor told my parents to lower their expectations for me, as I would probably only be a waitress. I do not like people telling me that I can not do something. It makes me want to do it even more, just to prove them wrong! (Trish's narrative)

Qualities we like about ourselves tend to be qualities we admire in others.

Qualities we dislike in ourselves are ones we dislike in others. In looking at the stories of others it is as though we are looking in a mirror and seeing the reflections of our own experiences. This reflection allows us the opportunity to explore and understand ourselves better. In supporting others in this way, we are supporting ourselves. The map of our life travels is more clearly defined and not obscured by poor driving conditions. As

I commented to Jen,

Student teaching should allow individuals to learn from other teaching professionals. Student teachers should not be judged by experienced teachers. They tend to judge new teachers based on their values, beliefs and ideas about teaching and do not take into consideration that student teachers have their own values, beliefs and ideas about teaching. A great deal can be learned from each other, as long as an atmosphere is created that is conducive to sharing ideas and asking questions without being evaluated. Student teaching should be a process that allows for growth as both a teacher and individual.

Situations like this never encourage individuals to improve or reflect positively on teaching. It leads to bad feelings about the profession. It causes individuals to question their teaching ability. Self doubt does not allow for growth. I am so glad that you were strong enough to survive this experience and then have the opportunity to have positive learning experiences with other colleagues. These positive experiences can never undo the damage done by the negative experiences. The negative experiences can tend to linger in your mind and haunt you when you are having a rough day. How do you heal from a experience like this? Since most teachers put everything they have into teaching, when they are criticized as a teacher, they feel as though they are being judged as a person. (Caroline's comments to Jen)

Writing and sharing stories about our teaching practice gives insight into the development of an individual personally as well as professionally. Truth about who we are as individuals cannot be separated from who we are as professionals. "Teaching that class was a real struggle because | gave the best that was in me, and | did everything that | knew was right to do, and they didn't value what | gave" (Jenine's narrative). **As teachers we must understand the social context in which we teach. To become a better person or teacher we**

must live through the experiences and learn from the experiences of others. We struggle as teachers in developing a clear understanding of what teaching is about and what meaning it has for us. As commented by Jenine to Caroline,

It must have been so difficult for you to live surrounded with the tragedies of life being played out daily, and in the lives of your students. You must have felt very helpless at times. But then to hear the story of the boy who wanted to become a math teacher was very uplifting. Even though you say what you did was meaningless, I don't think so. This example demonstrates that you had an impact. You gave him hope. As you said, a whole lot of little seemingly insignificant things become significant. This too in the lives of others. Sometimes we don't even know the impact we have. (Jenine's comments to Caroline)

I have grown in my profession by listening to the stories of other teachers, students and in the telling of my stories to others. My own and others' stories and memories have shaped me as a person and teacher and influenced my daily teaching practice. Human beings are natural storytellers. Stories about teaching are written within the context of a teacher's life history and are important in analyzing and bringing order to our lives. Stories about teaching tell more about feelings, attitudes, interpretations, goals and beliefs than they do about curriculum or teaching practice. Stories are important in the development of an individual. As outlined in Jen's personal reflection,

Telling my story about my practicum was very therapeutic for me. I had been carrying this guilt and insecurity about my abilities as a teacher for a while, and revealing what happened made me understand how ridiculous it all was. One person's opinion really shouldn't have made me feel like I was a hopeless case.

Even though my first year of teaching went fairly well, I still struggled with the feeling that I was not worthy of being there. When I read the part of my practicum to any of my teaching colleagues they were appalled at the discouragement I received. This reaction validated my belief that I was treated unfairly. (Jen's personal reflection)

As indicated by Britzman and Pitt (1997), most teachers on a quest for self-mastery in teacher education struggle with the mastery of one's own identity and that of the role of teacher.

It is difficult to find a balance within ourselves that deals satisfactorily with the demons fighting within us as to what is right and why things are simply the way they are. Sometimes we may feel very uncomfortable in our own skin, saying the words that we are expected to say in support of the philosophy behind a program and at the same time knowing the darker side.

Even though my frustrations are from a different area of the curriculum, they are based on the same issues of what is best for the students, what are the expectations of all the stakeholders and what is the philosophy of the program and why all these elements are so far apart on the spectrum. Why is there not a common goal? How can we achieve unity? (Caroline's comments to Julie)

It is somewhat painful to remember events that impacted our lives and development so profoundly, but writing about difficult times allows for understanding and resolution. This directly relates to Anna Freud's writings on transference. She believed that unresolved conflicts from our past with ourselves or others impact the meaning of current events and experiences. "Learning how one learns from the lives, histories, cultures and dilemmas of others involves a close study of one's own conditions

of learning” (Britzman & Pitt, 1997, p. 69). Understanding ourselves and our past gives us the starting point at which we view the present and make insights into who we are personally and professionally. It allows us to understand why teaching and learning are so complex and why the dynamics between individuals is so varied.

I found that my teaching style worked with some classes and not with others. The classes who did not like my style were very open and quite hurtful when expressing their frustration with me. However, as the year went on, and I persevered, I allowed my students to see more of who I was as a person. With this, I found their appreciation and tolerance grew. Some of them actually hugged me at the end of the year! (Jen's personal reflection)

Mitchell and Weber (1999) describe teachers as travelers. Teachers are influenced by travels and explorations of their past. The authors refer to this type of genre as writing memoir, which focuses on the combination of what is remembered and how it is remembered. Memories and sharing stories are important in growing as a person and redefining ourselves and understanding our place in the world. Understanding our past gives us the opportunity to rewrite the future.

