

**LEARNING TO TEACH:  
A BEGINNING TEACHER'S STORY**

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By

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## ABSTRACT

A beginning secondary teacher in rural Saskatchewan, Sarah, was interviewed over a four month period to examine how a novice secondary teacher describes the process of learning to teach. Relevant is Goodson's (1992) recognition that a teacher's classroom life and professional influences are not inseparable from a teacher's life outside the classroom and personal influences. Complexity is reflected in Sarah's storied description of learning to teach.

Narrative inquiry within a qualitative design was used in this study. The researcher and participant engaged in weekly interviews, or more accurately conversations, about learning to teach. Participant observation was also employed for researcher orientation to Sarah's world and for grist for researcher-participant conversations.

Sarah's story is offered as an alternative to traditional research and is a response to calls for stories with authentic markers of human presence (Graham, 1993). Sarah's story is presented as a writerly text (Barthes, 1974); that is, her story is contextually understood; is descriptive rather than prescriptive; is open to meaning making; and is intertextual in nature.

Sarah's story is a reflection of the constructive way this novice teacher makes sense of her experience. Sarah's story of learning to

teach is, possibly, more perceived than, for lack of a better word, real; her talk about “learning” and “becoming” is more about “finding her teacher mask. Sarah’s story becomes one of perceptual identity formation, a marriage of her pre-teaching life and her teaching life so far; however, her understanding of the various cultural myths associated with the idea of “teacher” become significant.

Sarah’s story may have implications because teacher talk propagates the cultural myths clustered around the concept of “teacher” and, for Sarah, her colleagues prove to be a powerful influence. Second, her story suggests that feelings of separation and detachment must be usurped with a setting, which includes time and place, for teachers to discuss schooling, teaching and learning. The implication is for changing schools where the structure and climate preclude such opportunities. Third, the professional development value to the teller of story is apparent. The act of telling for Sarah, reflecting on the principles that inform practice and centering on the act of teaching, is the valuable part, not the story itself. Fourth, stories teach in ambiguous ways--they have an affective power. More research on what stories can offer the field of education is required.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### “WHAT I REMEMBER IS WHAT I AM”

Glen Sorestad begins “Aide Memoire” with the poetic line, “The world begins and ends in memory; what I remember is what I am”. I have elected to begin with his words because this research is about looking at what is remembered in an effort to understand the “am” of a novice teacher in rural Saskatchewan. My research interest begins here: I am one who understands his life as stories; I have come to know that the experiences I remember, share and render for and with others define me. Sorestad is defined, in part, by his offer of a boyhood memory with a single blade of grass and the shrill he produced with this unlikely instrument. His poem teaches us that experience with simple things is significant if only because his poetic offer reminds us that “a remembered world holds truth and realities far clearer than echoes” (Forie, O’Rourke, & Sorestad, 1998, p. 217). In another way, though, Sorestad’s words rather than my own as a beginning to this chapter illustrate what 32 years of life experience has taught me: defer to authority in an attempt to appeal to authority. Authority, however, is not always truth and missing is personal experience.

In educational research there is an increasing interest among qualitative researchers in narrative inquiry in an effort to hear personal

experience (Colins & Colins, 1992; Fox, 1995; Dhamborvorn, 1996) and get at truthfulness (Carter, 1993). Perennial efforts by the academic community, in particular, to reconstruct and codify first-hand, experiential accounts persist. Much in educational research has been understood by reducing and simplifying unique and complex classroom behaviors and situations; this research has employed reductionism in order to produce nomological knowledge (i.e. facts, generalizations, cause and effect propositions and theories), and the research findings are often intended to govern and inform practice. A nomological diet was offered in my undergraduate education program and is reflected in one of the course's prescribed textbook, Teaching Strategies: A Guide to Better Instruction (Orlich et al., 1985). Within this type of textbook, teachers are reduced to objects of researchers' studies and then ultimately are expected to be the consumers and implementors of these findings. Significantly missing, however, are the voices of teachers, the questions that teachers ask, and the interpretive frames that teachers use to understand and improve classroom practices.

Traditionally, research has been quantitative, that is, research that measures and is based in science. This approach to research develops understanding, both curricular and pedagogical, through questionnaires, check-lists, non-participant observations and surveys. The researcher assumes an intentional distance from the subjects he or



she attempts to understand; the stance is an effort designed to ensure the objectivity of the researcher and, ultimately, the research findings. Such an approach to research, in its attempt to generalize, aims at discovering the broad characteristics of what it studies and is less concerned, if at all, with the murky issues of personal meaning, relevance, contextualization and holism of the individuals it studies. In its attempt to quantify and simplify, this type of research neglects the uniqueness and individual difference of the participants. Quantitative research makes the assumption that what is complicated and complex can be reduced to charts, diagrams and statistics. Generalized findings are applicable to a generalized audience. Quantitative research findings may be the very text that Shakespeare's Hamlet speaks of when asked about the matter of his reading. He responds dispassionately: "words, words, words" (Shakespeare, 1958, p. 956).

And yet narrative inquiry is not without problems. Sorestad must have traditional leanings for he asks: "Did that blade of grass I plucked/as a boy to vibrate with my breath/really burst the air with shrillness?" Interrogatively, he locates a tension, although there are more. Indeed, there is a sense of tension and conflict--even, at times, division among researchers about what narrative can tell us, but, despite its apparent and not so apparent limitations, narrative inquiry is becoming increasingly popular in fields such as education

and sociology because it recognizes that individuals and relationships are too complex to be simplified into numeric abstractions. Narrative inquiry looks at the meanings and significance that participants place on things--in short, the meanings and perspectives that humans give to events and experiences. It treats each individual as unique and makes no attempt to generalize to the whole group: embracing the notion of multiple realities rather than a single reality; searching for situational meaning rather than assigning context a "variable" status in any given research equation; and exploring the research possibilities of "studying experience rather than using experience as a contextual given for educational discourse" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, p. 260) are changing the ways of knowing.

Story, in particular, has become one possibility in the study of experience and it is within this qualitative and narrative framework that I research. The purpose, then, is to present Sarah's story, the story of a novice teacher's experience. Although this research interest is further shaped within the course of this research process, my guiding question is, "How does a beginning teacher describe the process of learning to teach?" Sarah's storied description is offered as an alternative to those interested in the work of teachers.

Division and changes within approaches to educational research are not significant in themselves, but the desire to change and seek

alternatives is. The impetus for change comes not only from those engaging in a “kind of fresh questioning” (Aoki, 1988, p. 406) but from teachers who are interested less in prescriptions and more in gleanings that will increase their understandings as semi-autonomous professionals who negotiate and mediate among complex and sometimes contradictory demands (Giroux, 1985). In this way, research possibilities are being explored to provide understandings for and by practitioners. As teacher Linda Alford (1983) tells, research should allow “us [to] see how others teach.... We can see the effects of their behavior, test our decisions against theirs, match our strategies against theirs and gain insights into ourselves and our teaching” (p. 32). It seems, however, not enough to enliven research accounts with occasional anecdotes or researcher interpretations of teachers, students and classrooms. There is a desire to move beyond the idealizations and generalizations to uncover teachers’ direct experience as well as to discover the invaluable first order descriptions --the voices--from those who dwell in the classroom and who experience what it means to teach.

Clandinin (1992) recognizes that “a long history of silencing teachers’ voices [exists] in educational research” (p. 61). In a similar way, others have shown concern and interest by asking where the voices are of the teachers themselves (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Schulman, 1992; Black, 1992). But these are more than

insistent calls; they are compelling arguments for a genuine voice of and for teachers. Issues of credibility, ownership and validation are central. First, feelings of disbelief of or disconnectedness to the research text stem from the reader's inability to find the "person" in or behind research accounts. Graham (1993) points out that research without symbols of an authentic human presence is often mistrusted because it appears "disembodied" or "detached" from context, person or lived experience. Therefore, credibility is more likely if situational voices of people--classroom-based teachers--are heard. Second, questions of ownership are raised. Excluding the voices of teachers bars practitioners entry into a conversation about their work. Teachers and researchers must begin to work collectively, as a community of experts, in search of wisdom and meaning (e.g. Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Aoki, 1990). Third, on any given day and in schools across the country, it is commonplace to hear teachers in conversations with other teachers. Professional exchanges about challenges, difficulties, uncertainty, successes, must be viewed as valid, if not invaluable, in the study of experience.

Ironically, I have discussed story without story; I have embraced an emerging paradigm but couched it in language (point of view, tone and diction) borrowed from the traditional paradigm. Some lessons are hard to forget. But, to illustrate that we understand our lives and the lives of

others through story, requires story. I learned about my great-grandfather, Lawrence F. Tapper, through stories told by my grandfather. My great-grandfather's service as cavalry sergeant in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905-1906, his unwillingness to accept an officer's commission on the condition that he renounce his Jewish faith, his immigration to Canada in the summer of 1914, his life in northern Manitoba as a trapper and trader, and his 1951 death in the Winnipeg General Hospital are stories that make up the story of the "Iron Man of the North"--my great-grandfather. Recently I have heard other stories, from the Cree Indians of northern Manitoba. They tell different stories of the fur trade. Still, I enjoyed hearing my grandfather tell those stories; now I enjoy telling those same stories to my younger cousins. Stories are testimony that people interpret and make sense of their lived experience; people continuously give personal meanings, implicitly and explicitly, to their situations and to the events they experience. Interpretations of the same event or situation differ from person to person and situations are ever changing as are the meanings that people give to things, people, and events (Aoki, 1990).

Furthermore, some educational researchers are of the view that "humans are story-telling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Story has become appealing in contemporary educational research because of the interest

in recovering that which is directly experienced as well as reclaiming the invaluable meaning and descriptions from those who reside in and who experience life within a pedagogical situation. Therefore, because “people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives” researchers, who wish to recover and reclaim that which has been lost or obscured, are challenged “to describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them [people] and write narratives of experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Perhaps the value of stories and rewards to the narrative researcher are, as Noddings (1991) suggests, tied to a single proposition: “stories have the power to direct and change our lives” (p. 157).

Patrick Friesen, a local writer, shares that he has “always had . . . interior conversations, since [he] was a child” (Forie et al., 1998, xxxiii). I include his observation because like many of the other stories and fragments of story that follow, they reflect the interior conversation I have had with texts, written and spoken. Strangely, the research process has been rather lonely; it is a feeling that can, perhaps, be likened to the feeling expressed by Sarah in chapter four. As an introduction to the research, I include it here because the construction of any text always bears the marks of the person who created it. And while Sarah’s story is central to the research, the researcher’s story can

never be too far away. So, before discussing narrative and narrative analysis further, I should offer something more.

My five years of teaching in Wellington, New Zealand are understood by me as a series of stories that range from my terrifying first day to a simple but memorable exchange I had with a student. A personal awareness of struggle, refinement and eventually, the acquisition of the stories that affect and reflect my own curricular and pedagogical decisions in those formative years have left me curious; I am curious about the sense-making process for novice teachers--of and from particular and specific events and struggles. Novice teachers' stories are beginning to appear (Britzman, 1991; Clift, 1991; Fox, 1991, 1995; Grossman, 1990; Richie & Wilson, 1993). Their stories prompt me to contribute. Before the presentation you must understand your narrator. My teaching story is more than the sum of my experiences; it is also a story of the people I have come to know through teaching. I would like to share a small story about a student and a specific classroom experience that is contained in the larger narrative of my first years of teaching

Rebecca, a grade eleven student at the time I met her, is one of many students with whom I was lucky enough to work during my first years of teaching. This is not to say that I was

always lucky; indeed, certain students feature in my tales about students and not stories of teaching. Rebecca, however, is a part of my story. Whether it was the letter received from her last month or the study of story, something reminded me of her oral class presentation--it triggered the memory of that powerful story she shared with us.

Rebecca's class was large for a senior English class, about 30 students. Her class was also made distinguishable because of its disproportionate number of able students; I remember this because never again did I have a class as large or able. Rebecca, however, did not find school easy. She sat in the second row in the second seat from the front of the classroom; she was two desks away from my desk. Her uniform was not kind to her or any girl for that matter. A blue tartan pattern on an itchy looking fabric was fashioned into a skirt cum bib front. It certainly was inappropriate for a large girl who was shy and self conscious. Yet, for all of that, she had a smile that made one forget about the awkwardness. It was a warm smile like the one our Else's wears after seeing the little lamp in Katherine Mansfield's "The Doll's House".

Students in her class that year were assigned a research task to interview someone and orally report back to the class; one



of two formats could direct their study: a biography of a person or a description from a person who had been changed by an event or experience. I remember stressing the importance of humanness; I encouraged them to share the words, photographs and objects that helped them understand. I now realize, in organizing the assignment, I was interested in getting the students to listen to and share stories about people.

