

INFLUENCES OF EXPERIENCE ON STORIES TO LIVE BY
IN AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a narrative inquiry into the experiences of two children's lives in school. I lived alongside the two children in their grade five classroom for eight months of their school year inquiring into the ways that their school experiences and their relationships with the teacher, classmates, and subject matter influenced the way they composed their stories to live by. In this thesis I share a personal reflection on the way my story to live by has been shaped by my experiences, specifically as a student, a teacher, and a researcher. I use field notes and taped conversations with each of the two boys to retell the stories they shared with me and apply them to literature and theory. I use Dewey's Criteria of Experience within a narrative framework to help understand and retell the stories of the two boys as well as Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray Orr's commonplaces of narrative inquiry: place, temporality, and sociality. I explore Aoki's planned and lived curriculum and Noddings' ethic of care and fidelity in teaching as they applied to the inquiry.

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My husband, Jim Lawrence, for the endless love, support and encouragement he gives me every day of our lives together.

Lastly, my daughter Emma Jayde Lawrence for her patience and unconditional love. She is my beautiful reason to continue the quest to improve school experience for children.

DEDICATION

In memory of my father
Tim Tarala, my greatest inspiration
for my work in education.
His passion for and commitment to
education has been passed on through
the countless lives he touched
throughout his distinguished career.
May this be the beginning of the
ways his legacy will continue.

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CHAPTER ONE

FRAMING THE RESEARCHER AND THE INQUIRY

As I began to examine my journey that has brought me to the place where I stand as a graduate student, a researcher, and a teacher, I was drawn through a process of temporal drifts back and forth while considering my life story. I experienced shifts from the bigger picture, an aerial view of my journey, to specific, detailed views of particular experiences or parts of my story. I use the term story here and throughout this research text because of the influence of Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) view of human experience: "...humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are as they interpret the past in terms of these stories" (p. 477). This perspective remained the foundation as I considered my own life story and the stories of children in this inquiry. In order to understand the researcher and the place from which this inquiry emerged, this chapter shares parts of the journey I made through temporal drifts and shifts from bigger picture to detailed views in my story.

Being the Student

I have always been someone deemed successful in the area of academics. Whether or not I personally believed this varied from time to time, but beneath some insecurity I somehow knew that I was one who was considered a "good student." As I thought about this historical knowing, I was reminded specifically of one experience.

I was in Math A30, my first class in a brand new school in grade 11. I didn't have many friends, since my family had just moved to this new town, and I was overwhelmed with all of my new surroundings, the unfamiliar chaos every way I looked. It wasn't until I entered my math classroom that I felt safe again. The familiar desk configuration, empty walls, clean white board, shelves of text books, and quiet students ready for the syllabus. I opened my binder, full of clean loose leaf, opened my brand new graphing calculator, laid my perfectly sharpened pencil, with a flawless eraser on the end, next to my binder, uncapped my brand new blue ballpoint pen and laid it next to the red one that I only used for underlining. I opened the rings of my binder, slipped the syllabus over the rings and used reinforcements to ensure I would not lose this valuable piece of paper on which I would rely for the next five months. It was a routine that I had come to know well in my career as a math student; a routine that provided security, familiarity,

predictability, and confidence. As a researcher examining this experience, I started to wonder why this environment, and this routine gave me these feelings that led to my enjoyment and my success? I wondered further whether it was the environment that created this part of me, or was I just the type of person that was exactly what mathematics teachers are looking for?

I clearly relished those structured and organized environments that provided safety and security for me. I then wondered where this feeling of being safe and secure came from? In pondering this question I was drawn back further into my past. As I started to remember my first years in school, my first mathematics classes, I remembered the early parts that shaped the way I understood myself as a mathematics student. I remembered the workbooks that we had, the sandy brown pages, and the thick paper cover that was tattered on many books, but not mine. I always made sure that I had a pencil that showed up sharp and clear on the pages, not the soft, dull pencils that were hard to see. I was always in a competition with Jacob¹. He was the other “smart kid” in our class. It was as early as grade two that I can remember the feeling of anxiety in a race to finish our daily seatwork; not only did it have to be finished, it had to be 100% correct, corners clipped. I learned very quickly that teachers liked neat notebooks, neat workbooks, and students who did their homework.