Narrative of Hope

I Hope

What is hope? I don't really understand what it is and have difficulty putting its meaning into words. It is a feeling we need to have, in making sense of the world and in directing our lives, but is unique and different to all. Hope is found deep within us, but its exact location is undefined. It can never disappear, but sometimes the emotion is stronger than at other times. When I feel hope, I feel warm and content. When I feel a loss of hope I feel cold and confused.

There are a number of different types of hope. Personally, I can hope for the future and hope for the best. I can hope for a change in the weather and hope to see someone soon. Professionally, I can hope that I am being the best teacher I can be and hope I will never lose hope in the profession or in the ability of students to learn. I hope that I am reaching the needs of all of my students and hope that the educational system will survive the turbulent times of restructuring and under funding.

Many people in this world of change and difficult times have lost hope. There seems to be no hope left for marriage, the family, government, community, religion, or school. The foundations of our society are beginning to crack because of the loss of hope in the strength of the structure to weather the storm. What is important is that people not lose hope in themselves, others, or in the building blocks of society.

I have struggled with finding and maintaining hope. It is a very elusive emotion. Some days I feel I have captured it and other days it has escaped me. But I have come to understand that I need hope and that it has had significant meaning in my life. Hope is a family name. It is the maiden name of my great-grandmother, the middle name of my grandfather and the first name of any daughter I may have in the future. On one occasion I was told I resembled HOPE - that is Bob Hope. It is believed that Bob Hope is the first cousin of my great-grandmother. I guess if we are related I cannot argue that we may have a faint resemblance to one another.

I started my career in teaching in isolated northern native communities. Communities where students came to school in horse drawn-wagons and families lived off the resources of

the land. Communities where they had no status or reserve land and where there were no employment opportunities. Communities where there were few health care services and TB was an epidemic. Communities where there was no running water, no indoor plumbing, no stores or facilities, no radio or television, and often times little or no hope.

The people were warm and welcoming. They allowed us into their communities, into their lives and their hearts. They were eager to share with us their Cree and Chipewyan traditions. I cared for the children, the people and the community. This made the abuses more difficult to understand and to deal with. It was reported that 80% of community members admitted being addicted to prescription drugs. Alcohol consumption and illegal drug use was excessive. Verbal, physical and sexual abuse was a frequent occurrence. Suicide rates were high and murders common. The causality one night was a recently graduated grade nine student, who had just turned sixteen the day previous and was four months pregnant. She had been brutally beaten to death by her 27 year old boyfriend who was angry with her for wanting to leave the community to go to high school. He was angry at her for wanting something more. He was angry because she had hope for her future and he did not.

It was in the north that I noticed my hope start to fade. I saw a lot of hopelessness in the eyes of the people. They were in search of an identity and hope for the future. They wanted their people, culture and traditions to survive. I became very depressed and lost hope in humanity and in making a difference. I found it extremely difficult to watch the abuses of this community. I came to the realization that I could not save these people from their abusive and destructive tendencies; the rescue needed to come from within. I learned to focus on the hopeful and good things in these people and not on hopeless matters.

The interactions and relationships formed with the students were most rewarding. It was amazing that many of the students really did care about school, even though they struggled and were faced with adversities. I tried very hard to make sure that all my students experienced success of some type in school; that is what kept me hopeful. One boy in my grade

nine math class had real attitude and was unsuccessful at math, until he realized that I cared and expected him to do well. He came to enjoy math and worked hard to get one of the highest marks in class. He thanked me for turning him on to math.

Whenever I need a reminder of the importance of hope in our lives, I watch the film *Shawshank Redemption*. The movie reminds you that no matter how desperate the situation you can never lose hope. Red says to Andy, "Hope is a dangerous thing, hope can drive a man insane." But by the end of the movie, Red finds hope and states, "Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things." The last line of the movie is simply, "I hope....." allowing the viewer to fill in their own wishes of hope.

I have learned a great deal about people, education and myself through my exploration of hope. Many people are losing hope in the educational system. Restructuring by the government is because of a lack of hope in the existing system. They are trying to fix something not in need of repair. How can you improve a system that is already one of the best in the world?

Some parents feel they need to shop around for alternative educational products, because they have lost hope in community schools providing the best education for their child. But the best education students can get is in their own community, knowing their neighbors and caring for the welfare of the people in it.

There are great schools, administrators, teachers, parents and students that support all of the wonderful things happening in our schools. The most important part of education is the teaching and learning relationship that is forged between teachers and students. Teaching is often referred to as a thankless profession, but what keeps me hopeful are all the little things that happen each day. And even though the little things may seem insignificant, a whole lot of little things are very significant.

I hope that I can make a difference. I hope that I will always love teaching. I hope that I will always care. I hope

Caroline Roberts

Conclusion

Think of all you would have missed
but for the journey there,
and know that the true worth
of your travels lies not in where
you come to be at journey's end,
but in who you come to be along the way.

Anonymous

The purpose of this project was to bring together five women, teachers, identities at various points in their teaching careers and lives. Each person brought to the group their beliefs and values about teaching, their insecurities about their first years in the profession, stories of their growth and learning as people and professionals. Each had something unique to share about herself, while having commonalities and shared experiences that were universal to all.

My main objective was to allow each member to gain personal insights about her development as individuals and teachers. All members of the group were instrumental in offering each other support, reflection, and an arena to and discuss successes and failures in her career. Each member was an important contributor to the project and to the narratives of each person taking part in the project. The goal was to provide living action research about identity formation. The identities that I identified in the development of this project include authoring identity, professional identity, personal identity, gender identity, and physical identity. Throughout this process, the individuals gave support and feedback to one another allowing for the formation, creation, and authoring of teaching narratives using Preskill's model. Five narratives were written, including those of social criticism, journey, apprenticeship, reflective practice and hope. The bond created by the group allowed each individual the freedom, confidence and strength to share things that they had not had the ability to share in the past.