Most students selected family friends employed in such professions as law enforcement and fire/rescue workers or opted to tell about the neighbor who recently immigrated to New Zealand. One student interviewed a neighbor who flew a plane in the Battle of Britain.

Rebecca, however, shared with us something more personal about someone close to her--her mother and her mother's unsuccessful battle with cancer. Further, the tone of Rebecca's story was different as was the tone of the classroom. I remember sensing the change; I was moved and scared at the same time.

Rebecca's story began the day that she and her brother found out about the cancer. She described how each of them reacted to the news, how roles and responsibilities changed, and how she changed. She cried at least twice; a few of her classmates were also moved to tears. We didn't have another

presentation follow Rebecca's that day. Instead, students told similar stories about others with cancer.

Rebecca worked hard that year and year twelve to earn average grades. Her recent letter informed me that she has completed, with more hard work, a three year Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology. More recently, she has secured a part time job and volunteers two days a week at a local recreational youth center. She also talked about her mother and the relationship between her and her brother. She is doing well.

Rebecca and her story, for some reason, stand out.

But I do know the reason. Three years ago I offered this story in my thesis proposal and I have included it here without change although the story has changed. I now understand or accept that its inclusion may be linked to Grandmother Tapper's unsuccessful battle with cancer and my mother's more recent successful battle with the same disease. As Freeman (1984) observes, causal linkage of events is often known only retrospectively. I recognize Rebecca's story.

While some educational researchers argue that teachers' stories seem "an area ripe for careful research" (Carter, 1993, p. 8) or make the claim that narrative inquiry may provide "glimpses of practice previously unheard" (Black, 1992, p. 66), this is not my intention. I do

not mind familiar stories; familiar stories are reassurances that we are not alone. Therefore, my research interest takes up the challenge issued by Connelly and Clandinin (1990): “to describe. . . lives, collect and tell stories of [teachers] and write narratives of experience” (p. 2).

Last, I recognize and strongly believe that teacher stories, and narrative inquiry, are an effective way of knowing. Stories are opportunities for practitioners to question their practices, to reflect on their practices (Mezirow et al., 1990; Mattingly, 1991) and to see and hear stories and narrative accounts that mirror their own stories (Dhamborvorn, 1996). From this perspective, stories are the tacit constructs (theory) that are realized and born in practice and, ultimately, guide classroom practice. Simply, reflection on experience informs future action. Perhaps R. D. Laing’s (1967) observation that “we do not need theories so much as the experience that is the source of theory” is an appropriate end to this discussion. Narrative inquiry, then, is vehicle to communicate experience and reclaim a space in educational research for the voice of a practitioner, specific to our province. I began with the first lines of Sorestad’s “Aide Memoire”; I wish to end with his end: “In the cupped hands of remembrance/the thin green reed of what we are/trembles with a sound so rare” (Forie et al., 1998, p. 217). I appreciate those who can say things more effectively than I can.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “BUT MAINLY HE TOLD THE TRUTH”

The want to narratize experience seems “a primary act of mind” (Hardy, 1977), while the how and what to tell appears learned (Rosen, 1987); after all, I have had, like many others, exposure to tellers and their stories as well as experience of telling my stories. Rosen (1987) reminds us that “stories are as they are only because others exist; they are intertextual” (p.15). Exposure and experience afford me the realizations that I instinctively possess the want to narratize, that embedded in my text is the texts of others, and that sometimes the stories we tell are not truthful, not just the stories we, in childhood, tell our parents but also those we, in adulthood, elect to tell to others, and sometimes ourselves. In Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the author, by the agency of Huck, the story’s protagonist and narrator, confirms my observation. Huck prefaces his story with the following:

You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another... (Twain, 1982, p. 1).

Huck understands his journey of experience on the Mississippi in a story frame; comprehends experience relative to the actions of others; desires his story be judged on truthfulness rather than truth; identifies the precarious relationship of truth and story; illustrates, with his reference to The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, the intertextual nature of story; and teaches me how to tell my research story. Huck's submission, "But mainly he told the truth" has been adopted as this chapter's title because it honestly acknowledges the nature of story. Clearly the concept of story needs examination.

What is meant by "story"? To a secondary English teacher like me, story is both familiar and comfortable. Human action is the subject of stories (Polkinghorne, 1995) and, people, notes Bruner (1990), "do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence. They frame events and sentences in larger structures" (p. 64). Story, then, frames a brief account of human action that consists of related incidents deliberately arranged to present effectively some form of conflict and its outcome (Carr, 1986).

In a similar way, Scholes (1982) begins technically by defining story as "the telling or recounting of a string of events" (p. 59). Further, he draws largely from literary studies to identify three elements common to all stories: the introduction to situational predicament, tension or struggle; the main character and action; and a sequence (i.e.

plot) with implied causality during which the problem is resolved in some form. Scholes' comprehensive definition also includes perspectives of both reader and author.

Authors "attempt to convey their intentions by selecting incidents and details, arranging time and sequence, and employing a variety of codes and conventions that exist in a culture" (Scholes, 1982, p. 60). In this way, the teller is not simply describing a series of occurrences; the author's selection and arrangement, for example, tell us implicitly and explicitly what these occurrences mean. Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992) argue: "personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned" (p. 1). Conversely, the readers are "required to seek coherence and causal connection among these incidents and conventions as they construct for themselves, often retrospectively, the meaning of the story" (Scholes, 1982, p. 60). The elements of a story, consequently, are often implicitly important to the readers because of the deliberate and purposive inclusion, exclusion, and arrangement by the author. Further, plotted stories illustrate the significance an individual ascribes to experience, by its causal links to events, in a story's frame. A story's beginning and end frame a narrative gestalt (Polkinghorne, 1995). Stories, however, can be plotless, but "by not including a plot in their presentation, these authors

call attention to their view that life events lack coherence and causal relationship” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.8). In sum, plotted stories are settings, characters, and events that are arranged in temporal sequence and, as a result, suggest causality and significance. But establishing coherence and determining causality offers what to whom?

Story, which emerges from action, provides two ways of knowing: a knowing that describes the richness and uniqueness of lived experience in a particular situation; and a second knowing that organizes and explains (Bruner, 1990). First, stories can convey a richness of description and understanding that can only be revealed or evoked through story (e.g. Carter, 1993; Jalongo, 1992). This is to say that stories shared by teachers about teaching, for example, can communicate an experience in a way that cannot be expressed or duplicated through nomological knowledge. Unique are particular and contextualized first-order descriptions. Second, stories are constructions that are produced by “human acts of intention with an eye to their shape, manner, style, and effect” (Graham, 1993, p. 6). In other words, stories are told with intention.

The intent of a teller, for example, may not include the sharing of a private story about a conflict with a student. Conceivably, the teller’s private stories may remain so for a variety of reasons: unresolved or unsatisfactory endings, regrettable decisions or indecisions, or a fear

that in sharing the story, the teller's professional reputation may in some way be harmed. Indeed, some private stories will never be shared while others, over time and with trust, will move from the private to the public domain. This is not to suggest that the shift in domain will reveal publicly an actual event; events are experienced and interpreted by people and, in this way, an actual account is difficult, if not impossible, to record. Whether the story is private or public, both are constructions where "the relationship between story and reality is, at best, troublesome" (Carter, 1993, p. 10). The reader is challenged, then, not to judge truth but truthfulness, not to seek generalizations but to view stories as contextualized "explanatory propositions with which we can make sense of the dilemmas and problematics of teaching" (Carter, 1993, p. 10).

Story may provide a third way of knowing, but a knowing for the teacher rather than the researcher. Reflection on action is central to the construction of a story. Jalongo (1995) believes that story affords practitioners the opportunity "of examining closely and thinking deeply about education" (p. 3). Reflective teachers "have 'common sense' precisely because they have a storehouse of stories that organize, apply, and interpret what they know about teaching" (Jalongo, 1992, p.69).



Storying enables teachers to understand their responses, explain student action or reaction, and interpret lived events of the classroom. In storying, however, it is conceivable, if not reasonable, to conclude that the human brain, in its attempt to make sense of lived experience, may find causality where it does not exist. "The act of representation is also an act of invention," adds Eisner (1993, p.7). In other words, a teacher may understand or assign causality differently from others who witness or experience the same event, but this understanding, indeed insight, is no less valuable. What is perceived or articulated to be the cause is as valuable, though different, as understanding real causality in any given situation. Simply, stories are important to educational research because stories, based on the emic or insider's perspective, provide a kind of knowledge that helps an educational researcher understand why teachers do what they do. The emic perspective could assist the etic or outsider's perspective generated from the dominant research paradigm.

Storied knowledge is unlikely to be ordinary in nature, at least to the author. As Graham (1993) explains, in storying, an author has chosen to "draw emblematic attention" to a particular experience that is personally significant. To the reader of the story, the story may be ordinary because the experience is a common one, but as Graham (1993) continues, "its typicality and familiarity as a story of a particular

kind” is, perhaps, more valuable than a story of uniqueness and individual difference. Similarly, Martin (1986) argues that “stories, no matter how peppered with generalizations, always provide more information or food for thought than they [the authors] have digested” (p. 187). Whatever the case, the stories, embedded in classroom life, and told by teachers, are important to them and, therefore, significant to research on teaching (Rosen, 1987).

Teachers’ action in the context of their particular classroom is subject to a multiplicity of influences and demands and, for this reason, must be seen as complex. Teachers begin lessons with intentions based on a body of knowledge, often acquired from the practice of teaching. Personal reflection on action in context is knowledge that informs future action. Complexity for the researcher, then, is not limited to understanding teacher action within the context of a classroom; the acquisition and refinement of teachers’ practical knowledge, which is non-static and based in action, is difficult, if not impossible, to understand in any matter-of-fact or propositional way. From this perspective, then, story is a vehicle for expressing a personal meaning associated with or given to an action (Carter, 1993; Jalongo, 1992). Teachers impose order and coherence on a stream of experience and by doing so, they ascribe meaning and significance to the incidents and events that occur each teaching day. Story is, for the researcher as

Elbaz (1991) argues, “the very stuff of teaching. . . [where] the landscape. . .and the work of teachers can be seen as making sense” (p. 85).

Story, an emblem of experience, is practical knowledge in “a form that plays itself out in the time and space of the classroom” (Carter, 1993, p. 7). Yet, one must not be led to believe that stories are personal constructions built solely on the past and present experiences of the teller, that is to say, stories are not simply practical and experiential. Stories are also “shaped by prepackaged expectations and ways of interpreting supplied by our culture” (Chafe, 1990, p. 80). Stories, likewise, are shaped by intentions and values.

It is not altogether surprising that story knowledge varies from teacher to teacher. Difference is generated not only from diversity of values, intentions, contexts and the nature of experiences storied among teachers, but from differences in the extent of experience among novice and experienced teachers. As Carter (1993) observes, “expert teachers. . . have a rich store of situated or storied knowledge of curriculum content, classroom social processes, academic tasks, and students’ understanding and intentions” (p. 7). Conversely, she argues that novice teachers, “who lack this situated knowledge, often struggle to make sense of classroom events, and in this struggle, their knowledge is shaped in fundamental ways, that is, their stories are formed” (p. 7).

Not surprisingly, perhaps, novel experiences, struggles, and formative nature of novice teachers' stories have made inexperienced teachers the popular focus of narrative research (Britzman, 1991; Clift, 1991; Fox, 1995; Ritchie & Wilson, 1993).

My desire to offer storied knowledge is implicit in the presentation of this research; it is a desire to present experience through a novice Saskatchewan, teacher's story. The novice teacher, Sarah, is from rural Saskatchewan; she was selected because of her enthusiasm and willingness to participate. Her location was incidental. Like stories, the direction of this research has been shaped by other research stories. Discussion of four completed studies in this section form those stories that direct my research. The four selected studies are particularly relevant to focus and methodology, or as in the Federation's study, complementary to completed research. I also began this work sensitive to the fact that many studies share, in part, my focus; examination of purpose within similar research is a measure to distinguish the purpose of completed research with the intent of the proposed research.

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Study of Teaching (Gallen & Bold, 1989) provides "a comprehensive, detailed description of actual teaching practices currently used in this province" (p. 13). The study recognizes that "teachers have developed a wealth of professional traditions and practices that embody a practical knowledge of what does

and doesn't work in the classroom" (p. 4). The study of "the collective, practical wisdom of teachers" (p. 12) is the principal aim of the research. The benefits of the study are for both professional and profession: teachers may gain insights from the "pooling of experiences and opinions" (p. 13) and the profession is served through the establishment of a base for research on which to build knowledge related to the business of teaching. Much of the foregoing appears similar to my own research interests and philosophy guiding that work; the similarities, however, are only superficial.