Positioning Myself as Successful

As I went through grade school, I continued to succeed in math and in school in general. In examining this reflection, it is important that I define what I believed to be successful in school both then and now. As a student I thought about success in three ways: Success in the eyes of the teacher, my peers, and myself. The emphasis I placed on each of these parameters shifted over time as I passed through different stages in my life as a student. Success in the eyes of teachers was of utmost importance when I was a smaller child. Although it still is important to me, it had a bigger impact on whether I deemed myself successful or not as a younger grade school student. As I have grown up, particularly in graduate school, deeming myself successful has become more and more internal. Marks became less of an issue as I became more of my own critic in an environment where independent learning was the focus. In school, success in the eyes of the teacher was expressed by verbal and written feedback and grades. I was unanimously

¹ Names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals referenced in this research text

considered a pleasure to teach as evidenced in report cards and parent teacher interviews. I was not even sure I knew what this meant until I, too, became a teacher. As a child I understood it to mean I was a good person, a good student, and, based upon this, I assumed it to also mean I was liked better than other kids. I now believe this meant that I did exactly what my teachers wanted. The other form of success from teachers was in relation to the grades I received. By getting 100% on assignments and tests, I interpreted that the teacher recognized and affirmed my intelligence in mathematics or any other subject. I was also smart enough to know that those high marks also led to positive feedback from the teacher. Peers were another aspect of interpreting success. Everyone knew that Jacob and I were competing to be first finished and have the highest grades; we were always referred to as the smart kids. In fact, if the teacher was busy, kids often told each other to “ask Jacob or Erin.” Other classmates constantly compared their assignment and test grades to mine, again reaffirming that I was a successful student.

Beyond teachers and peers, deeming myself successful in school was, and still is, more complex. In my eyes, my own success came from performance of expected outcomes to a level of perfection, or if not perfection, better than everyone else. Through my education, I was always striving to get the right answer. When I achieved the right answer, it was affirmed by the teacher’s feedback, my peers’ reactions to me, and then I felt a sense of accomplishment, confidence and success. I continually received “E’s” on my report cards, representing excellence and mastery in all subjects, particularly math. For some reason, I always thought that my “E” in math was the most important. So it is here that I begin to understand that my security in the structure of that Math A30 classroom was born out of many years of understanding that within this structure I was one who was a “pleasure to teach,” one who was celebrated as being “the smart one” and given constant affirmation that I was a success.

One might consider my position as the “pleasure to teach” or “the smart one” as a place to enjoy, supported by my discussion of the comfort and safety felt within the school walls. However, this place also brought up constant tension in my struggle to maintain this conception that others had of me and I had of myself. I mentioned in one reflection above my first memory of test anxiety. This was something I lived with right through my formal schooling. I had many negative physical reactions in relation to the pressure of receiving good marks on tests or major assignments. This pressure came from several sources, as I saw it. Trying to outperform others on a daily basis brought me to a place of constant stress and worry. It was detrimental to have

someone announce they had beaten me on anything. I felt daily pressure from others to be a top achiever. In addition, expectations from teachers and parents also contributed to pressure I felt as a student. However, as I reflected on these feeling of pressure coming from all three sources, I realized that the pressure in the end came from myself and the way I believed others identified me. Although seemingly contradictory to my previous discussion of feeling safe within the walls of the school, I did always know that this was a place where I *could* succeed. Even through sweaty palms and labored breathing on a test and finding out someone beat me on an assignment, I knew that I would be on top in the end which was what was important to me. Ironically, I felt that both the intense pressure and my security came from the same place, me; teachers, parents, and peers never doubted my ability.