One area of development for all members of this group was in the formation of an authoring identity. This area of identity formation was highlighted by insecurities in writing ability. I found that this was the area where all members required the most support from the group as a whole. It was not until we all met and read our initial

narratives and gave each other feedback that the true authoring identities of each person revealed themselves. It required support and acknowledgment from the group that what each person had to say was unique and important. Each member went on to write and rewrite her narrative in an attempt to create thoughtful and rich stories.

The presentation of the final narrative was to be in the form of each individual's fingerprint. Their narrative was to be placed into the lines of their print at the author's discretion. The final product resulted in a completely unique picture of the individual. Their story wrapped into something that was a work of art - a one and only creative piece reflecting completely the individual who authored it.

I hoped that the teachers gained pedagogical insights by hearing the different forms of narratives by each individual in the group. Judging by the collaboration, support, responses, and efforts put forward by the group, I am thoroughly convinced of the success of this project. I was especially impressed with the amount of time and effort put forward by each individual in the writing of her narrative, especially after the group sharing and discussion session. The comments and responses given showed a great deal of thought and reflection on the process throughout.

The formation of a professional identity was also a major point of the group discussions. Each member commented on her ability to share experiences with each other and receive positive and constructive feedback about events in her career. This was an overarching theme in all of the narratives. All members felt that what they had to share was received with importance and validity by each and every member of the group. Each felt that her professional contribution to the group was listened to and identified as important. Each member also commented on the similarities of life stories that each

person shared, as well as on the uniqueness of each story to the individual.

The initial concentration of the group was on each person's development as a professional in the teaching arena. It was along this path that each began to realize that the narratives showed more than just that. Each narrative had a common thread of self realization and the personal development each has attributed to herself over her varied and individual travels to reach the point at which she presently stands. This journey of realization has taken many turns into the past and is going to involve a synthesis of events and occurrences. The reflection of the individuals on this phenomenon will help to shape their identities. I hope this project aided these teachers in a journey of identity exploration. This exploration allowed them to look at the influences in their lives as experiences they must embrace, write about, reflect upon, grow with and learn from as they continue to construct and reconstruct who they are as individuals, teachers, professionals, and women.

“Not many teachers are offered regular, ongoing, systematically planned and supported opportunities to think with one another, to talk to one another, and to observe and learn from one another” (Zola, 1988). I hope that through this project, I have provided this opportunity for a small group of teachers.

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Appendix A

Personal Reflections

Jenine Chen

In writing my reflective narrative, I have found that my perception of the situation has changed not only since the initial event, but even over the past few months as I have been re-reflecting on my narrative. Key elements have remained the same in my narrative; however, the interpretations of my role and the roles of my students in the narrative have changed.

In the beginning, I felt like I knew the "right" way to teach students how to be effective communicators and independent learners. To me, the students' lack of willingness to embrace this independent style of learning revealed a deficiency within them. However, at this point in the process I feel that I was mistaken. The style of learning that you have (whether because of personal preference or cultural background) is neither right or wrong. However, if the teacher wants to help the students accept a wider range of styles, the onus is on the teacher to provide a means through which the students can come to the place of such acceptance. Once a means is provided and students still choose not to walk along this path, then the onus is on them.

As a beginning teacher, I felt it was important to learn the "right" ways to teach and then apply these techniques effectively and efficiently. Although I still lean towards this orientation of curriculum as technology, I am willing to embrace the fact that there are many styles of both teaching and learning and that a mature teacher has access to many of these styles and can adapt as the situation calls for this.

I enjoyed this process of discovery about myself through reflection. I found it particularly valuable to do so in a collaborative way with other teachers. I felt such encouragement finding out that other

teachers had similar struggles in their teaching.

In working with my own fingerprint, I found that there was much I didn't know about myself even from a physical standpoint. I'd never looked at my fingerprints before, and when writing my story in the lines, was amazed at the wonder of creation. Such an intricate and detailed pattern that I overlook every day. It makes me wonder about the other things I'm overlooking...

Trish Draper

I enjoyed being a part of Cari's thesis. The process we all went through was very interesting. In many respects, it helped me to focus on various events in my teaching career, as well as remember things long since forgotten.

I enjoyed the sharing portion of the process. When we all got together at Cari's house to read our stories, we each took turns sharing our stories and discussed each one individually. It was wonderful just to connect with other teachers at various points in their careers. It was great to see and hear that although our stories are all very different, many of the feelings about some basic issues and events were very similar. It was like a vein running through the whole process.

I found the writing to be quite difficult because I was unsure of what I was doing. It was difficult to write about my self. The editing process we went through, everyone editing and questioning everyone else's stories, really helped me. I was able to rework my story, answering questions the editing process brought out.

I would be most interested to see how the whole project finishes up.

Jen Matthews

This project was an inspiring one for me. When Cari asked me to do this I jumped at the chance. So much had happened to me since my practicum that I was looking for an excuse to reflect on it. Meeting and discussing my experiences with other, more experienced teachers was extremely rewarding. I found out that I was not the only teacher that had insecurities with how I dealt with certain issues.

Telling my story about my practicum was very therapeutic for me. I had been carrying this guilt and insecurity about my abilities as a teacher for a while, and revealing what happened made me understand how ridiculous it all was. One person's opinion really shouldn't have made me feel like I was a hopeless case. Even though my first year of teaching went fairly well, I still struggled with the feeling that I was not worthy of being there. When I read the part of my practicum to any of my teaching colleagues they were appalled at the discouragement I received. This reaction validated my belief that I was treated unfairly.