I share the study's interest in and valuing of teachers' practical knowledge and I believe that practical knowledge is best understood through "teachers' perspective[s] on teaching" (Gallen & Bold, 1983, p. 12). However, the study has other interests that I do not share. The goals of the Federation's study are the goals of business: efficiency, certainty, effectiveness, competency and excellence. This is not to suggest, for example, that I am opposed to excellence in education, but rather that I am opposed to research designed to "predict and control teaching excellence" (p. 3). In my introduction, I have argued against the scientific epistemology underlying the view that complex classroom behaviors and situations can be explained in amounts of certainty and predictability. Teacher effectiveness is not my research concern. The goals of my research are tied to words like "meaning", "situation", and

“understanding” as well as “intent” and “motive”. Perhaps scientist Adolphe Patmann’s warning that “life is always more than what science can say at any given time” (Aoki, 1988, p. 402) best reflects my stance.

The Federation’s study is concerned with “actual teaching practices” and the perspectives and experiences of teachers within the province . The completed study employs the critical incident technique; it is methodology that relies on an external “objective observer” to identify and “describe specific incidents in which they [the observers] judge the participant’s behavior to have been critical to the success or lack of success of the activity” (p 19). Significant becomes the etic or outsider’s perspective in understanding actual classroom dynamics. Insider perspectives or teacher input are limited. Not surprisingly, non-participant observation and the questionnaires yield numerous tables and charts that conceal assumptions, neglect voices, and ignore situational factors that render particular meaning and relevance (Aoki, 1988).

Although the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation Study of Teaching makes compelling arguments for local research, the study does not reveal to me, in any concrete or meaningful way, the “picture of teaching as it is practiced today in the province of Saskatchewan” (p. 19). Unlike the study, my work is not to present a single picture of teachers, but rather I am interested, through the story, in a separate

snapshots of a teacher at work in my province. I do not wish to reject completely findings of the Federation's study; in fact, I believe that my research is complementary, at least in part, to the shared purpose of revealing the work of teachers.

Snapshots are the form for research results presented in James V. Mead's (1992) study, Looking at Old Photographs: Investigating the Teacher Tales that Novice Teachers Bring With Them . Although the study is not local, the work is insightful to me because of its focus on novice teachers and story. Mead's research report "describes the stories prospective teachers (elementary, secondary English and mathematics) tell about interactions with and evaluations of their former teachers" (p. 3). While the study is similar to the Federation's study because of the numbers of subjects involved, the tone of Mead's study is markedly different--the study is both personal and real.

Mead's belief that teachers stories must be viewed "as the object of a conversation and not a report of the past" (p. 12) is an honest acknowledgment that is less contentious than are claims of objectivity and the actuality of second order descriptions. It is not only researcher awareness, however, that is honest; the stories of Jill and Julia, for example, speak to me with sincerity. Their stories seem to invite me to remember a few teachers from my own experience as a student in a rural Saskatchewan high school.

Yet, even though voices are heard, the large number of subjects involved in the study demand that the stories from teachers-to-be are reduced to thumb-nail sketches of character, setting and action. Something is lost. It is the loss that makes me argue for research that limits the number of subjects, hears whole conversations of a few teachers and seeks a series of stories of teachers at work.

D. J. Clandinin's Developing Rhythm in Teaching: The Narrative Study of a Beginning Teacher's Personal Practical Knowledge of Classrooms (1989) focuses on the development of the practical knowledge of Stewart, a novice kindergarten teacher. In another way, the study is interested in Stewart's stories of personal experience during his first year of teaching. After all, stories of lived experience often serve as the knowledge that guides teaching practice in our classrooms. Clandinin's narrow focus on Stewart, arguments for research on the development of practical knowledge by novices, the narrative approach, and her attention to context are some of the appealing aspects of her research.

Clandinin begins by defining and identifying Stewart's teaching image prior to his first year of teaching. It is essentially a description of "Stewart's image of 'teaching as relating to children'" (p. 125). After establishing the quality and form of that image, she examines the conflict or tension between image and "the rigid cyclic temporal social



structure of schooling” (p. 130). By employing the theoretical constructs of image and cycle/rhythm, Clandinin filters her thinking, presentation and, ultimately, her results through the battle metaphor. While I know experientially that image and school rhythm exist and clash, I wonder if other conflicts are at work. Clandinin, perhaps, would argue that this approach is just one in the many possibilities as we research “with novice teachers in order to offer accounts of their experiences” (p. 123).

Last, Fox’s From English Major to English Teacher: Two Case Studies (1995) provides a fourth point of reference. Her study is specific to novice English teachers and is an effort “to provide an insider’s perspective of the problematic process of learning to teach” (p. 17). Her research question essentially becomes my own: How does a beginning teacher describe the process of learning to teach? Yet, I did not recognize her beginning teachers; their observations seemed too insightful, too perceptively critical. A beginning teacher offers: “The greatest challenge I have during my early teaching experiences has been learning the art of transformation and change. Stepping directly from the shoes of a student into the shoes of a teacher, I realized that growth is not only adapting to change but also initiating change” (Fox, 1995). Is the quality of this perception typical? Friesen’s comments for judging truthfulness, like Carter (1993), tell me that it “is “know[ing] what

works for you. Not cleverness, but the truth you know when you hear it, read it. [It is] the truth of your wide-awake, unafraid intelligence. The [story] that speaks fully to you” (Forie et al., 1998, xxxii) is truthful.

It is a narrative account of experience that I am interested in, directed at the question: How does Sarah describe the process of learning to teach? I believe, like others (e.g. Carter, 1993; Mead, 1992; Clandinin, 1989) that stories of novice teachers convey lived experiences, events and reveal meanings that inexperienced teachers ascribe to their curricular and pedagogical choices. The Federation’s study informs me of the need for knowledge about the work of teachers in my province. Mead’s work illustrates the close relationship of story and practice; it is compelling evidence of the power of voice, and it serves as a warning against a large number of subjects in this type of research. Clandinin’s research stresses situational factors, argues for further research on the development of practical knowledge by novice teachers and provides a helpful discussion on narrative methodology. Fox offers a workable question, limits the scope, includes story fragments, but her study yields material with few recognizable markers of authenticity. The four studies become the principal works that shape the direction and form of this research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **“THERE IS METHOD IN’T”**

Shakespeare’s Polonius was the first to recognize that Hamlet, the character from the play with the same name, acted with purpose. Polonius’ words of recognition as the chapter’s title seem appropriate for the methodology chapter’s title. Let us begin with the participant’s selection.

Why Sarah? Sarah became a participant of this research, in part, by chance. I began with a participant search through the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, identifying those Saskatchewan teachers who had under two years of classroom experience. The teachers involved in this study would be selected with these three researcher criteria in mind: they must be willing to share and reflect upon their experience as well as feel comfortable with having me participate in classroom activities; the bulk of their teaching load should be in the subject of English; and their teaching careers must not have spanned more than two years. Sarah was the first person I spoke to about possible involvement in the research; she immediately agreed. Sarah’s teaching area, English, made her participation especially desirable. Insight and common experience would help to frame the researcher’s questions but, more importantly, the shared interest acted

as an ingredient for a comfortable rapport needed for the sharing of stories about difficulties and decision making. Fox's (1995) research supports this desirable condition. As mentioned in the previous chapter, her location within the province was incidental. Simply, the participant needed to be within reasonable driving distance from the researcher's location.

Why offer a narrative account of a novice secondary teacher, Sarah's story of learning to teach? I was once a novice secondary English teacher, in some ways I still am; however, I remember my own demanding first year and the lack of opportunity to story with others about the demands and challenges of beginning. I never articulated an emerging identity; I never reflected on the change, apart from those interior conversations I spoke about in chapter two. I was not seeking the unique but the familiar; I hope Sarah's story, in the next chapter, is familiar. Further, graduate school has revealed a problem evident for me in undergraduate school, a deference to authority--a deference to those speeches without speakers; a deference to those experiences without context. Perhaps Sarah's story will be heard in those institutions.

Because the study's purpose focuses on human experience in a context, the methodology adopted is qualitative. The characteristics of qualitative research reflect the paradigm's focus on complex settings

and the meanings that participants assign to things and experience. Perhaps, the orientation's most obvious and distinguishing feature is its reliance on humans as the principal instrument for data-gathering (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tesch, 1990). Implicit in this feature is the assumption that "no nonhuman instrument is sufficiently flexible to adapt to the complex situation as it evolves and to identify and take into account biases that result from the interaction and value differences between the 'instrument' and the subject" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 385). Narrative inquiry, which is more particular to this study, is firmly situated in the qualitative paradigm. While the philosophical underpinnings of narrative inquiry and qualitative research are essentially the same, the specificity of narrative inquiry brings with it a certain direction. For this reason, quality and dimension of the researcher-participant relationship, narrative interpretation, use of interview and participant observation, and frequency of contact must be addressed. Ethical guidelines are also articulated.

Unlike the objective, passive quantitative researcher, although such claims are hardly defensible, my role as researcher is active. Unlike the traditional research canon, I do not deny possessing a position. Sharing, a quality of our researcher-participant relationship, begins the process of most narrative inquiries (Noddings, 1986). I offered a story; Sarah offered a story. She asked for qualification; I

asked for qualification. Clandinin and Connelly (1988) liken the narrative relationship to a friendship. "In everyday life, the idea of friendship implies a sharing, an interpretation of two or more persons' spheres of experience. Mere contact is acquaintanceship, not friendship" (p.4). Because the foregoing concerns a complex dynamic, the point is perhaps best understood through a second illustration. For example, I listen, question and call for elaboration of aspects of stories shared with me; tellers, in turn, tell and retell the experience in response to cues, intentional and unintentional, in context of and outside the conversation. The intention of this second example is to show that, in working together, "the two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 5). Participant and researcher tell in conversation and retell in the narrative accounts. However, the research relationship has implications that seem to negate my earlier calls for the voices of practitioners. As Riessman (1993) argues, "we cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret" (p. 8). Yet I disagree. Individuals give voice where there is a redistribution of power in the relationship (Noddings, 1986; Oakley, 1981) which ends with a written record of teacher's story (as well as the researcher's story) and begins with a negotiated entry.

The tone and direction of the research relationship will be affected by the entry into that situation. Several researchers (e.g. Hogan, 1988; Noddings, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) believe in a negotiated entry. Implicit in this belief is arguably the single most important feature of the narrative relationships--equality. Ultimately, this is at best difficult to defend; however, I encouraged the sharing of power by having her suggest topics for discussion, by having her make sense of her offerings.

Tied to the first feature of equality is the issue of connectedness. Again, particularly at the start of any narrative inquiry, all participants must have input (Clandinin, 1993). The process must hear and respond to practitioners' voices when defining roles and responsibilities, articulating intentions and clarifying purposes. By listening to and including Sarah's voice, I affirm the participant's valuable contribution to the inquiry process and, ultimately, the findings. Inclusion rather than exclusion of Sarah within the research process was designed to ensure her feelings of connectedness to the work and, as a conclusion, her sense of commitment to and ownership of the research. Sarah indicated ownership by suggesting professional reading for me and by organizing more opportunities to discuss her story.

To conclude, the relationship of researcher and participant is characterized by sharing. Narrative research argues for a socially

interactive relationship where voice is given to practitioners and decisions are shared. Process goals are power sharing and a sense of connectedness and mutual purpose.

As Riessman (1993) contends, “representational decisions cannot be avoided; they enter at numerous points in the research process, and qualitative analysts... must confront them” (p. 8). Indeed, awareness and a rigorous self-examination of choices and decisions are responsibilities of the narrative researcher, but the reader is also challenged “to detect abuse of privilege” (Thomas, 1992, p. 11). This said, we must also remember that “all we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively and imperfectly” (Riessman, 1993, p. 15). Peshkin (1988) in discussing this research dilemma observes subjectivity entered his own work. He states: “I had indeed discovered my subjectivity at work, caught red-handed with my values at the very end of my pen--where I believe they belong” (p. 127). After all, “the storied finding of a narrative analytic inquiry is not a third person ‘objective’ representation or a mirrored reflection of a protagonist’s or subject’s life as it “actually” occurred,” concludes Polkinghorne (1995, p. 19). Researchers engaged in narrative analysis need to be attuned to their contributions to the constructive aspects of their research and to locate themselves for the reader of the research (Riessman, 1993).



Sarah is the source and the primary research method is the interview. The interview, which is important to the narrative researcher, holds two principal functions : “(1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 66). Interview, then, is employed within this narrative inquiry with the foregoing purposes in mind. Purpose and the narrative nature of this study argue for “qualitative interviews [that] offer the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1981, p. 136). Consequently, the study employs semi-structured interviews, and, as the purposes suggest, semi-structured interviews played a significant role, particularly at the start of the inquiry.