Being the Prospective Teacher

I am drawn outward from my own experience, to examine the bigger picture, to consider the impact of this early experience in my life on my view of education as I entered the University of Regina, enrolled in the Elementary Education program. Dewey (1938) theorized that experiences that we have are all based on experiences we have already had. Inevitably, my experiences as a student in school became the building blocks for my perception of education, as I believed it to be, as an aspiring teacher. As I examined my reasons for choosing education as a profession I was immediately drawn to my previous experience. The relationship I had with my teachers, the respect I had for them, as well as the comfortable, safe, and secure feeling that I associated with the structure of school in general weighed largely on my choice to become a teacher myself. It is, however, important to consider the fact that this comfort and security was developed within a specific, limited context of education and schooling. As I have mentioned in my above reflections, structure, teacher centered instruction, tests, and mainly rote learning were the places that felt comfortable to me as a student. These aspects had comprised much of my experience as a student, forming the basis for my idea of what education and schooling meant. I believed the security I felt as a student within education would transfer to my becoming a teacher within the very same system. Thus began the formation of who I was going to be as a teacher.

I found Mitchell and Weber's (1999) ideas of the constructive aspect of teacher identity using self reflection particularly helpful in understanding my view of what I believe it meant to be a teacher when I began my journey through teacher education. The authors suggested that

childhood memories of school and teachers, school photographs, pop culture including cartoons, movies, and newspapers all contribute to our ideas of who we are as teachers. I definitely had a view of what I thought being a teacher was before I even entered the teacher education program. This stemmed from far back into my past when I was playing school with my younger siblings and I stood at our little chalkboard as it hung on the wall and they sat at makeshift desks facing me. The idea of who I was as an aspiring teacher was shaped by who I was as a student and the relationship that was developed with teachers by being that student.

My self reflection illuminates the powerful role that school structure and experience, particularly experience mitigated by teachers, played in shaping the experience I lived out in classrooms. I wonder what this might mean for other learners. This powerful role is often overlooked, however, because of the commonplace existence the schooling experience has in our society (Jackson, 1968). It is something so commonplace that the significance of the experience has been devalued. I will forever remember the few experiences I shared above, and more than likely, the teachers involved in those experiences have no idea that they were so influential in shaping the story of who I am.

Being the Teacher

One of the most influential parts of who I am and why I am here writing this research text was my role as a teacher: the teacher I believed I was and the teacher I became. My personal reflection really did not occur until I began this research journey. It was the tensions I felt as a classroom teacher that jumpstarted my desire to return to university and explore those tensions.

In my first year teaching I had the opportunity to teach a very small class of five boys their grade 12 English Language Arts course. I had one boy on a regular program, three on a modified program, and one on an alternate program. This was not what I was educated to do as I had just received my Bachelor of Education with a specialization in Kindergarten to grade 5 education. Being the eager and naïve new teacher that I was, I accepted with no hesitation and was positive I was going to teach these boys what they needed to know. I went in with curricula under my arm and my plans ready to start the semester. In hindsight I was beginning to live out the vision I had constructed for myself as a teacher. I was welcomed by one boy, an 18 year old, saying to me, “I just want you to know I ain’t any good at English and I don’t do homework.”

Needless to say, I quickly learned that my pretty plans, assignments, and tests were not going to work the way I thought they would. I did try to impose those plans, assignments, and tests and was met with constant “failure” as I deemed it. The boys were uninterested, they were not doing their homework (as they had kindly warned me on day one, and I so conveniently ignored), and their marks were extremely low. I was left in a place of discomfort where my beliefs about my job as a teacher were clearly interrupted with this experience placed before me. I started to broaden my previously narrow view of what being a student meant, what education meant, and what being a teacher meant. I now realize that the discomfort I was feeling in this previously safe place I had come to know was because of the discontinuity of that experience teaching with my past experiences with teachers and teaching. In that classroom I came to realize that I had seen education through a limited perspective: my perspective. I was doing exactly what Nunley (2005) described as teaching the way I was taught, and in this case, to no avail.