The value of this project really became apparent when all of the people taking part met in person. Each of us shared our story. When I read mine it was clear they could identify with what happened to some degree. They had all gone through it. I expected that people would be able to relate. I was surprised that, even though I didn't have as much experience as the rest, I had felt the same way they did at some point in the last couple of years. I went into this thinking that I was the only one that would have a difficult story to tell. Everyone has had their doubts and insecurities in their career; even after years of experience.

Being surrounded by strangers and confiding in them, made me realize how easy it is to stay in the safe surroundings of your own school and discuss issues, concerns, or seek advice from the same people. I appreciate everything I have at my school, but it was nice to have some different viewpoints and input from people I was not familiar with.

Initially, I went into this project feeling as though I had so much to learn from the experienced teachers who were participating. This definitely proved to be the case. However, they also were able to learn from me. I believe it brought them back to when they first started teaching and made them realize how far they had come. I would like to think that we all walked away from this experience having learned a great deal from everyone involved. I certainly did.

Julie Wilson

What I like most about this project is that it made me put some thoughts I'd been having for a long time in order. It forced me to really explain how I felt about certain aspects of the teaching environment in which I work. I realized I was a lot more critical of some aspects of the system and less critical of others. No system is perfect and neither are the people, and by this I refer to all the parties, who are involved in it.

I had some frustrations with the project. When writing my narrative, I found it very difficult to narrow my focus. I was always keeping in mind the fact that it would have to be rewritten in the form of a simple fingerprint. This helped me to edit, but it also forced me not to elaborate as much as I would have liked in some areas. The final draft of my narrative is much briefer than it initially was.

I really enjoyed meeting the other participants. We all have very diverse teaching experiences,

but I was very pleased to see how much we all had in common. I particularly enjoyed listening to our first year teacher. We all try to seem so confident that first year. I felt like I was the only one who had insecurities about my teaching. I appreciated her honesty, and it was nice to see that we all had those feelings of doubt. It also helped me to see just how far I have come as a teacher and that the process of becoming a good teacher is never-ending.

Caroline Roberts

I was very surprised with how open the teachers were with each other once they met to share their narratives. Not only were they willing and eager to read aloud their stories they bonded quickly and shared emotions, feelings and similar experiences. The discourse was very rich among a group of individuals who did not know each other, had never met and had such varying teaching backgrounds. I think it had a lot to do with the fact that we were all women. We felt very comfortable in this situation. None of us had previously been involved in such an experience and we enjoyed the sisterhood that was established. Whether or not women voice their concerns about the discrimination they experience in society they do acknowledge it. This was a stand for what we believed in and who we were. We reaffirmed and acknowledged our feelings and experiences about being women in the teaching profession.

We had all been looking forward to the opportunity of sitting down and discussing educational issues with colleagues. There are not many opportunities for this during the year when we are busy teaching. We are so busy dealing with students and parents issues and concerns that we rarely have the chance to voice our concerns, feelings and needs about ourselves and the profession. We all saw this as a great professional development opportunity. A chance to learn from one another's successes and failures. We all recognized that it gave an excuse for reflecting on our teaching practice critically and learning from our analysis and the analysis of others.

Personally, the process made me feel better about myself personally and professionally. I learned a great deal about myself, by looking at the life experiences of a group of individuals that I thought I knew. These individuals shared more about themselves than I could ever imagine in their narratives, reflections to each other, discourse and comments on the process. I really got to know these people well through this process.

I never really enjoyed writing in a creative manner before this project. I have frequently kept a journal for teaching, but when I look back, I realize it was more about listing facts than it was about telling a story or expressing feelings I had about certain issues in my practice. I understand the difference now. We can share a great deal with each other by writing our experiences in a story format. They are more interesting and rewarding to write and share. It makes you think more critically about the structure of the story. My sister who is an anchorperson for the eleven o'clock news always reminds me that she does not read the news but tells the story of the news. There is a big difference. I now see myself more as an author and storyteller than I did before beginning this project.

Appendix B

Group Comments

To Jenine

It was interesting that you exposed many of the frustrations I feel in trying to encourage students to take ownership of their learning. I thought it might only be a problem at the high school level, but you made it clear that it is an issue for learners of all ages and across cultures. You mentioned that some of the problems may be a result of the different teaching and learning styles experienced by students of different cultures. Having previously taught in China, what were the teaching and learning differences you identified?

I don't see this as an ESL issue and I know that all teachers have struggled in finding their place along what I see as a spectrum with teacher centered and student centered styles at either end. I think that most teachers fall somewhere in between both extremes depending on experience and situation. My teaching style varies slightly from year to year, school to school, subject to subject and class to class. I know that as a beginning teacher I taught in a teacher centered style because I felt a little out of control. To gain a feeling of control I took charge of the teaching/learning process. As I became more confident and experienced, I realized the importance of students being intrinsically motivated.

It is important that students take responsibility for their learning actions, but it is easier for students to give up this responsibility. If students do not take the responsibility they need not blame themselves if they have not been successful in their learning. Initially, your students did not take responsibility and could easily blame your teaching style rather than their learning style in their perceived failure to learn the language and communicate effectively. How was it different teaching ESL students in Canada compared to overseas?

It was inspiring to me that your students came to appreciate you not only as a teacher, but as a person. Why do you think a relationship of mutual respect is needed for effective teaching and learning? What changed their outlook on how effective you had been and how

much they had learned from the class?

In your narrative, you definitely shared that teaching is an expression of ourselves. A situation where it is nearly impossible to separate the teacher from the person. It is the teacher/student relationship that is the foundation of all learning and that one style of teaching is not necessarily superior to another. Different teaching styles is important in reaching the needs of all the different learning styles. It is about finding your style - teaching or learning - and working with it rather than against it. There can be a balance between teacher centered and student centered styles of teaching. What style works best for you will make you an effective teacher.