In many ways, semi-structured interviews resemble conversations; both are exchanges, begin with agendas and conclude, at least it is hoped, with some form of resolution. Yet the nomenclature connotes a range of secondary or associated significances that does more to distinguish the terms than link them. Associated with interview, for example, is a tone of formality and a format that is

planned and directed by the interviewer. Interviewer and interviewee roles are clearly defined. Conversely, conversations connote informality and the role boundaries of interviewer and interviewee become less clear. However, this is not to suggest that conversations are without structure. Van Manen (1990) explains:

A conversation may start off as a mere chat, and in fact this is usually the way that conversations come into being. But then, when gradually a certain topic of mutual interest emerges, and the speakers become in a sense animated by the notion to which they are now both orientated, a true conversation comes into being. So a conversation is structured as a triad. There is a conversational relation between the speakers with the notion or phenomenon that keeps the personal relation of the conversation intact. (p. 98)

The structure of a conversation, in other words, is dialogical. Last, interviews end with the completion of the researcher's agenda where as conversations end when "they finally lapse into silence" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 99).

Conversations, like interviews, serve two functions: conversations are used "either to mainly gather lived-experience material (stories, anecdotes, recollections of experience, etc.) or serve as an occasion to reflect with the partner (interviewee) of the conversational relation on the topic at hand" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 63). Because conversation functions in the "gathering of and reflecting on lived experience material" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 63), the two functions are seemingly similar if not identical to those given for interview.

Conversations differ though, because the two functions of description and analysis are, in practice, inseparable. The conversations, which grow from cues like images, words or questions, are a curious mixture of telling and reflecting. In contrast, interviews, which dominated the research process at the start and to some degree at the end, treat the description and analysis aspects separately. In addition, the informal tone, the flexibility for both participants, and the power sharing nature of the conversational relation further define difference. Conversations are the principal method of research.

Meanwhile, I believe that I have wrongly left you with the impression that research conversations develop arbitrarily, independent of agenda or intention. On the contrary, interviews and conversations are governed by the research statement, and for this reason, cogency, within interviews and conversations, is the responsibility of the researcher. While “one needs to be orientated to one’s question or notion in such a strong manner that one does not get easily carried away” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 67), the task is not without challenge. However, Van Manen (1990) offers further advice to the researcher:

As we interview others about their experience of a certain phenomenon, it is imperative to stay close to experience as lived. As we ask what an experience is like, it may be helpful to be very concrete. Ask the person to think of a specific instance, situation, person or event. Then explore the whole experience to the fullest. . . . And whenever it seems that the person being interviewed begins to generalize about the experience, you can insert a question that turns the discourse back to the level of

concrete experience: 'Can you give an example?' 'What was it like?' etc. (pp. 67-68)

Semi-structured interviews and conversations during the inquiry process were story orientated. Interviews revealed, albeit superficially, contexts and characters important to the stories; interviews, then, informed a beginning to Sarah's narrative. As the inquiry proceeded, moving from interviews to conversations, our understanding changed. Descriptions, dialogue, and stories within descriptions and dialogue communicated the ongoing story of one teacher learning to teach. The narrative inquiry focused on the story's theme: How does a beginning teacher describe the process of learning to teach? Stories, shared in the inquiry process, became obsolete, restoried, and some moved from having secondary to primary significance within the framework of the larger story. The process, as Carter (1993) describes, sees "that people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others" (p. 4). Carter refers not only to the subjects; the description obliquely includes the living out and sharing of the researcher's story. The study, after all, shares the stories of all participants.

The data has been collected in another way. Participant observation is complementary to interview and one more important way

to collect data. The narrative researcher, "by virtue of being actively involved in the situation being observed, often gains insights and develops interpersonal relationships that are virtually impossible through any other method" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 391). Specifically, participant observation served three functions in this study. First, participant observation orientated the researcher to the world of the teachers. The orientation included the personalities of students, teacher and administrators as well as the physical locale and social circumstances that define setting. Second, participant observation implied some shared work which helped to build the relationship necessary for the sharing of stories. Third, participant observations were opportunities to see what curricular and pedagogical decisions were made in the classroom and to explore, in semi-structured and structured interviews, why those decisions were made.

The degree of involvement and the nature of the shared work was dependent upon Sarah's schedule and program. Observations were unobtrusive as possible. In this case, the researcher acted primarily as observer but participated enough to foster the relationship and gather grist for interviews. Other contact came in the following forms: test supervision, small group work, or remedial assistance; however, this type of contact was limited. Students were informed of my research

purpose. Again, Sarah's program and degree of comfort acted as the determining factors in shaping the form of contact.

This study was conducted over a period of approximately four months, or in other words, almost one full term. Whereas the quality of the contact was socially interactive, the frequency of contact was temporally continuous. The amount of contact varied throughout this period, although at least one weekly face to face meeting occurred to ensure the participant maintained a sense of connectedness to the research. The length of interviews ranged from one to three hours, with an average length of two hours. The conversations took place in Great Central School, Sarah's home, restaurants, and my home.

This story is not about teacher effectiveness but rather one teacher working within her particular classrooms; it is not interested in skills but rather in the participant's journey of choices, decisions, justifications, and her perceived failures and successes. Finally, the narrative account intends to focus not on the characteristics of "good" teaching but rather on the process of learning for one novice teacher in rural Saskatchewan. The novice teacher's story is contained in the larger research story. Narrative methods of semi-structured interviews, conversations, participant observation enabled me to tell Sarah's story.

Confined by and within the boundaries of research statement, “key ideas, recurrent events, or activities in the data [have] become categories of focus” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1981, p. 70).

The singularity of subject and the particularity of context resist generalizations. This narrative account includes both description and analysis of lived experience “in attempts to get shared meanings with others. . .it is a search for perspectives and theoretical insights. It may offer possibilities but no certainties as to what may be the outcomes of future events” (Bassey, 1991, p. 42). This is my intention for the research.

In collecting, interpreting and constructing Sarah’s story, I have adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and observed by the University of Saskatchewan. I informed Sarah of the research purpose, nature of our contact, benefits, possible inconveniences, and rights. She was informed that participation is strictly voluntary and that she may be excused at any time. The researcher ensured the participant’s anonymity with adoption of a pseudonym. All information is confidential, and in keeping with the guidelines, Sarah was presented transcripts for member checking. The preceding details are summarized in Participant Information (See Appendix A for a copy of this form). Sarah has signed two copies of the permission form. (See

Appendix B for a copy of this form.) The participant and I have each kept a copy. The tapes were erased once the study was formally accepted by the University of Saskatchewan and transcripts will be destroyed after a period of five years from this acceptance date.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **“WHAT I WISH TO WRITE IS NOT HERE BUT SOMEWHERE BEYOND.”**

“What I wish to write is not here but somewhere beyond.” The poetic line has been gleaned from Doug Beardsley’s “The Perfect Poem” (Forie, et al., 1998) and has been chosen as the title of Sarah’s story to reflect my desire to produce what Barthes (1974) refers to as a “writerly text” rather than a “readerly text”. A writerly text is one that encourages the reader’s participation because the text is open to meaning making; conversely, the readerly text is one that requires less of the reader by providing a tightly packaged set of linear experiences. An explanation of Rosen’s concept of intertextuality, “a notion that a story only exists as a story by virtue of the existence of other stories” (1995, p. 23), is also relevant to writerly text and the chapter’s title. Writerly texts are not only dependent on intertextuality, they are about intertextuality (Rosen, 1995). What is offered is not “frozen texts” for “overreaders” (Thomas, 1992), but rather “a perspective of fragments, of voices from other texts, other codes” (Barthes, 1974, p. 34) for, what Barthes labels, the “pleasure” of meaning makers. Therefore, “What I wish to write is not here but somewhere beyond” reflects the notion that

meaning derived from this chapter is beyond this writer, Sarah, or the text itself. Now, I wish to share Sarah's story.

Sarah's school is not difficult to find. Great Central School's building size seems disproportionately large to the fewer than 200 inhabitants of Barley; however, more than half of the student population is bused into town explaining, in part, the scale. The sandstone block school is modern, adequately equipped, and well-maintained, offering a kindergarten to grade 12 program. Barley is appropriately named because the town is, without question, the center of a prosperous agricultural community. Although there are no paved roads leading to the town and the nearest major city is over two hours away, Barley prefers that its status be determined by the number of grain elevators, richness of soil and, of course, the school.

Sarah and I met in her classroom in rural Saskatchewan and, judging by the choppiness of the first transcript, it would be safe to conclude we were both nervous. While driving I remember wondering why she had agreed to converse with a stranger about her stories of teaching. Also, I began to wonder why the experiences of a first year teacher *really* became the subject of my study. Had I romanticized my own experience and, through Sarah, hoped to replay that event? Maybe, other stories motivated me to add to the chorus of voices (Cathro, 1993; Oakley, 1992). Or, perhaps I was using Harper Lee's To

Kill A Mockingbird sage advice offered to the character Scout: “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view” (Lee, 1960, p. 30). If so, I was naive to assume such a comprehensive understanding and, yet without Sarah’s story, I, too, would “have never seen our neighborhood from this angle” (Lee, 1960, p. 278). Over the months that would follow, I would stand on Sarah’s porch, sit in her kitchen, share evening meals with her family, and watch her teach in her classroom. Through our conversations, I would need to understand “What motivated her to share these stories?” and I would need to consider “In what way was our conversation directed by my agenda, controlled by our context, and shaped by her experience?” Also, I needed to be attentive to the pervasive question: “What is it like to be a beginning teacher in small-town Saskatchewan?”

After being drawn to her classroom’s panoramic view of the prairie that was defined by the wall-length of window on the north side of her classroom, I appreciated and commented on the unobstructed view. The prairie ended and Sarah’s town began with this wall. Butting two student desks together, our conversation began.

Sarah is a mother and a wife. Her focus is not exclusively on teaching; she has the task of juggling both home and work. Her morning begins early with the organization of her three year old son for his stay at a home located half way between Sarah’s subsidized teacher

accommodation and the school. The caregiver's daughter is a student in Sarah's grade 10 English class. With a stop to drop her son off, she can make the trip to school in under twenty minutes. Sarah's husband is not a teacher and relies on temporary contracts in areas vaguely compatible with his tertiary education. His brief placements have been in the larger centers as is any potential for permanent employment; however, at least for now, Sarah has the permanent employment and provides the stable income for her family. The situation is far from ideal as Sarah observes: "With my husband being gone, it's been a nightmare." Gender, marital status, and dependents may differ for novice teachers but her struggle for permanent employment and the general theme of career instability are not unique to the province's neophytes.

Instability is a feature of Sarah's story. Her arrival at Barley was not her intended destination; indeed, she applied to most school boards with the single hope of securing a position, any position at any level in any location. Advertisements for "teachers wanted" did not limit her search; she applied to all school divisions. "This [Barley] is the third school in as many years". The first temporary contract was the most difficult as Sarah recalls, "57 applications and out of that, one interview". Substitute teaching and short-term, temporary contracts are the prologue to her time in Barley. And although Barley is her first

permanent contract, Sarah's professional assignment belongs to a teacher on maternity leave; therefore, while she is guaranteed a position next year, it could be any subject, at any grade level, and in any school within the division:

It's pretty hard. We'd like to get along with a family addition and we just can't do that when you're bouncing around from school to school and not knowing from one year to the next. You can't plan anything big financially. . . Professionally, it's tough too. I told the director here and laid it bare for him that I'd like to stay because it gives me a chance to actually improve on some of my programs which I don't feel that I can do if I'm not going to teach the program again.

Not surprisingly, she is "getting. . . tired of moving" and frustrated with the instability--frustrated for her family. Sarah laments: "There's nothing that's certain anymore".

Dogwood School Division was her first employer and the temporary position, a medical leave with the potential to become a permanent contract, was for a year. "At first, I thought, it [Dogwood] reminded me a lot of my hometown. In the interview, everybody seemed to be quite friendly so I transferred that, assumed that's what the town would be like". Her classroom looked much like her classroom in Barley. She remembers "nice big windows. Actually, the entire wall was windows, a nice little prairie view". Yet, she recalls a structural detail that she now believes was augury; she gradually became aware that "the whole school was starting to lean to one side. My room was right

next to the library and there would be light shining in my room through the cinder blocks. The declining structural integrity of the school, she laughs, was to parallel her loss of professional confidence as she struggled.