My struggles and cries for help to other teachers or others in authority were often met with, “they just need the credit to graduate.” This very notion of just giving credits created a tension inside of me that changed my entire view on teaching early in my career. I truly believed that these boys deserved more than “a credit” in my English class just as any student would, yet I was confronted with the realization that perhaps the education system was not as I had thought it was or hoped it would be based on my experience as a student. I had come in face to face contact with manifestations of their tensions as illustrated in the one boy’s opening comment. More and more I realized that these boys were constantly reminded of their failure to meet standard requirements by failing grades, being placed in labeled “modified” courses, and by comments from their peers and teachers. I was faced with this 18 year old boy who told me he “couldn’t” for everything we did. It frustrated me to no end to hear him tell me over and over he could not do things that he would not even try.

I realized that the tensions I felt as a child, as a student, were beginning to help me understand tensions students experience around performance. Although they were living in a world completely different from mine, years and years of being confirmed a “failure” in the same structural system in which I had experienced success, we had in common the fact that tensions were created based on our schooling experiences. Furthermore, it was these tensions, these experiences, which shaped, and continue to shape, us as individuals. I realized that these young

men had come to my classroom with a wealth of experiences that had shaped the story of who they were, just as I had. I realized that I had to change my perspective.

Learning from the Students

Several memories stayed with me as being particularly transformational. In the provincial curriculum guide for modified English Language Arts, the boys were supposed to complete a novel study. Reading was an issue with this class and I knew that from the beginning. The students each had significant reading difficulties, each for different reasons. In response to learning that they were going to start to study Harper Lee's (1960) "To Kill a Mockingbird" I heard, "I haven't read a book yet, why would I read this one?" or "You have got to be kidding" or just smug laughter. I decided I was going to listen to what these students were telling me and try to teach them based on that telling. Instead of me being the dictator of the curriculum in the classroom, the boys and I constructed the curriculum for this novel study together.

I began with the thought in my mind that the point of a novel study was to understand the story, the themes, the characters, the symbols, and all of the important messages that come from the literature. I realized, thanks to the honesty of the boys, that reading the text was not going to be the means to get to the point of the novel. Instead I used the movie. We used excerpts from the story, but generally relied on the movie to communicate the story. I found the students to be very interested in the story, even asking daily if we were going to get to watch more. The boys did assignments based on the characters, the themes, the symbols and personal connections to the story. I will never forget that one particular boy carried the novel with him every day of the novel study even though we weren't reading it, and in the end, tried to read it on his own. This experience was so powerful in my transformation. I found myself moving from my narrow perspective to a broader perspective of what education and teaching should be. I had to be willing to change and even rewrite the story of teaching and learning I had brought with me to this experience. I could not impose my ideas, my plans, my choice for assignments and my objectives on these boys. I needed to respect the five different storied lives that were in my class and have them contribute not only to the rewriting of our classroom curriculum but also to the rewriting of who I was as a teacher. My idea of education as it was as I entered the field created intense dissonance with what I now believe education could be. I had to let go of the need to teach the way I had been taught and the way I chose to learn, essentially the story of school I had

come to know as a student and prospective teacher. In reward, I realized that I had, even in a small way, contributed to helping them reshape their stories as those who cannot to those who can.

Another experience that stayed with me from this same teaching experience was the challenge of teaching the five paragraph essay to the five boys. I had explained to my class that we were going to embark on this journey of learning to write an essay. I was immediately met with “I can’t” or “No way.” I had previously taught my grade 9 English class the structure for writing an essay using the same method I was taught while I was in high school. I had marked them the same way I was marked when I was in high school, based on sentence structure, coherence, grammar, spelling, and essay structure. Because I had been teaching these boys for several months already, I knew that I was not going to be able to teach this class the same way I had taught the grade 9’s. I walked the boys through the process of writing their essays based on the things they chose to write about. We discussed things like topic sentences, the content for each paragraph, and the parts of the essay. Danny showed me his draft copy and I helped him fix grammar and spelling along the way. When he handed it in to be marked, I found myself with tears in my eyes and on his paper. The voice that was evident in the essay he had written was powerful because by this time I knew Danny and parts of his life story. The connection I made with his writing was incredibly powerful. There were spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, missing indents, and inconsistencies in the spacing between paragraphs, but I looked past those things to the content and the voice he had presented and to the chills I had when I read his work. I gave Danny an 82% on his essay. When he looked at it, he stared for a moment and then looked up and said, “I have never been an 82 in anything.” Those words reverberated in my mind as I realized that he associated who he was with the number I wrote on the top of that page and the numbers written on all of his work in the 12 years of school preceding this one. This experience brought me back to young Erin striving for 100% all of the time. I, too, associated who I was with those red numbers at the top of my pages. I linked my success to those numbers and in turn my idea of who I was as an individual, a good student. Just as I had, Danny had associated who he was, not an 82 in anything, with marks at the top of his page. In this moment I had the uncomfortable realization that I was someone merely a few years older than he, yet he was looking at me to define who he was because I was his teacher, just as I had looked to my teachers to define who I was.