I know as teachers we always question ourselves and battle with self doubt. We crave feedback about the job we are doing. It is not about needing praise for a job well done, but about reassurances of our teaching abilities. We need this feedback in our continued growth as teaching professionals. I have found this writing group provides reassurances that we have similar questions, fears, insecurities and strengths as teachers and human beings.

I enjoyed your writing style and found I wanted to know more about your story when it concluded.

Caroline

I really struggle to find any corrections that need to be made. I can empathize with how you felt when you realized you weren't reaching all your students. I found, especially in drama, that my teaching style worked with some classes and not with others. The classes who did not like my style were very open and quite hurtful when expressing their frustration with me. However, as the year went on, and I persevered, I allowed my students to see more of who I was as a person. With this, I found their appreciation and tolerance grew. Some of them actually hugged me at the end of the

year!

Jen

First year teachers are often more focused on their teaching rather than the learning styles of their students. The culture gap between you and your students was another obstacle for you. I like your questions in Paragraph 2 - Did you ask these questions at the time or later upon reflection? Often first year teachers do not have the answers to these questions, and often they are too afraid to even ask them.

Your students probably all valued your efforts, but they could not appreciate your style because of the culture barrier.

It is difficult teaching a language in a classroom environment because it is so artificial. I found that I did not know how well I had learned French until I had lived in Quebec and was forced to use the language in real settings every single day. I was able to put what I had learned in class into practice. This, I believe, is a common frustration of all language teachers - how to make learning a language authentic to their students. It must be student centered, which I ultimately believe your style was, even though as a first year teacher you may have felt otherwise. You did "invite" your students. I don't believe you forced them at all, but it is an even more delicate matter when dealing with another culture.

Julie

Trish made no comments in regards to Jenine's narrative

To Trish

Obviously your journey in teaching is not nearing an end. I am interested in knowing your future plans and aspirations in this profession. There are a number of different reasons why people end up in this profession. Many stumble into this career, like myself, and only realize once they are there how fulfilling and rewarding teaching is. I have met a very few that have always aspired to this noble profession. I truly admire your dedication. It seems to me it was almost like a religious experience, a calling to teach for you. You were born to teach. It is in your blood. I am jealous.

It is inspiring that it did not come easily and you had your fair share of difficulties and doubts; but you endured and were strong. I would have enjoyed hearing more about your feelings and specifically things you have done in your classroom. What about interactions with students, parents, administration and colleagues that have contributed towards your growth in teaching?

I applaud you for selecting this narrative to write on. It is most difficult to summarize a life in a few pages of text. Evaluating everything as to its value in your life. It is easier to remember the facts and more difficult to remember the feelings. I hope that looking back has been enjoyable and not difficult. We can learn so much from each others journeys whether similar or different from our own. I learned a great deal not only about you, but also about myself in reading your story. Thanks for sharing very personal stories. Would you have done anything differently if you could have?

Caroline

Your narrative is so wonderful to read. It is easy to feel your enthusiasm through what you have written. The only part I found confusing was the ending. It seemed as though you had much more to say. This is probably something you are already aware of.

Have a great year!

Jen

When I read your narrative, I couldn't believe how much determination you had and how far it got you! That's been something I've always lacked and admire it so much in others. If someone told me I couldn't do something, I'll probably believe them!

When were you at the U of A? I was there 1996-97 getting my TESL Diploma.

I think it's wonderful to hear how open you are about sharing ideas. I think this is one of the most important things for me professionally -- to be in an environment where sharing takes place, continual learning, continual improvement. I wonder how to engender this kind of sharing throughout the system? I guess it's a risky thing to do -- putting your ideas up for evaluation all the time. It has to be done in an accepting atmosphere, a trusting atmosphere.

What a wonderful way to take charge of the interview and make it what you wanted. I've been thinking about this a lot lately. I conform to others' expectations, but in doing so, I know I'm not doing as good of a job as I could be doing. If I would take the risk and not conform, I would momentarily disappoint them, only to (hopefully) impress them with the end result. I'm not much of a risk-taker, and so was encouraged to read your example of effective risk-taking in action.

Jenine

Keeping a memory book - what a great idea! This focuses on the positive - what students have given you often reflects how they feel about you as their teacher.

Not liking being told that you can't do something also makes for good teaching practice. It is very unlikely that you would ever say this to a student.

I like how you explained the various stops along your journey (phone company, different colleges and universities, becoming pregnant). One stop leads to another, and had you missed a stop, you may have gone in another direction, though I do feel you probably would have ended up a teacher any way, because you were always so drawn to it.

I agree. Every teacher should sub. It hones your classroom discipline and ability to think on your feet.

I would like to know more about why your second year was wonderful. How did you experiment? What did you learn?

Your narrative seems incomplete. Starting "sharing workshops" is a wonderful accomplishment. I would like to know what your "sharing workshops" are about. What lead you to start them? Implementing programs/workshops is an important stop on your journey that should be elaborated upon.

Julie

To Jen

The experience you shared at the beginning of your narrative made my heart break. It made me think a great deal about evaluation of teachers. I know that with professional growth plans we have moved from a system of evaluation to that of supervision which I hope will eliminate situations like the one you experienced. Your narrative emphasizes the point that there is no such thing as "constructive" criticism. Criticism is simply criticism whether it is disguised as constructive.

Student teaching should allow individuals to learn from other teaching professionals.

Student teachers should not be judged by experienced teachers. They tend to judge new teachers based on their values, beliefs and ideas about teaching and do not take into consideration that student teachers have their own values, beliefs and ideas about teaching. A great deal can be learned from each other, as long as an atmosphere is created that is conducive to sharing ideas and asking questions without being evaluated. Student teaching should be a process that allows for growth as both a teacher and individual.