“At the beginning of the first year in Dogwood, I was quite confident. I was a little nervous, like [in the area of] classroom management. But by the end of the year, I was totally leveled”. Right from the start Sarah recalls:

I knew that I wasn't terribly happy. But being first year, I attributed it to first year. Everybody knows that the first year is stressful so I figured it would get better in time. And I'm sure it would have if I had been there longer. I look at it in terms of growth. I would have been stunted at this. In that first year at Dogwood, I did not grow professionally. I coasted.

For Sarah, the cause of her unhappiness and frustration are inextricably linked to her administration; she did not feel supported professionally. For example, she remembers removing a few chronically disruptive students from her class with instructions to speak to the principal; however, “they'd be back after 15 minutes and said ‘Mr. So and so told me to come back in’. . . Why did I bother sending them to the principal?” Metaphorically, she remembers the experience: “It was like having the rug pulled out from under you as you're trying to stand up”. Further, she believes that the atmosphere of the school was felt in the community:

About a month in, I started to wonder. Nobody would ever say, "hi". Nobody introduced themselves. People didn't make much of an effort. . . In a one word description? . . . Trying.

The climax to this was the announcement her position would be available as a permanent contact; however, she would not be appointed:

I was crushed. I was going along under the assumption that if [Gloria] doesn't come back, I've got the job. That was the impression I had been left with in the interview and as far as I knew, things were going swimmingly. I was doing fine in my classes; I was getting good reports from the director and the principal. I had no major problems with parents. Things would get resolved one way or another. And then suddenly, oh well we don't need you after all. . . I was in my last class before lunch. I get a knock on the door and there's the principal and the director standing there looking very grave. The director says, "I thought you'd like to know that we'll be readvertising your position." And that was it. And then they left. I was shocked.

Sarah remembers an overwhelming feeling of shame as she returned to face her class. "The kids knew after seeing the director and the principal standing there".

Recovery was slow and Sarah considered leaving teaching. She acknowledges two sources of support for her during and after her time in Dogwood. First, her husband tried to help, but "a spouse will support you no matter what". Further, she continued to have doubts because of her husband's vantage point:

Especially when the spouse isn't somebody in the profession, it's hard for them to know what to say or do. Even if they know what to say or do, they do not always come off as being sincere. He didn't know what I was like in school. He couldn't see that end it.

The second source made the most significant impact. "I think the thing that saved my confidence was the other teachers". Sarah adamantly believes: "If I hadn't had the other teachers in Dogwood, I don't know if I would have gone back to teaching. They were there. . . They were constantly reassuring". While Sarah would be frustrated by some of her colleagues in the next two teaching assignments, she would also rely on them, especially in Barley.

Sarah's contract was not renewed and she did not secure a position in the fall; subsequently, Sarah resorted to substitute teaching in and around a large urban center. Quickly Sarah realized that "The students don't think of subs as teachers". Relief teaching did not complement an already difficult beginning.

I hated it. . . I had an entire class of Grade 10's not show up! They were playing football because they thought, all right a sub. She won't know we're gone.

Relief work was sporadic and Sarah did not have ownership. "Fool proof" lessons were prepared for ease, but the prescriptive material and pedagogy often precluded meaningful student-teacher relationships. Fortunately, Sarah secured a maternity leave contract from November to March in a farming community superficially similar to Dogwood and, for the first time, she felt appreciated, if not valued.



Wheatville, her new school, gave her a point of comparison and, in doing so, bolstered her confidence and promoted reflective action

(praxis):

I started thinking about the stupid stuff . . . and it sucked the life right out of me. I don't feel like I had anything left to give to the kids if I focused on politics so much. I was only in Wheatville for five months, so maybe I wasn't there long enough to really pick up on a lot of the politics of the school because I know the other teachers complained about administrative decisions, etc. But I never felt that way. I know my administrator there was quite different. I saw eye to eye with him a lot more. He was one person who you could take at face value. If he told you something, he meant it. And he would tell you what he meant and so on. Maybe administration just drags a person down. Maybe you need to focus more on your own little classroom.

Her teaching assignment at Wheatville, albeit a brief experience, yields smiles as she shares memories, especially of her Grade 9 class.

Reasons for her fondness include student personalities, administrative support, and connections established in co-curricular activities. With pride Sarah adds that her grade 9 girls' basketball team produced provincial team players:

I definitely think that it affected me very much for the better. It [co-curricular] had a positive influence. They saw me from a different angle too. And yet, I did volleyball with the grade 7 and 8's this year and it just wasn't the same. We just didn't click the same way. And yet in the classroom we seem to click just fine. . . you reach a point where they can almost be friends.

Again, the position did not lead to permanent employment; the mother on-leave returned to her position. Sarah would have to begin her search

for employment and her family would have to relocate. But this experience was different; she made a strong connection with the students. Evidence of this difference is in her desire to remain connected to her former students by monitoring their progress through a teacher who continues work and live in Wheatville. Sarah notes: "I desperately miss my kids there".

Barley provides a third point of reference in her story littered with comparisons and is the place where Sarah views the past, considers the present, and speculates on the future. Armed with favorable references and a regained professional confidence, she was offered her first permanent position for the following school year. Sarah would be required to teach in both areas of specialization, English and French, but also be required to teach art, a subject in which she professes to have no expertise. Childhood, family, teachers, university, internship as well as experiences in Dogwood and Wheatville would act as grist for sense making in Barley.

Sarah grew up in a small prairie town and her story acknowledges that she, like Lord Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses", is a part of all that she has met. The experiences, inhabitants, and ethos of a small Saskatchewan town have demonstrably affected her but also influenced her in subtle ways that she argues continue to be revealed to

her. One formative experience Sarah recalls provided her with her first taste of teaching:

I coached figure skating when I was in high school. I enjoyed being able to teach these kids something. And at the end of the year I remember looking back thinking, that kid can do a double because I taught her. . .

Later, I sat down and took stock of what I had done, what I could handle, and so forth and what I needed. I realized it had to be with people. I needed to work with people”.

Further, she became involved with her high school’s peer tutoring program. Her experience, providing remedial assistance to elementary school children, required her to forfeit her study hall periods; the sacrifice for a grade 10 student was great but the experience proved worthwhile. Sarah views the experiences of coaching and tutoring as factors in her decision to become a teacher.

Inhabitants of her town, particularly teachers, additionally formed and informed her decision. First, her best friend’s parents were teachers. Resembling a second set of parents, “I certainly got to see and to hear a lot about teaching second hand”. Yet, the cast of teachers responsible for Sarah’s formal education have had the most significant impact, not only in the selection of the vocation but in helping to define her professionally. Recollections include: “I had wonderful teachers, just about the whole way through. Almost every single teacher I had was very good. They were able to make every kid in the class feel

special". Although most of her teachers have retired, she continues to keep in touch with a few that made a difference and, although she finds it strange to share stories about teaching with them, she respects them.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, she remembers most vividly those teachers of subjects that she would later teach: English and French. She quickly determined weakness in her French instruction and her understanding, although storied as a recollection, is framed in the present. Sarah concludes: "I knew it in the way kids know things. If you don't know your material, they know. They can tell". She also was mindful of classroom management problems, some of which were linked to the issue of content. Her experiences informed her that teacher preparedness and material that challenges students help to establish a productive learning environment. Conversely, Sarah's high school English teacher personifies competency and his contact, too, has shaped her professionally.

He was extremely enthusiastic; he knew his stuff inside out. He treated us like young adults. Mostly it was the enthusiasm, I think. He got along with most of the students. He was quite strong on classroom management. Even though he was strict with us, I still liked him.

She recognizes the power of teacher enthusiasm and the value of clearly articulated expectations for behavior. Sarah believes these qualities, gleaned from the inhabitants of her town, are responsible for the success of, for example, her four-week unit on Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

Sarah shares: "I've got some great activities and I love that play".

Enthusiasm, according to Sarah, is her greatest strength.

In Margaret Laurence's (Conrad, 1995) essay "Where the World Began", the author stories the impact of her small prairie town. After leaving Neepawa at eighteen, Laurence states: "I did not know then that I would carry the land and town all my life within my skull, that this would form the mainspring and source of the writing I was to do, wherever and however far away I might live" (p. 86). Sarah, like Laurence, talks of a community ethos. Industry, integrity, and strong parental support are admirable, are visible in Sarah community and are qualities that pillar the image Sarah has of and for herself. Moreover, past memories function as benchmarks for assessing the present. For example, Sarah comments:

I get frustrated at having to water down my standards so that some of these students can pass. Not to say that I'm giving them passes. But, I would like to hold kids a lot more accountable and responsible than I feel I can. I just don't have the energy to do it on my own. What is needed is a little more discipline for them to develop those abilities themselves. The main thing I get frustrated with is the parents who take responsibility for their kids' failures. How is the kid ever going to learn responsibility if they don't have to take it? When they succeed at something, how can they take credit if don't take credit for their failures?

Again, frustration becomes a theme in this novice teacher's story.

Although Sarah recalls her parents' expectations for her, she believes

expectations, from her extended family and, indeed, her community were and are also subtly shaping and directing her. Sarah argues:

Parents should be more supportive of kids doing things you think they should--make them sit down and do their homework, the usual stuff like that. I grew up in a town that was mostly French and Ukrainian . . .it seems like there wasn't as many discipline problems. The parents expected their kids to work more.

We both laughed at how we had begun to sound like our parents, with their stories of prairie life, one room school houses, and long journeys on cold winter days to light the school's furnace. It reminded us of Max Braithwaite's Why Shoot the Teacher, an autobiographical account of his first year of teaching in rural Saskatchewan during the depression, because it resonated with their stories (and ours!) and indicated that the professional landscape of and for teachers has indeed changed. Sarah adds:

There was an author who wrote an essay in which he talked about how people of his generation are so disillusioned and have it is so much worse than the generation before. And I thought, I'm sure every generation has said that about the previous generation.

Paradoxically, Max Braithwaite's solitary experience in the Willowbrook schoolhouse is and is not the experience of Sarah. First, we are creatures who work autonomously in the confines of our own classrooms, making countless professional decisions, interacting with dozens of young adults, and we, in the periods of quiet that punctuate

our busied professional lives, second-guess those decisions and seek more effective ways to interact with students. Certainly, a component of “teaching is lonely”. Yet, economics dictate the disappearance of the one-room school; students are bused into the closest town and pooled finances allow students choice and access to modern resources and technology--Barley is an example. And while most teachers continue to work autonomously, larger schools afford conversations, professional and personal, and, for Sarah, the exchange safeguards against “slip[ping] into some narrow little vision” as well as providing a sense of belonging through the verbal identification of an accompanied or shared experience.

Sarah has established some good friendships; conversations with a few select colleagues about work and home can be heard in venues as diverse as classrooms and kitchens. Jackie and Michelle, in particular, have become her confidantes; they are not only linked to Sarah because their classrooms share the same hallway, but they are also linked by gender, age, and a shared sense of their professional competence. Conversations in difficult times were important to her: “I needed them”. In Barley, she is beginning to help others. “Jackie is like me. She just needs to talk things through sometimes. So she sits down, talks to me, and usually feels better after a while”. Sarah has also “been thinking about the influence of [her] friends”; that is, what impact do Jackie and

Michelle have on her practice. Discipline, for example, has become a focus for her as it has for her colleagues. While she sees a connection, she also sees a connection to her experience. She argues: “There has to be some fairly strong discipline because if you can’t manage them, they can’t learn”.

Conversations lately, though, have been about the professional performance of a colleague, problematic for Sarah and her friends because the issue has impacted their classrooms. Strategies to resolve the problem have failed:

There are always teachers who do more or less but I can’t think of a teacher yet that I’ve worked with that hasn’t at least taken care of their responsibilities in the classroom. There’s always a bit of resentment, but this teacher goes a step beyond. How is [this teacher] doing what’s best for these kids?

For Sarah it is one more issue that is “weighing on [her] mind”. While the triad’s shared resolve has not affected change, Sarah knows there is value in sharing the experience in words. “If I didn’t talk about it with them, I’d confront him and that would cause other problems.”

Irresolution becomes the temporal end for this story thread.

Sarah’s university experience, especially her internship in a small Saskatchewan city, features in her story. She had expectations before beginning her education; she envisioned acquiring the content required and the skills that would “teach me how to teach”. English classes were cerebral, if not esoteric, and seemed remote from the reality of the



classroom. Further, professors failed to model effective instruction; the lecture method was used exclusively. Education classes over-emphasized things like lesson plans while teaching methods saw limited attention. Yet, she acknowledges that learning to teach is somewhat intuitive and “you have to be a people person yourself to be able to pick up on it”. Strategies are appropriate or effective because teachers perceptively know their landscape. In time and with further reflection, Sarah began to value aspects of her formal education. For example, she remembers the power of eye contact and teacher silence in gaining student attention as well as one professor’s pearl of wisdom:

There’s a perfect piece of advice for first year teachers. Never discipline in front of a classroom. I’m glad that in the first year, I had the sense to take kids out of the classroom and into the hallway where I could talk to them one on one and not give them the opportunity to make it into a show.