From this realization arose another tension for me in this place that used to feel so comfortable. The way I had viewed assessment and evaluation when I entered the field of education had been from an extremely limited perspective. I did not understand how much it had contributed to my understanding of who I was or how other individuals understood themselves. Even worse for me, I had been doing the same thing to younger children, grades 3-10, and it took my experience with Danny being so close to my age to really understand how powerful the role of a teacher is in this process.

Being the Researcher

One of the most difficult parts of this inquiry process was to try to understand myself as a researcher. In trying to understand the question of who am I as researcher, my initial response was, I am just me. With such a simple statement emerged the complexity of who that “me” is. To begin the difficult task of unpacking that complexity I considered Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) summary of Dewey’s “...notion that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (p. 2). To understand myself as a researcher in this inquiry, I had to consider the “young Erin” I described in the beginning of this research text. Those experiences as a student, striving for high achievement with perpetual stress and anxiety influence who I am as a researcher. The writing of this text brought with it many feelings of anxiety reminiscent of those earlier days as a student. I am still hard on myself, indicative of the perfectionism I exhibited, then as a child and a student, and now as an adult and a researcher. In addition, my experiences as a teacher also influenced the “me” who is the researcher. The reason I came to this place as a researcher is because of my experience in the classroom as an educator. Without those experiences, including the ones with Danny that I have shared in this thesis, I may not have arrived here, at this time, in this place with the same wonders I have now. It is the delicate and unique combination of these “narrative fragments,” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 20) these experiences, that have united in this time and place to create me, the researcher.

Weaving the Researcher Together

One example of the influence of previous experience on mine as a researcher was when I first entered the inquiry site. The classroom teacher, Elaine Neider with whom I worked with in this study, was not in the classroom yet and I came in with my shoulder bag wearing my teacher clothes. The bell had rung and the children were creating chaos in the classroom. I sat in a chair

near the edge of the room next to the teacher's desk. I chose this location because it had been the exact one I had sat in when I had my initial meeting with the teacher a few weeks earlier. As the situation unfolded, I found myself struggling with whether or not I should interject since the happenings clearly conflicted with what I knew as a teacher, yet I knew that doing so would influence my position as a new member of the classroom community. I even wrote in my notes:

As I walked in, as new as I ever could be, a stranger to them and the school, societal expectations and norms preceded me as my identity in the school was beginning to be formed. The clothes, the bag, the jewelry, the heels...all spoke to the children without words. The children spoke back without words as well. Their looks were silent messages to each other to be quiet as I walked into the room. Immediate questions as to their teacher's whereabouts clearly showed they thought I was their sub. As they continued to talk while announcements were on, the EA looked at me as though I was supposed to respond to the chaos ensuing in the room. Children came up to me telling me what Mrs. Neider does when the class is loud. Societal norms preceded me. My existence was painted before me already communicating loudly before I had even been introduced. I wasn't the stranger I thought I was, my identity was not my own to construct. (Field Note, October 10, 2007)

I wrote that the educational assistant in the room was looking at me like I should be doing something about what was going on because I had the impression she thought I was the substitute teacher. Whether this was her actual thought I do not know. It could have been my own internal struggle at that moment and the children's reactions that gave me that impression. This was one of my many recorded moments of tension between being the teacher or being the researcher.