Situations like this never encourage individuals to improve or reflect positively on teaching. It leads to bad feelings about the profession. It causes individuals to question their teaching ability. Self doubt does not allow for growth. I am so glad that you were strong enough to survive this experience and then have the opportunity to have positive learning experiences with other colleagues. These positive experiences can never undue the damage done by the negative experiences. The negative experiences can tend to linger in your mind and haunt you when you are having a rough day. How do you heal from a experience like this? Since most teachers put everything they have into teaching, when they are criticized as a teacher, they feel as though they are being judged as a person.

I think that it was great that you had such a strong support system your first year of teaching. I know that being in the position of new teacher you are under a magnify glass. Even though you may be full of many questions, you may hesitate asking them in fear of being judged as unequipped and ill prepared in your role as teacher.

I enjoyed the structure of your narrative. It was as though I was walking through the hallways of your school being introduced to the people who have had the greatest influence on you in your development as a teacher so far. I was fascinated by how much you shared about yourself my describing the qualities of others you admire. You never really came out and talked a great deal about yourself directly, but it was very evident in the organization of your narrative. Your writing style is very comfortable and enjoyable to read. Thanks for sharing these stories.

Caroline

I could identify with some of the feelings you had when you entered your first teaching position. I remember feeling and thinking some of the same things. Your line, "Immediately, I knew I was among great people." I too remember feeling this way when I began, unfortunately after being at the same school for five years and working with this same group of people, I began to take off the rose colored glasses, so to speak. I began to see them for who they really were rather than putting them on a pedestal about myself.

Yes, they are all good teachers, some are even what I would call great teachers, but I learned they were no different from me and I was no different from them. I learned to trust myself and my ideas.

I also learned through teaching that my colleagues are my greatest and most valuable resource people, but I am a resource for them as well. You will be and probably are a resource person for people in your school too! Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do.

Trish

Your narrative was so honest and open. Although I haven't experienced anything so extreme, I could relate to the feelings and the struggles you described. I really admire you for going through that time with so much dignity, strength, and self-knowledge. I hope that I will be able to do the same. My problem is that I supply my own critical environment! I can become so critical of myself that it's crippling! Reading your narrative helped me re-realize how counterproductive it is to believe the criticism -- my own or others!

I was interested to see how you could see the strengths in each of the teachers you've been in contact with. I've also come to the conclusion that each teacher has something special to offer that is

unique and that there is no one 'right' way in teaching. I am realizing what a constructive process valuing is -- valuing others, their contributions, their abilities.

As well, it sounds like your students valued you. I wonder why we are sometimes so selective in choosing which input we believe? Or do we choose to believe the negative? I am sure that now you have a strong sense of self, and of who you are as a teacher.

I also enjoyed reading your reflections, showing insight into what you have done and what you plan to do next. I too think you had a very successful first year of teaching even though you had to overcome such adversity. You did very quickly what I have been working towards for years: being independent of other's opinions and criticisms. I am impressed.

Jenine

I had very similar feelings during my practicum year. You cannot get an accurate idea of what teaching is about at university and during your practicum you are very focused on simply surviving/passing. It is also very difficult to remember that your practicum teacher's opinion is just one person's opinion, and that your practicum advisor at university is there to support you if you feel that your practicum teacher is not. I also like how you compare your practicum experience to your first year of teaching. It goes to show the importance of receiving positive feedback, something that as teachers, not just as teaching students, we must always keep in mind.

Getting to know your colleagues is crucial, and can be difficult because teaching can be a very isolated profession (every one locked away in their own classrooms). You can grow as a teacher by taking from those who provide good examples of teaching, but it is also valuable to pay attention to those who don't do things as you would, and learn from that.

Did you consider Janice to be a mentor? Taking a mentor is the best thing a first year teacher can do. The first year I taught grade one I had two mentors, and their input was invaluable.

Your first year of teaching is about survival. I personally feel that your first year should focus on your classroom and building your confidence as a teacher. Extra-curricular activities always take second place to the classroom.

Ultimately we learn best from ourselves, that little voice that tells us when what we are doing is right.

Julie

To Julie

I think that all teachers struggle with issues of social criticism and even though your topic was that of French Immersion which I have no experience, I could understand your frustration in relationship to the frustrations I experience in my program. It is difficult to find a balance within ourselves that deals satisfactorily with the demons fighting within us as to what is right and why things are simply the way they are. Sometimes we may feel very uncomfortable in our own skin, saying the words that we are expected to say in support of the philosophy behind a program and at the same time knowing the darker side.

I am constantly struggling with contradictions in the career and technology studies program between the philosophy of the program and the actual running of it. The philosophy of the program is that students work independently and at their own pace, but logistically this does not work effectively around school time tabling that is based on blocks of time, terms and marks.

Many of the concepts that I teach, simply cannot be learned independently under the guidance of a teacher. They are just too complex. It is nearly impossible to effectively teaching

students from grades nine through twelve three different levels of instruction in one classroom. It would be like taking students in math from grades nine through twelve and teaching them their individual concepts in one class.

Sometimes it is as though we are forcing students through modules in attempts to obtain credits and funding, but at the same time we are promoting a philosophy that students are expected to complete modules at their own pace. Another frustration is that I am teaching high school level CTS courses to students who are mostly in grade nine. Sometimes I debate whether they have the abilities and skills at this level to deal with the complex topics that I teach.

Even though my frustrations are from a different area of the curriculum, they are based on the same issues of what is best for the students, what are the expectations of all the stakeholders and what is the philosophy of the program and why all these elements so far apart on the spectrum. Why is there not a common goal? How can we achieve unity?