Sarah’s assessment of her internship was never in dispute: “good but very tough”. She was given opportunities in both teaching areas. In English she worked with three teachers. The first was awaiting retirement and allowed Sarah complete freedom--content and approach. And while Sarah appreciated the trial and error experience, the teacher did not provide feedback. Instead, “feedback was from the kids. Luckily, they were a good class. They let me know what they thought of things. They did help”. The second teacher “was definitely an example of what I did not want to be or how I did not want to teach”. Grammar was the

focus and the format was simple: “She lectured and gave exercises. She would occasionally have them write a paragraph so she could mark it on grammar”. In this teacher’s classroom, Sarah felt compelled to follow her model, despite concerns about the educational merit and the perceived atmosphere. Sarah remembers feeling troubled at the numerous prescriptive grammar exercises: “I didn’t want to leave them with these worksheets because I didn’t get anything out of them . The people that really needed help, they just underlined words”. The details echo Charles Dickens’ satirical description of Mr. McChoakumchild’s classroom in Hard Times. In addition to holding opposing views, Sarah did not feel ownership because she, feeling obligated, “did it her way”. The third teacher, who had an intern of his own, proved to be the most helpful even when the contact was limited to observation. And while “he taught grammar. . . he emphasized to the kids that just because you know what a noun is, don’t think you’re finished. You need to know how to use that”. Students seemed interested in learning. “He has stuff on the go all the time. . . Everything just hummed along in his classroom. . . The kids seemed to feel free to ask questions”. All available time was spent observing him. Yet, Sarah felt that these teachers were on ends of a spectrum; she belonged in the middle of tradition and innovation. One teacher represented what she did not want to become and the other

represented what she felt she could never be: a master teacher. "For English, I never worked with an English teacher who was like me".

Sarah and her cooperating French teacher, Linda, "were the same kind of person to begin with". "I could see results in her class and I want to get results like that. So a lot of how I approach French, the bulk of it comes from Linda". Indeed, much of Sarah, the French teacher, is a reflection of Linda, the French teacher. Sarah states:

A lot of what I do is directly copied from her. For example, at the beginning of each French class, one of the kids has to come up to the front of the class and they have to ask 2 or 3 questions to the other kids in the classroom. We keep a list of questions. Just practicing things we've already learned. . . Even the whole set up of the class is borrowed.

Sarah believes that the two were compatible and this ease made it possible for her to adopt Linda's style with little modification. Sarah continues to keep in touch with Linda.

I wondered if I would keep in touch with Sarah, if I would ever return to Barley. On the drive home after my last visit, I listened to the cassette of our conversation. This conversation occurred where it began, in her classroom. Sarah's voice was animated; she talked about plans for the summer--about plans for her yard and plans with her family. She occasionally talked about plans for the fall term; her director informed her that she would return to her school, her classroom, and her students in the fall. She also, without prompting, considered

how she has changed and how her classroom has changed. Sarah speculates:

The way I view kids I don't think has changed terribly much. I'm a little more realistic. You get disappointed fairly often when they don't measure up to my expectations. My classroom, that's changed. I never thought of myself as a real structure person. . . I'm finding that it's not as practical. . . I think I've become stricter in expectations and how they should behave in the classroom. And even what a classroom should look like.

More obvious, perhaps, is Sarah's transformation in Barley; she is "a lot more confident--happy". The last day was uneventful; she received a few cards and words of thanks from students as they picked up report cards. E.R. Braithwaite's To Sir With Love, a non-fictional account of a teacher's first year, romanticizes that experience; so did I. I was neither able to relive the special part of my career through Sarah nor am I able to claim to know Sarah. But for both of us, conversations became about "just getting different viewpoints. Sometimes you do get those blinders on and you forget that there's 20 zillion different ways of looking at the same thing. I think that we should all have to do this--talk it over, especially after the first year".

Sarah searched for the why of her confidence and happiness. Maybe the feeling is in "knowing the beat". She has a better sense of what teaching feels like, who she is, and what she wants. Or maybe the "fear in the beginning" has been replaced with some comfort from her experience. Why Sarah ends with these particular feelings are unclear

to me; however, what is certain is that Sarah's childhood, family, university, internship, Dogwood, Wheatville, and her first year in Barley come together and, in a complex way, play a significant role in the story of this novice teacher's beginning.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 'A RED LIGHT MEANS THE CAMERA IS ON'

Perhaps, what I have managed to hear is who Sarah had become, wanted me to see, wanted others to see, and even, would liked to have become. Sarah's story introduced me to some of those who taught her to tell this teaching story; she spoke of her teachers who modeled teacher behaviors and of her colleagues who storied teacher behaviors, that she consciously includes and excludes in her classroom. Further, she spoke of communities that define values that guide her practice. Telling her story seemed to be an opportunity for her to construct that identity and, I think, was made easier because I promoted reflection, if not forced her, through our research arrangement, to give time to reflection through our conversations. Often the fostering and opportunity value was evident in what she offered. 'A red light means the camera is on' is borrowed from Bert Almon's poem, "Look This Way" (Forie et al., 1998); its selection identifies a theme: Sarah's awareness of herself and others in her telling of the novice teacher's story. This chapter is about researcher reflection; it is an opportunity to examine the story and, when necessary, turn the same critical eye to the scraps of story left on the pages of the transcripts.

I begin reflection on Sarah's story as she began her reflection, with an understanding of position. A couple of things rattled in my head as I reread Sarah's Story before writing about it. First, never far from mind was an article encountered in my graduate program: David Blades' (1996) "Procedures of Power in a Curriculum-Discourse: Conversations from Home". The author cleverly weaves a tale about post-modern curriculum discourse in a post-modern way. Essentially, the author constructs a fictional story of characters, the authors of his readings, who he engages in a dialogue. The setting is both commonplace and personal: the Blades' living room. Blades' personal, sense-making struggle becomes the conflict in his narrative. Although the article has aesthetic appeal because content and the form are inseparable, the approach seems a legitimate and natural way to understand.

Second, Sarah's story reminds me of a story. Dara, a mature and perceptive student in my senior English class, suggested that our classroom study of the story of Hedda Gabler from the play with the same name (Ibsen) and the story of Martha in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (Albee) were made clearer for her through a novel and essay of modernist and feminist writer, Virginia Woolf. Quickly I reread To the Lighthouse, and, read for the first time, A Room of One's Own, an essay whose arguments are so intertwined with metaphor, comedy, and anecdote that the book-length essay reads like a story. Narratively,

Woolf adopts the chimerical name Mary Beton to deliver the powerful feminist polemic. Taking parts of the stories that were helpful in understanding the narratives of Hedda and Martha, my class considered what Virginia Woolf might say to the characters, what she might say to the playwrights, what she might add to what she had already shared with us through her writing. We established a word-picture of the place where Woolf might share with us. Not unlike the scene established at the start of A Room of One's Own, a river bank under an English open sky, we, too, positioned her on the bank; however, it was on the bank of our own Saskatchewan River under a prairie sky. Most kids participated, some finding connections and others arguing with a roundedness and sympathy of observation that goes beyond sex partisanship. I think she might have enjoyed that afternoon. Gender had come to the classroom door, with a louder knock than ever before. I continued to think of Woolf and I began to wonder, in a personal way, what Woolf might say to Sarah, what she might say about Sarah's story, and, what Woolf might say to me. David and Dara made it possible for conversations on the bank to continue.

At first the author was silent, reflective. I was nervous because my friend, David Denby (1996), told me that his first experience with Woolf made him "feel like a nine year old boy" (Denby, 431). I introduced myself, and then Sarah to the invited guest; however,



Virginia stopped me. She assured me that a formal introduction was unnecessary; she already knew something of Sarah. After all, they shared something that I could never share or, perhaps, understand. Woolf smiled. Was it suppressed laughter? My introduction of the parties was an illustration of my male need for dominance and emblematic of the way gifted women have been confounded and defeated by men, maybe? She knew something of me; To the Lighthouse and especially A Room of One's Own were rendered with an androgynous mind. She had insights. Afforded the two qualities essential for women, money and a room of one's own, Woolf (1929) was free to do something extraordinary:

I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me. I need not flatter any man; he has nothing to give to me. So imperceptibly I found myself adopting a new attitude towards the other half of the human race. It was absurd to blame any class or any sex, as a whole. Great bodies of people are never responsible for what they do. They are driven by instincts which are not within our control. (pp. 43-44)

With a brief pause Virginia spoke again; her voice was strong but gentle, passionate but reasonable. Woolf glanced at Sarah and then turned to me. "I am disappointed that you have invited me to offer 'some important statement, some authentic fact. [For example,] Women are poorer than men because--this or that'" (Woolf, 1929, p. 47), she started. She knew I was looking for eternal truths to help understand the conversations; in my nakedness and embarrassment, I

stumbled for words. There was no single line of significance, no “eternal truths”, not the kind that others (Brophy 1988; Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Porter & Brophy, 1988) were able to offer. “Maybe this meeting isn’t going to work”, I blurted out. I was a professionally and economically stable single male with no dependents conversing with a woman who played wife, mother, and teacher and these demands were compounded with financial and professional struggle. What did I know about that? Again, Woolf paused before speaking. Clearly frustrated with having to state the obvious, she retorted, “Perhaps now it would be better to give up seeking for the truth, and receiving on one’s head an avalanche of opinion hot as lava, discoloured as dishwater” (Woolf, 1929, p. 47). Although she seemed to understand part of my feeling, I exclaimed that “Iridescent metaphors may not appease my committee.” Sympathetically she responded, “They, too, the patriarchs, the professors, had endless difficulties, terrible drawbacks to contend with.” “Simply”, she continued, “do as you have done”. “It would be better to draw the curtains; to shut out distractions; to light the lamp; to narrow the enquiry and to ask the historian, who records. . . what conditions women lived, not throughout the ages, but in [Barley], say, in the time of [Sarah]” (Woolf, 1929, p. 47). Her advice was somewhat oblique, but I think I knew what she was suggesting: “the greatest release of all. . . is freedom to think of things in themselves.”

I needed to look at the story, to think of the story. But Sarah, the historian, shared experience that needed to be pieced together. Our conversations introduced me to the ghosts Rosen (1987) spoke of: “Inside every non-narrative of discourse there stalk the ghosts of narrative and inside every narrative there stalk the ghosts of non-narrative discourse.” Ghosts appeared and disappeared, surfacing in conversations about teaching but less obviously framed as a cause and effect tale such as “Little Red Riding Hood” or “The Hare and the Tortoise”. Sarah’s stories were fractured, sometimes difficult to see. Indeed, this was Sarah’s reality. She hoped for permanent employment for her husband, for a secure place for herself, for stability for her son; she missed her husband’s presence in the home; she felt pressure in her role “to be the bread winner”, and, although she was not sure, she worried that her husband felt that in some way he had let them down: “There’s an expectation for men”. The family’s financial position demanded she work and precluded the possibility for a second child. While embedded in the conversation over the months were specific references to classroom events, the conversation seemed to drift recursively from past, present, and future, seemed to focus not on experience but experience of becoming a teacher; seemed to shift in content from professional to personal without warning and seemed to range in tone from melancholy to optimism. Breaking the silence, I

confessed: “I was expecting some recognizable reality, my first year teaching reality.” Then Woolf asked if I had read To the Lighthouse to which I nervously confessed, “Yes”. “My story illustrates that there is not a recognizable monolithic reality but instead the patches of light and substance on Lily Briscoe’s canvas. Something ephemeral,” she added. Again, my mind turned to Sarah’s story.

Sarah’s story is about the experience of being a wife and a mother, but it is mainly about being a teacher: her successful use of the novel They Cage the Animal at Night; her failure to employ the “right” discipline strategy for a particularly unruly grade 10 boy; her frustration with two administrators and a colleague; her feelings of insecurity in teaching outside of her areas of expertise; and her polished response to the perennial student question: “Why do we have to know this?” illustrate this notion. But, perhaps, Sarah’s story is more about becoming a teacher. While she begins with an image of herself as a teacher before her professional work, her experience defines and redefines her image of and for herself. Sarah said:

I pictured myself more in 10 to 12. But actually, once I started teaching, I actually do prefer grade 7 to 10, to teach. To sit and chat or whatever, I prefer the 11 and 12’s, which is kind of nice because for art, me being so full of “art knowledge”, what tends to happen is I’ll come up with a project for them to do and while they’re working on the projects, we get some neat conversations going. So in that regard, I actually enjoy my 11’s and 12’s. I haven’t taught grade 11 and 12 English, only French. That was nice too because you get really small numbers.