Exploring Tensions as a Researcher

I struggled with bringing the tendencies I had as a teacher to my position within the classroom community as a researcher. I tried to keep the teacher tendencies to a minimum since I did not want the children to view me as another teacher in the room. This became quite a paradox for me and for the students, as they called me Mrs. Lawrence and I told them when I was introduced that I had been a teacher before I decided to go back to university to "learn how to be a better teacher." I still felt the need to distance myself from my teacher-self in order to

develop my own place within the classroom community. I did not want to step on the toes of the classroom teacher. This distance was also important to me because I wanted to develop a relationship with the children in the classroom in a different way than I would have if I were the teacher. I found that once I was able to remove myself from the responsibilities I felt as a teacher, I was able to develop relationships in different ways and view the classroom experience in different ways. I relate this to Greene (1973) when she wrote that "...we live immersed in our daily lives. By taking for granted the commonsense reality of things, we function habitually, conventionally" (p. 131). I had spent two years in a habitual routine of teaching without taking the time to step back and view my life, particularly as a classroom teacher, from an inquiring point of view.

The separation of my "teacher self" and "researcher self" was one I grappled with regularly. I wrote a short reflection that expressed the continuing tension:

I did not want the children to see me as the substitute teacher particularly because this was my first time in the classroom. They had not been introduced to me and I had not explained my position in their classroom. I did not want to compromise this by acting as a teacher while Elaine was out of the room. However, I did feel a sort of tension arise here because my instinct was to act like a teacher particularly with another adult in the classroom who I believe thought I was a substitute. (Field Note, October 10, 2007)

The fact that this was the second time I wrote about this same tension in the first morning I was in the field is indicative of it being in the forefront of my mind at the beginning of my inquiry. Reflecting on this particular morning, I see that I was in a position where I was not sure what role I was going to play in this classroom. I was not sure what it meant to be Erin the researcher and was searching for continuity in my experience (Dewey, 1938) and a coherence in my life story (Carr, 1986). My experience, my life story, included being a teacher. The story I was living was included being a teacher and I was afraid that having another adult think that I was not a good teacher would compromise who I already knew I was.

In the process of trying to understand myself, my identity, I considered Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) use of the term "stories to live by" (p.4) to refer to identity as it is understood narratively. This resonated with me as I considered the notion of my life, and that of others, as being complex stories comprised of many characters, shifting plotlines, with places of tension and resolution, all woven together to compose unique individuals. Using this term, stories to live

by, and understanding identity narratively is supported by Lyle (2000) when she wrote that “[h]uman beings are predisposed to organize experience into a narrative form” (p. 53).

As I wove myself as a researcher into my story to live by I had several shifts in perspective. As already mentioned, I tried to experience the classroom through a different lens than I had previously as a teacher. I was not sure what this meant at the beginning of the inquiry. I experienced several shifts in perspective as the inquiry unfolded:

I found it very interesting to sit among the students today. For the first time I took myself out of the role of the teacher and researcher as “note taker” and opened myself to the role of the student. I sat among the children and felt the waiting time and the boredom. My mind started to wander and I looked around the room at the children. I suppressed the need to fidget, to talk, to move. I still knew better than to let these show just as I had as an elementary, high school, and university student. I looked around and saw students like me, sitting quietly, although I don’t know what is going on in their minds, they appear to be learning the way intended by the teacher. I also see others...the ones noticeably distracted and seemingly disinterested, clearly missing the intended learning. As I sat there, as a student, I realized that maybe it wasn’t just those who were obviously distracted that weren’t learning. I realized that my mind was wandering; I just knew how to avoid attention and conform. So is it the material I was learning, or simply the keys to portray the image of a good student? (Field Note, October 15, 2007)

I mentioned a new shift away from teacher and researcher to that of the perspective of a student. Moreover, I identified my researcher self as being a “note taker.” At that beginning point of the inquiry this was sincerely my understanding of who I was as a researcher. This passage seems to typify Dewey’s (1938) principle of continuity of experience, “From this point of view, the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p.35). In bringing this particular experience to Dewey’s theory I realized that the key to understanding who I am as a researcher was in understanding that who I am as a student, a teacher, a daughter, a mother and all the other parts of my past and present, are who I am as a researcher. Each of these parts of my life have influenced my story to live by. In this particular moment when I had a shifting perspective to that of a student, simultaneously I had a temporal shift to my past experience as a student and I created a new realization as a researcher. In

moments I had combined my experiences as a student and a teacher in classrooms to create this new experience as a researcher.