Caroline

I strongly support your views and enjoyed reading your narrative. I could not pick out any mistakes mechanically or content wise. I do admire your ability to be so open and honest about the nature of the program in which you are in. As an English teacher in an immersion school, I clearly see the hypocrisy of the term "Immersion" for the students. To my knowledge, there were very few parents that spoke French in my school. During our mandatory silent reading period, the school policy was that the French students were to read French. There was no end to my struggle to get these kids to read French. They viewed it as invaluable and pointless. Something does not seem right here. The kids thrive on their status, but put down the education itself. I could go on and on. Good luck in your

plight for more support and in motherhood!

Jen

I was very surprised by Julie's narrative. I must admit I had attitude about French Immersion programs. I guess I had this attitude because the French immersion teachers I had contact with were all very elitist and their programs were always given lots of money. I always felt the English programs were not treated equally with the French program.

In the program I had an experience with, parents placed their children in the French program as a status symbol. When many of the children failed to do very well in the French program, they were transferred to the English and then had problems. The French program ended up with nice small classes of obviously bright children and the English program ended up with very large classes, with many children having many learning and behavioral problems and to top it off the English program had less money and fewer resources to draw on to help the children. It was, I'm sure very frustrating for the teachers involved.

I mentioned I was surprised by Julie's narrative because she was non-elitist. She was not promoting the immersion program. she actually could see the difficulties and inequalities. It was refreshing to read.

Trish

In reading your narrative, I learned a considerable amount about the French Immersion experience. I was almost completely ignorant about this topic. Your narrative was very insightful. I hope someone is listening to you in your school context!

I teach English as a Second Language, and have often had students who were there for

reasons other than a sincere desire to learn the language. I've had to work to overcome their dislike of learning English, and was many times successful.

When I listened to and read your narrative, what eclipsed all was the word 'French'; it brought back memories of unsuccessful language learning, of hating French, of shutting down when I hear the word 'French'. When I went to China (in my second year there) I attempted to learn Mandarin, but this was only because I was thrown into a situation which necessitated it! I found I loved the Mandarin language and haven't stopped studying since. Had I not been put in a real-life situation where I could discover I could learn language, I would have mistakenly assumed for the rest of my life that it was hopeless and closed that door forever. To me, classroom learning of French is a scary thing, a dead thing, a door I want to keep closed forever.

In reading your narrative, I needed to think about this issue again, to open emotions again I've kept buried, to open doors I've shut.

What do you see as the solution to this problem? Making French more used in the real world lives of these children? Selecting students more carefully for the program, regardless of budgetary constraints? I'm curious about how to make French more meaningful when it is as displaced as it is here.

In terms of budgets, keeping students, and all the other political agendas, I can relate as I am an ESL instructor. I am becoming more and more aware how much money for students is an issue. It certainly has changed the nature of my classroom -- oversized classes, students who didn't belong in my classroom, canceled classes, lack of classroom contact hours, etc. I have become so frustrated that I long to start my own school where I won't have to answer to anyone. Why are issues unrelated to teaching interfering with my teaching!

I hope that somehow your problems will be solved and that your voice will be heard.

Jenine

To Caroline

I was truly blown away by your narrative. A few years ago, when I was still in university, I was obsessed with the Native culture. Any course that had any relevance to Native history and education, I took. My goal was to teach on a Native reserve when I graduated. Cissy would probably remember. I frequently inquired about how you and Dave were doing up North. Cis could not stress enough the hardships you went through there. Like you said in your paper, "...when you are new to teaching, you have a naive idea that you will change the world." I had dreams of changing the hopelessness, that I heard so much about in class, of a race of people. As I went through my practicum, I realized how challenging it was for me to reach the "dominant culture" let alone the Native communities. Fortunately, I got on with the board, I truly believe that I wouldn't have made it through one year if I was where you were.

Jen

I love the way you connected everything. The thread of hope runs through it all. Excellent!

This is great. You are a wonderful writer! What a gift! Don't change a thing!

Trish

I really enjoyed reading your piece on hope. It was very poetic and thoughtful. I think it is wonderful that you plan to name your daughter Hope. It's a beautiful name, full of meaning. I enjoyed how you wove the metaphor of having hope with the name Hope.

Having lived in the south and in the Edmonton area most of my life, I don't know too much about the north and found that interesting (except we lived in Manning, AB for about a year when I was 8).

It must have been so difficult for you to live surrounded with the tragedies of life being played out daily, and in the lives of your students. You must have felt very helpless at times. But then to hear the story of the boy who wanted to become a math teacher was very uplifting. Even though you say what you did was meaningless, I don't think so. This example demonstrates that you had an impact. You gave him hope. As you said, a whole lot of little seemingly insignificant things become significant. This too in the lives of others. Sometimes we don't even know the impact we have.

I agree with you about needing to work with the system we have. We don't have a bad system by any stretch of the imagination. We just need to get behind it wholeheartedly, and the only way we can do that is if we have hope, if we believe that we can make a difference.

As well, I've experienced times when I had a real lack of hope in my life and found it an utterly miserable place to be in. It was a personal lack of hope, not a professional one. I don't like the person I am when I am lacking hope, but feel like it's impossible to go back to the place I was when I had it. Then suddenly, without my willing it, waves of hope wash over me unbidden, and I am closer to where I was before and waiting for more and more waves to come wash over me as time goes by. Having gone through this divorce this past year, I found I went through such deep times of hopelessness and could never imagine a time when I could feel the joy of living again. But now, I do. Every day I feel stronger and better than

the day before, happier and more filled with hope.

Jenine

I like how you explain what hope means to you - given that it is such a personal emotion that so many lack.

I can relate to your hopes about education/students/teaching. We must remind ourselves to stay hopeful. Hopes comes more naturally to some. I personally find staying hopeful about my students and the school system very difficult, though I did find myself more hopeful teaching grade one more so than any other grade.