Clandinin (1989) introduced me to a first-year teacher, Stewart, who spoke of this beginning image and this image's clash with the realities of experience and the particularities of context. Stewart's image is boldly articulated and firmly defined which may explain, for him, the tension and struggle he has with his experience and context. His image, with moral and emotional dimensions, guides him in the determination of "so good" and "there's nothing worth that". Sarah's story, despite its theme of frustration, renders experience and context with the former description and excludes the use of the latter, maybe without choice. Three schools in as many years and a family to support ensure compromise. Certainly, Woolf might have something to say about the observation. Ultimately, though, the metaphoric clash of image with "the rigid cyclic temporal social structure of schooling" (Clandinin, 1989, p. 130) is not a fitting metaphor in the understanding of Sarah's experience. Sarah seems to have less of an understanding of a beginning image; however, she actively searches for, in our conversations, an emerging image. Prefiguring Schon (1983) and Grundy's (1987) reflective practitioner, Dewey's notion (1938) of teachers as students of learning seems fitting. Construction of her image, though, does not rely solely on her experience as a classroom teacher; Sarah tells us that teachers are influential on other teachers.

Mead's narrative work (1992) with novice teachers generates a number of tales about impact of our teachers on the formation of our image, if not on our professional knowledge. We are informed by our student experiences. Those storied memories, analogous to "old photographs", are both negative and positive snapshots employed in imaging building but also helpful in "tell[ing] us about the informant's present belief about teaching" (Mead, 1992, p. 11). When Sarah expresses a dislike of the female equivalent of Dickens' Mr. McChoakumchild, she reveals her disdain for teaching prescriptive grammar as an end rather than a means to an end. Prizing her high-school English teacher's enthusiasm is mirrored her valuation of enthusiasm as her greatest strength in the classroom. Yet, a teacher's impact is often subtle, if not illusive, especially when Sarah assesses her influence as a teacher on her students. At times, she feels discouraged, unappreciated. Sarah wonders whether or not she is having an impact on those she teaches. She even likens teaching to religion: "You have to believe it because you're never going to see it". Ironically, she does not see that our conversations embraced, often warmly, those who ply the same trade. Teachers influence teachers.

Sarah's friends asked to join our conversation; they wished for an opportunity to tell their stories. I was surprised by their interest, but I should not have been. After all, Sarah's story exists because of the

existence of other stories; “we learn the story grammars of our society, our culture” (Rosen, 1987, p. 14). We learn not how to tell but what to tell also. Britzman (1991) explains: “In the case of learning to teach, cultural myths partly structure the individual’s taken-for-granted views of power, authority, knowledge and identity. They work to cloak the more vulnerable conditions of learning to teach and the myriad negotiations it requires (p. 7).” Sarah’s story of learning to teach is, possibly, more perceived than, for lack of a better word, real; her talk about “learning” and “becoming” is more about “finding” her teaching mask. Sarah story, in this way, becomes one of perceptual identity formation, a marriage of her pre-teaching life and her teaching life so far, and an awareness that, for example, certain teaching behaviors can mean “kids have no respect for [him]” and “he’s isolated in the staffroom”. Sarah’s fictive identity, like a character in fictive literature, is composed not only of elements of her already-experienced world of understanding, but also by her understanding of the various cultural myths associated with the idea of “teacher”.

Teacher talk propagates the cultural myths clustered around the concept of “teacher”. I once heard an argument that knowledge is more meaningful if “passed down orally, in [a] face-to-face context, between members of the same household, kin-group or village” (Goody, 1982, p. 19). My experience with Sarah makes me believe in this proposition.

Talking with other teachers is instrumental in development because the story of teaching is more credible when told in first person rather than in third person. Still, Elbaz (1991) warning is noted: teachers are not privileged authors who somehow have direct access to truth and power to tell the whole story. But teachers' stories are significant to teachers. Remember the childhood story of "The Little Engine that Could" from which I have never forgotten the lesson: anything can be accomplished with determination. Sarah tells stories of "Teachers' That Could" and "Teachers' That Can't"; so do I. We strive to be represented in former and fear to be included in the latter. While narratives such as Shirley Jackson's short story, "The Lottery", warn us about participation in such practices, we continue to play. Jackson's fictional community stones a member; Sarah's non-fictional community alienates a member.

Sarah's friends and colleagues play a role in influencing her; for example, while Sarah argues that her temporal interest in classroom management "has lot to do with the community that [students] grow up in and families and so on". Subsequently, community expectations became administration expectations. Still, she ascribes causal nexus to her peer group. They converse at school, at home, and, every fortnight, at the Jackfish Hotel just outside the school division. Sometimes the group agrees not to talk about work; however, "it's really hard not to". Fines of a quarter for every violation of the agreement have yielded



enough to fund an occasional dinner in the city. And while narrative are sometimes tales and not stories, the opportunity seems, to the participants and the observer, necessary. Strangely, her inclusion in such social gatherings still makes her “really lonely”. Many novice practitioners want ongoing, collegial support (Carter, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Fox, 1995). Sarah argues: “I think that we should all have to do this--talk it over, especially the first year. . . and even after”. Chronic pastoral care is required. Who would talk with Sarah’s friends? Who would converse with Sarah after our research arrangement ended?

Sarah knows that learning by its nature is a social, collaborative activity (Vygotsky, 1978) and subsequently she values group work and class discussions; however, while her classroom promotes student learning, ironically, it restricts teacher learning because of a school structure that promotes individualism in a “sink or swim” physical solitude (Goodlad, 1990). Professionally Sarah feels lonely, other Barley teachers request to participate in this research, and one “unsuccessful” teacher is storied about rather than storied with. Separation and detachment must be usurped with a place, hopefully schools, to discuss schooling, teaching and learning (Ervin and Fox, 1994); must be addressed with time to talk, to work together, to determine needs, to ask questions, to reflect (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990; Giroux, 1986); must be combated with *spaces* reserved for

community story tellers in teacher education programs and educational research agendas.

Sarah complains about her teacher education program because, while in it, she did not learn to teach. Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1996) observe that phrases like “learning to teach” illustrate the traditional paradigm in teacher education. Teacher identity understood this way is about transposition rather than formation. Offered a codified knowledge base for teaching, she was dissatisfied. “I had my little strategies: the eye contact and stopping what I was doing. I didn’t have situations, how do you know which kid to do what with. That was by guess”. Further, Sarah states: “I liked classes where I can say, oh I don’t need that. This is much better”. Giroux (1986) understands Sarah’s feeling: “teachers are encouraged to remove themselves from their own histories, experience and values as these bear down on and shape the nature of their work” (p. 11). Learning to teach is the “finding” theme of Sarah’s story. “I think I’m better because I’m more confident. In that first year, you’re are always waffling”. Sarah’s declaration of confidence is supported with her unsolicited offer of advice: “never discipline in front a classroom. I’m glad that in the first year, I had the sense to take kids out of the classroom and into the hallway where I could talk to them one on one and not give them the opportunity to make it into a show”. Perhaps, the act of telling for Sarah, reflecting on the principles that

inform practice and centering on the act of teaching, is the valuable part, not the story itself.

Stories teach in ambiguous ways; “generalizations from story are at best precarious” (Carter, 1993, p. 7). I realized that I was no longer looking at the story but also at the act of telling the story, a dichotomy that is, at best, arbitrary. Sarah tells her story to me, to those at the Jackfish Hotel knowing that “A red light means the camera is on”. That is, she, in the role of performer, tells with an awareness of audience. Audience includes her students but an awareness of anyone appears to have more advantages than disadvantages. Regardless, teachers and non-teachers, “we become the stories we choose to tell” (Jalongo, 1995, p. 86). And if the value of story for Sarah is in telling, what should be done with the story. Arguments calling for stories, authored by teachers, to form a body of knowledge much like cases are used in medicine and law, have been made (Bruner, 1987; Jalongo 1995; Carter, 1993). Tripp (1994) distinguishes between process (storying) and product (story). He asserts storying “can empower teachers in terms of assisting them to understand and improve their practice. . . [but the story] , instead of being a service to teachers and teacher education as an important means of assisting teachers understand and change their practice, is in danger of becoming yet another form of ‘studying down’ (Bell, 1978), and of having greater value to the academics who build

their reputation by performing the research, than to the teachers who so willingly collaborate with them” (p. 7). And while phenomenological claims for recovering voice are meritorious, they may be not more than an attempt to professionalize the field of education through alliances with fields less insecure with their professionalism. In addition, stories can confuse and frustrate beginning teachers because novice teachers “lack the situated frames within which such stories are interpretable at all, who often presuppose that one learns best from clear and direct statements that are true and who normally have well-developed conceptions of what it means to teach, conceptions that may or may not match the view represented in a particular story” (Carter, 1993, p. 10).

I never spoke about my embarrassment to my professors, to my family, to my colleagues, including Sarah, about sensing shame because of my alliance with “soft” narrative research. Narrative research in my university (Baille, 1993; Cathro, 1993; Gray, 1996) and research in other universities (Fox, 1991; Hogan, 1988) was largely in women’s work. Somewhere in my mind it had been determined or established that my male world never placed value on talk and story. But at the beginning of this research I did embrace the rhetoric: “Stories have the power to direct and change our lives” (Noddings, 1991, p.157). Sentimental, naive and optimistic, I believed the claim. And at the end

of this research I am still not unconvinced that stories have an affective power; however, the power to affect change is not in Sarah's story, not in my story. Our power has been in the opportunity to tell, Sarah telling in our conversation, mine in writing this document.

I became cognizant of the grassy bank and its sluggish river again. Observation now became less academic. I remembered the dust billowing out from behind my moving car, framed by the edge of my rear-view mirror, on my weekly trip to and from Barley. I recalled the awkwardness of our first meeting in Sarah's classroom, with our view of farm land and blue sky. I thought about recent accidental meeting in a city supermarket. Sarah was no longer working in Barley; her husband had secured a permanent position in the city and she gave up her job. She had two children with her, having given birth to a second son. She was happy to see me as I was to see her. She spoke of the stress of a new-born and of her desire to return to the classroom. Until she could secure a new position, she would substitute.

Sarah and Woolf had not returned to our place on the bank and I could no longer see them. It had become my place. The sun had shifted in the prairie sky, closer to the horizon now. Woolf was needed by other students. In To the Lighthouse, near the novel's end, the Ramsays make their way to the beacon. Mrs. Ramsy's epiphany on the journey parallels my own: "The great revelation had never come. The revelation

never *did* come” (Woolf, 1927/1990, p. 161). As stories, ours, perhaps, bordered the banal, stories heard many times before; yet, their value was never in the uniqueness but their commonality. Sarah helped me to construct a moment out of four months of conversation, something permanent about something temporal, a story with only minor epiphanies . Using story we have attempted to make sense of our experience. As Mrs. Ramsy observes: In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing. . .was struck into stability” (Woolf, 1927/1990, p. 161). That is what we had: opportunities to reflect on classroom experience and generate familiar teacher stories.

## CHAPTER SIX

### “THE WAY [SARAH] TOLD IT”

Sarah’s story has been shaped by me and, although the story has been constructed from our words, the narrative may be more mine than not. This precarious researcher-participant relationship, with issues of ownership and equity, began to concern me five years ago; I am still concerned. I have thought and I have listened. Prairie writer, Leona Gom, in her poem “The Way He Told It” (Forie et al., 1998), shares her memories of a prairie doctor, Rosenbloom, who is defined by his profession and his faith. Indeed, Jews were and are scarce in Hines Creek, Alberta, at least less common than novice female teachers in rural Saskatchewan. For Gom though, the doctor’s faith and occupation were significant to the community and stand in contrast to her ascribing significance instead to his words. In a similar way, Sarah is viewed by her community as the teacher, with all that “teacher” connotes in Barley, whereas significance, for me, is derived from Sarah’s words. And what did I locate as significant? What did I find out about the life of Sarah? Was her experience connected to her rural Saskatchewan locations? What about gender issues around the research? Was the mask metaphor appropriate to or comprehensive enough to characterize Sarah’s sense-making? Gom’s poem seems an appropriate

chapter title because “The way [Sarah] told it” has determined “what I remember” as well as guided, at least in part, “The way [I] told it” (Forie et al., 1998, p 75).

Barley’s cast of characters, those in and outside the school, have indirectly shaped this story. In our first conversation, Sarah talks about this community influence:

I don’t know what’s like in the cities but the thing with small towns is, as soon as you get a leak, then everybody knows about it and everybody assumes that because it came from a teacher, then it must be true. Or that it’s in proper context. I know that one of the other teachers here has had a really rough time because another teacher said something about her that was pretty much unfounded, but it became gospel. And she’s having a really rough time with one of her classes in particular, because they are really taking it as gospel truth and are really holding against her.