Emerging as a Researcher

The narrative inquiry I undertook changed my understanding of the possibilities of research. The methodology of narrative inquiry serves a dual purpose in this context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative as both the method for research but also the phenomena of study. It is in both these contexts, the way I chose to conduct my research and the actual inquiry into experiences of children, that the inquiry I undertook expanded my limited understanding of what research means.

When I entered the graduate program my knowledge of research was limited to science fair projects in high school biology. My participation in research was limited to questionnaires, or surveys. When I initially tried to come up with a methodology for approaching my research wonder, I struggled to figure out how to go about it. I started with ideas around ways to improve achievement, thinking I could survey students for their opinions, or implement a teaching strategy and give a before and after test or a questionnaire. As my time in university went on and my knowledge of types of research was expanding, I realized that I had a very narrow and limited view of the possibilities for research and I was trying to fit myself into a place where my wonders did not fit. I began to realize that “[t]hey, the methodologies, should not be the decisive, determining factors in dictating where we look, what we see, how we study, and how we interpret” (Brimfeld, Roderick & Yamamoto, 1983, p. 10). I had made the decision I was going to use a quantitative or experimental method to explore my research wonder. As time passed and through time for self discovery, I realized that my research wonders actually were being harnessed by my idea of what type of research I was trying to conduct.

Situating the Inquiry

When I began the proposal for this inquiry, I had a focus on children’s experiences within mathematics. As I entered the field, I began to see new interests emerging that diverged from my initially proposed research wonder. Brimfield, Roderick and Yamamoto (1983) cite Berman who wrote, “[t]he image of something emerging is consonant with the idea of knowing being very personal, involving surprises and discovery” (p. 13). This was an uncomfortable phenomenon for me as it created tension with my typical structured and scientific view of research, again

evidence of the “young Erin” being part of my story to live by as a researcher, support for Clandinin and Connelly’s (1999) idea that identities have histories. As I began to spend time in the field I realized that I struggled to extract mathematical experiences from the students without considering other parts of who they were. I needed to allow the knowledge to emerge as the experience in the field unfolded. This concept, although explained and described in great detail to me before my inquiry by several professors and through reading, was incomprehensible until I was immersed in the inquiry and was able to experience it for myself. I began to understand that the knowing was not going to come from somewhere else, I was the one who is going to construct my knowing by spending time immersed in the inquiry site (Brimfield et al., 1983; Greene, 1973).

Understanding the Inquiry Space

Murphy (2004) employed Clandinin and Connelly’s metaphor of professional landscapes to help understand the context of schools. “It allows us to talk about space, place and time. Furthermore, it has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things and events in different relationships” (Clandinin & Connelly as cited in Murphy, 2004, p. 25). This metaphor helped me understand the complexity of the experiences being lived on the inquiry landscape each day. In this particular inquiry I had the opportunity to live alongside the teacher and children as part of the community of individuals that comprised the classroom landscape. It is with the understanding of the complex relationships that are negotiated within the classroom landscape that I realized the importance of becoming a part of the landscape myself:

In order to join the narrative, to become part of the landscape, the researcher needs to be there long enough and to be a sensitive reader of and questioner of situations in an effort to grasp the huge number of events and stories, the many twisting and turning narrative threads that pulse through every moment and show up in what appears to the new and inexperienced eyes of the researcher as a mysterious code. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 77)

This was evident in my field notes taken the first day I visited the classroom. I noted my curiosity of many of the classroom routines particularly in transition from place to place or subject to subject. “The amount of routine that is present seems to have many ramifications.