If your bambino is a girl, you may just have a name for her!

We all struggle with maintaining hope. I am unsure of the purpose of this paragraph however. I am not sure it is a necessary point.

Excellent examples. How do you maintain hope in such a place? How did some or any of the people maintain hope? I guess I would like more examples of hope you did see up north.

I like this. I did not remember hope being such an important theme to the movie. I myself remember most the character of the old man (I forget his name) who commits suicide upon his release from prison. He has no hope outside of his animals and library in prison. Then again I am one of those people who finds hope difficult to maintain. I really like this example. It really emphasizes the importance of hope, particularly in the most bleak of circumstances.

This is the core of the narrative - the loss of a sense of community. This is what I personally feel causes people to lose hope in institutions such as the school. We do not see beyond ourselves, thus we are suspicious of school, church, government. Our hope has been replaced by skepticism and criticism.

Can you suggest how we can get it back - as a whole system or teacher by teacher?

Julie

Appendix C

Transcribed Comments from the Sharing Session

Trish Draper

- *I have always been a teacher I think. My mother tells me I use to organize the kids in the neighborhood all the time to play school. I love it to death.*
- *I don't think you ever get over getting nervous. There needs to be openness between teacher and practicum student with mutual learning occurring.*
- *I think the university gives you an illusion that you know everything. My real education began when I walked into my first classroom. That was when I started to learn to be a teacher. You need to control your own style.*
- *I have learned so much from the sharing session of ECS teachers. At the very beginning, there were teachers that would come with nothing, no ideas, but with paper to write down everyone else's ideas. I am trying to show them what I am trying to do. They don't want to hear it, this is what we have done for x number of years, but that does not mean you can't try something new. I find that really frustrating, so I just go in my room and close the door. I will just do what I want.*

Jen Matthews

- *I am still at the part where I am scared and I am nervous for September. I am excited but nervous.*
- *I loved school all my life. I especially enjoyed junior high. I have always identified well with kids that age.*
- *I was very open with how insecure I was and how little experience I had. In my*

practicum, he focused so much on my lesson plans I forgot I was suppose to be teaching the kids cause I was so worried about what he was thinking and what he wanted so I never had any relationship with these kids. I was just trying to stay afloat. I was trying to learn the material so badly. It was an awful experience and it was my last practicum. It was the taste in my mouth when I started teaching. I can't get through this without support, so I was so lucky to be at the school at was at. The staff is so helpful.

- I wish I had kept a journal because I didn't. But this year, I am definitely going to keep a journal - it is a goal. I don't think I can look back and remember certain things. Well there are certain things I shouldn't have done and others I did right and I would like to do them again. It is the little details.

Julie Wilson

- School was the best thing I knew. I had always been going to school. My year starts in September and ends in June. It was a known identity and I knew it well. I can see the difference I have made. It is very rewarding. I surprised myself because I never thought I would enjoy it.
- When I started focusing on what the kids needed to learn and less about what the university said I should be doing is when I started teaching
- Having sort of a mentor. The other grade one teacher I would consider her a master teacher. I found I was learning a lot from her. On the other side of me was a first year teacher who was coming to me and asking me questions. I was answering her questions. By being able to answer her questions I knew I had learned things and become a better teacher. It made me feel for the first time that I had

experience under my belt. I was learning from one teacher and teaching another which was a very interesting experience. But it is very frustrating being a first year teacher because even though I had many questions, I didn't want to ask many questions because I did not want to look as though I did not know. But I didn't know. I was lucky that my husband taught at the school so I asked him questions, I would not ask others. I would go try things he suggested but it was his style not mine.

- Teaching is very isolating. We are all doing our own thing. I was told to find a mentor. My principal gave me three mornings to observe any experienced grade one teacher in the district. He said he was not giving you this opportunity because I think you are incompetent but I think this would be helpful to you. Mentoring can do a lot but one thing you learn is how individualized teaching is.
- I think you learn from your own mistakes. I am not going to do this year. My first year I was too much *my way or the highway*. It was coming from my own insecurities and I was more flexible the second year. Teaching all those different grades has been schizophrenic, but at the same time it teaches you a number of different strategies. I think it is very common for first year teachers to be teacher centered. You are surviving, you are trying to figure it out and students are getting an education in spite of what you are doing because you are so focused on yourself. Now I know I am much more student focused. I will totally change what I planned because I see the class needs this day. I am much more aware of what they need and less what I need to teach. If something did not work, I would try it again a different way.
- I am emotionally scarred from my first year. Now I see myself more as who I am but not all I am because I don't put everything of who I am in the classroom.
- If you write things done it forces you to reflect.
- Focus on giving us ideas on how to improve because you do not have them because you do not

have the experience. You just can't say your lesson plans are weak well tell me how to make them better. Show me , show me yours. I never saw any of my practicum teachers resources. The same people go and the same people do not go to workshops and seminars.

Jenine Chen

- I fell into it because I wanted to travel overseas and teaching was the best way. My father is a teacher and he had great influence over me and I love it now. I really didn't know what I was doing and very cut off from other people in knowing what I should be doing. I learned by doing and talking to other teachers.
- A class I took got be writing and thinking beyond classroom experiences and how it can impact what I am doing right now. Some things that I am not satisfied with and I found if I went back and reflected on things in the past it helped my present teaching.

Caroline Roberts

- Every single year in teaching is so different from the previous year. That is what I am amazed about. I think that is why we all have that nervous feeling at the start of each year. The dynamics of kids in your class or one person on staff can change a whole classroom or climate of the school.
- A false relationship because you are doing what you have to do to please your practicum teacher. You are learning to be that person. You are not being genuine.

Appendix D

Participants

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