Why did Sarah offer this story minutes into our first conversation?

Primarily, the story serves as notice that Sarah, or any teller, is mindful of the audience and the potential repercussions from a community for telling. Sarah notes that unlike urban communities, “You definitely live here and they tend to have longer memories”. Clearly, her offerings are constructed with this danger in mind. In another way, Sarah’s story teaches me how to tell the research story with caution by drawing attention to the causal connections that link complete honesty with community punishment. Herein lies a principal tension in narrative research: Sarah speaks of the emancipatory power of sharing



professional stories, but yet is controlled, if not limited by these same constructions. However real for Sarah, researchers (Noddings, 1991; Clandinin, 1989; Jalongo, 1996; Bell, 1993) tend to neglect this narrative conundrum.

Although Sarah is especially attentive to classroom management issues in Great Central School, and the interest may be linked to her childhood experiences as well as the focus of her colleagues, she also attributes the attention to Barley, a community that prizes discipline. In fact, Sarah quickly identifies by name a number of parents who “practically live in [the principal’s] office. . . They have expectations for [teachers]”. Influential with those who make decisions that affect teachers’ lives directly, parental concerns become teacher concerns. Administrative decisions regarding teaching assignments and school placements within the division are sometimes viewed as rewards and punishments. In fact, Sarah identifies specific individuals and situations in her story as illustrations of this influence. And however real or not, Sarah’s perception of a school narrative, with its political tensions, influence her. It is a story that “nobody says directly. . . you just know”. It is a story “that was [learned] over a period of time-- [through] smaller incidents and things involving me and the other teachers”.

Not only does this awareness of community-influence guide her practice, but it affects her in other ways. From “I was nervous” to “her feel[ing] frustration”, administrative decisions in all three Saskatchewan towns have impacted her, “especially when [the decision] comes to supporting teachers against someone from the community”. She notes a tendency for the administration to be more responsive to parental concerns and, perhaps, less sensitive to teacher issues. Other teachers have drawn her attention to this tendency. For example, she explains: “During my first year in Dogwood, one of the other teachers and I had our little visits at the beginning of the year, and she told me what some of these parents were like. If I was nervous before, I was petrified after that. I was very careful not to step on toes publicly”. Parents, directly and indirectly, influence Sarah.

Students also have a power and influence that is unique, but not independent from parental power and influence. In particular, an early experience frustrated Sarah and stands out as her primary reason (or story) for her beliefs. The story begins with her explanation of the initial problem: “kids [were] swearing in the hallways and throwing garbage around, getting really rough”. Staff meetings were called, problems were identified, and consequences were established. Detention was one such consequence. Sarah continues:

We made up a schedule for who would supervise the detention room, a team thing. I had a kid who I heard swearing in the

hallway, and so I said, "Okay, detention for you. You come tomorrow". He didn't show up the next day. And one of the consequences was that if you didn't show up, the next day detention was doubled. So I said, "You owe me a second detention. Well, he went to the principal. The principal came to me and said, "I've reduced his detention to only half a noon hour. He said that the student hadn't been swearing. He said "hell", which was not what the kid had said.

Although Sarah observes, outside the context of this story, a principal in a small town is at best, "a difficult job", she is grieved by her principal's decision to reduce the detention. Her enthusiasm for the staff initiative, her willingness to support other school rules, and her feelings for the principal were impacted. Sarah recalls: "It took away my authority. I needed to have a sense of authority. And number two, he didn't even bother checking with me to hear my side of the story before he went ahead and told the kid that his detention was reduced". A "need" for a sense of authority is important to this novice teacher; for Sarah, "teacher" connotes authority and is part of her fictive identity discussed in chapter five. Cultural myths around "teacher" are informed by rural communities and interpreted by rural teachers (Kottler, 1997). Sarah interprets community support for firm discipline as a call for the authority of teachers in Great Central School, yet, ironically, it is the indirect challenge of authority through a school's administration that puzzles her. In spite of this tension, authority is a static component of the mask she wears as "teacher" in Barley.

Sarah has a theory about small towns, a theory that was formed with experience in three rural Saskatchewan communities. She explains qualities such as diligence and responsibility are linked to the cultural make up of her community and that this understanding of the students' backgrounds helps her understand them. For example, parents of German descent are "behind the teachers and try to promote education to their kids". Ukrainians typically "have a strong work ethic. The parents expect their kids to work more". While Sarah's observations may not be hugely scientific, they reveal one rural Saskatchewan teacher's attempt to understand her students by ethnicity. Perhaps it is particular to Sarah because she, in explaining her past, draws attention her background: "I grew up in a town that was mostly French and Ukrainian where. . . it seems like [parents] expected more from kids". Regardless, "German" and "Ukrainian", like the concept of "teacher", have special meanings for those who live and work in rural Saskatchewan.

"Woman" also has a special meaning in rural Saskatchewan; however, its meaning is more difficult to locate. A woman's story is even more formidable to tell, especially for a single urban-dwelling man. As I struggled with this challenge, Virginia Woolf's name came to me from Dara, the student who told me about A Room of One's Own. In the work, Woolf judges a great many stories--especially stories by women--in

themselves; that is, she judges them firmly, mindful not to be blinded by an authors' sufferings. In fact, she thinks hardship produces bad writing or, alternatively, storying. Women that are angry lose their way in narrative; they make speeches when they should be attending to "things in themselves" or, if you wish, a description of a lived life. Woolf was employed as a character in this thesis narrative because she modeled and explained how to listen and write: without a tearful eye. If the tone of my writing is not sympathetic, it is because that emotion is not appropriate; however, if the outgrowth of my writing is a healthy respect for and a better understanding of Sarah's formative struggle in rural Saskatchewan, I have been learned my lessons from Virginia Woolf.

For me Sarah earned respect. Perhaps, it is her story, shared in chapter four, of the director and principal's visit to her Dogwood classroom that helped crystallize this respect. Although I can only speculate as to why an administrative decision was made to inform her in this particular manner, I believe at the heart of this issue is gender. There is something sinister in the image of a female novice teacher, working with an understanding of her own fledgling professional competence, receiving an unexpected visit from her two male administrators, only to inform her that they would not offer her a permanent contract. The disruption to her classroom by two

noteworthy visitors, ensured the students' awareness of the occasion when Sarah transparently received her news. Impact to the self-labeled "bread-winner" must have been felt in all fronts--as mother, wife, neighbor, and professional. Would a male novice teacher have been informed in a similar way? Does this example illustrate, in part, what "woman" means in this rural location? Importantly, an informed understanding of Sarah's professional and personal situation did not exist; it did not matter. Sarah's story of learning to teach affirms and negates the cultural myths that structure "taken-for granted views of power, authority, knowledge and identity" (Britzman, 1991, p. 7).

Identity formation, although it has been addressed in chapter five, requires further examination in light of this chapter's discussion around community influence and cultural myth. Dana Fox's (1995) work with novice English teachers, Susan and Maureen, reminds me of my work with Sarah; participants gravitate to well-worn images of teachers and teachers' work. Sarah begins to recognize the phenomenon of image-selection as she consciously assigns names to those images or masks of "teacher". Allusions to "Mr. Popularity", "Attila the Hun", "Jellyfish", "All-star", "The knowledgeable-one" and "Jock" pepper her story. Fox's research found overcoming "mental stereotypes" proved to be an important factor in a novice teacher's development. This epiphany for Sarah occurred when she became aware of a school structure that was

and is inflexible; she comments on this tension: "We have to place that kind of ideal, that image that we have [of ourselves as teachers] within a structure that won't allow things". She realizes: "It's not until later that you realize how to adapt to that". Learning to teach is learning to adapt, by altering or modifying those masks we employ and that are supplied by our culture. Inevitably, Sarah believes that in order to survive, "the image becomes changed so much". Not only do beginning teachers need the opportunity to unpack preconceptions and examine their "teacher" identity, we, as seasoned teachers, should join them in critically looking at our own "teacher" identities (Fox, 1993; Kottler, 1997).

Sarah's stories are about human action, and the theme is not limited to her professional life; Sarah informed me of her professional and personal situations. Not surprisingly, they are difficult to separate, if not impossible. Goodson (1992) notes that a teacher's classroom life and professional influences are not inseparable from a teacher's life outside the classroom and personal influences. Sarah selected from a flood of experience, locating relationships, causes, motives and consequences--essentially ascribing *meaning*. Sarah's willingness to narratize her experience reflects what Hardy (1977) describes "as a primary act of mind"; however, Sarah's enthusiasm for storying may also be connected to my willingness, and at times, my need to narratize

my own experience. Sarah's stories invited my stories, my stories encouraged hers, and our stories exist because other stories exist. Our stories are intertextual.

Because of the intertextual nature of story, I have tried to communicate this quality in the research story, not simply to illustrate a story's connection to or dependence on other stories, but to honour what my mind instinctively does without prompting. In doing so, I have produced rather than consumed (Rosenblatt, 1978), written rather than read (Barthes, 1974) attended to rather than neglected "off-stage voices" (Rosen, 1987), and given voice to the otherwise silent "inner-speech" (Vygotsky, 1978). Imbedding fictive narratives within our story seems appropriate not only because we are both English teachers, but because it is an honest acknowledgment that experience is not our only source for the stories we share.

After all, as Rosen (1987) admits, "We do not pluck our stories from direct experience. We invent experience, the actors, the action, the circumstances, the provocations and the outcomes" (p. 15). Yet, never far is life. Sarah and I work with students, language, and stories in the privacy of our classrooms, yet we are mindful of others, especially when we story experience. Our awareness of an audience has shaped the way we told it; an awareness evident in Sarah's storied warning to me and an awareness evident in some of the obliqueness of this written text. And



still, you have something that is contextualized, something with the marks of the speakers, and something embedded in teachers' lives as lived. Remembering the discomfort with certain claims for narrative research (Noddings, 1991; Jalongo, 1992), I encourage the reader or "writer" (Barthes, 1974) to determine truthfulness, to consider the value of story, in research on education, and to find the voice of a novice Saskatchewan teacher. Without apology and returning to chapter four's title, remember that, "what I wish to write is not here but somewhere beyond".

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**Appendix A**  
**Participant Information**

## **Participant Information**

### **For Research to be Completed by Mark Wilderman**

- Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of the study is to collect stories of experience from novice secondary teachers and to make meaning of these accounts in light of current and relevant educational research. I am NOT interested in the skill of teaching but rather in experience and the understanding that comes from it.
- Rationale:** The research is partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in the Department of Curriculum Studies. Second, I wish to offer experiential accounts that contribute to and promote conversations about our work.
- Procedure:** The research will be conducted over a period of approximately three months; the frequency of contact within this period will be negotiated, although one weekly conversation is required.
- Interviews and conversations will be the common form of contact. They are opportunities for teachers to share, reflect on and make sense of their professional experiences. These are central to the research.
- When and where appropriate, I will participate in some classroom activities. These are opportunities for me to see teachers live out their experience and to help me better understand it. My role is "helper".
- While one contact opportunity per week is desired, comfort level and work load as well as program opportunities for shared work will further determine the form and frequency of contact.
- Benefits and Risks:** The research provides opportunities for teachers to share, reflect on and make sense of their professional experiences. To my knowledge there are no risks involved in participating in this research.

If participants have any concerns or questions regarding the research please contact one of the following:

Mark Wilderman  
Graduate Student  
Department of Curriculum Studies  
University of Saskatchewan

Dr. Sam Robinson  
Department of Curriculum  
Studies  
University of Saskatchewan

**APPENDIX B**

**Participant Consent Form**

## **Participant Consent Form For Research to be Completed by Mark Wilderman**

Please read the Participant Information sheet and this form. If you have any concerns or questions, please ask me. When you have finished reading, understand fully the contents, and are in agreement, please sign both copies of this form and return one to me.

This consent form is designed to ensure the rights of all participants involved in the research. The following safeguards are in place:

1. Participants will not be mentioned by name in the completed research; pseudonyms, instead of participants' names, will be used. The researcher intends to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.
2. Participation is voluntary. Each teacher who agrees to participate will sign this form stating he/she has read and agreed to the conditions as outlined.
3. Any data given to the research belongs to the participant until the participant signs a statement releasing the data to the researcher.
4. Transcripts of interviews used will be submitted to participants to review for accuracy or for possible lapses in confidentiality.
5. Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. If this should happen all data given to the researcher by the participant will be returned
6. When the research has been formally accepted by the University of Saskatchewan, all notes and transcripts will be destroyed and tape recorded interviews will be erased.

I have read this information outlining Mark Wilderman's proposed research. I am volunteering to participate in the research.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_