There are children who seem to welcome the routine and many who seem to rely on it, but it also seemed to cause certain children to stand out as being disruptive” (Field Note, October 10, 2007). Many of my field notes in the first weeks focused on these routines. After several visits, discussions with the teacher and getting to know the children, the routines began to make sense to me and were no longer the focus of my attention as they had been in the beginning. Even more significant was the deepened understanding of the students with whom I worked more closely, explained in the following chapters, as a relationship was built throughout my extended time living alongside them.

Exploring Experience

My time on the classroom landscape found me part of an intricate community including teachers, educational assistants, and students. I experienced Dewey’s (1938) theory that individuals need to be understood in relation, in this case to the other students and adults living on the landscape, but also by parents, families and friends beyond the landscape. This was something I, in some ways, knew as a teacher before I came to this inquiry. It manifested in my belief that behind every behavior was always a reason, but I had never internalized the complexity of understanding experience.

Dewey (1938) discussed two principles of understanding experience: continuity and interaction. I mentioned earlier his principle of continuity suggesting that situations or experiences from the past affect the present experiences and in turn both past and present will impact future subsequent experiences. Each experience modifies the persons involved. Interaction is Dewey’s second principle for interpreting experience. “It assigns equal rights to both factors in experience – objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a situation” (p. 42). He also suggested that it is the lack of attention paid to internal conditions that is problematic in traditional schools. As I began to weave together my experiences as a student, a teacher, and researcher, with both Dewey’s principles for interpreting experience, seemingly simple situations which earlier seemed one dimensional began to take on different dimensions. In places where I may have earlier seen the surface, I began to see multiple layers.

As my understanding of experience changed, the way I understood the individuals in the classroom and the dynamics within the classroom also changed. I began to see the influence of the relationships among the members of the community. I started to witness Dewey's (1938) theory that all human experience is social involving contact and communication with other human beings. This revelation was pivotal in considering sociality as one of the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry to help understand experience (Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007). One of these relationships in particular was the teacher, Elaine, with students. The inquiry was not about teacher practice, but the significant impact she had on shaping the classroom landscape became an important piece of my understanding the experiences of the children I wrote about in the following chapters. As I spent time in the classroom, I realized more and more how important the relationship was between each student and Elaine. Elaine was absolutely central to the class and the dynamics of the landscape.

When I am in Elaine's classroom I always get the feeling that all the children are appreciated as am I. Her approach to the children and her classroom and everything going on in the classroom is one of joy, appreciation and connection. There is so much personal contact through conversation, eye contact and interaction. (Field Note, October 17, 2007)

This connection between Elaine and each of her students showed up many times in my field notes in different ways as well as in the conversations I had with students. Elaine certainly is a source outside the individual that influences the experiences on the landscape (Dewey, 1938).

As I immersed myself in the landscape of this classroom I considered the fact that I was going to be part of the intricate community of individuals as well, someone that changed the landscape by my very existence on it just as the teacher and each student did. My view of myself as a researcher used to be one removed from the study, trying to be as objective as possible in order to produce valid, unbiased results. I now acknowledge that not only did I impact the landscape, but who I am affected what I saw, did not see, wrote and chose not to write. I did not attempt to objectify the field texts that I collected nor the text that follows. I conducted the inquiry and composed research text under the premise that the understanding I had of the experiences of the children on that landscape, my knowing, was not something to be understood externally of me (Greene, 1973).

Research Puzzle

Much time in self reflection, and an interruption and transformation in personal understanding of what education, schooling and being a teacher really means have created many situations of tension for me, some of which I explored in this chapter. I came to realize how powerfully influential the school landscape is, including the teacher and the very structure of the education systems in which we live, on shaping the storied lives of children in our classrooms. In my experience as a teacher, I began to see that if I listened to the students in my classroom I heard the voices of many different stories being lived by each individual. Although each story was different, the similarity remained that students were experiencing tensions related to achievement and performance. In addition, they were living with tensions around understanding themselves as individuals, creating their stories to live by. I began to wonder about these tensions and the way that the school experience influenced these stories.

I realized through different experiences both as a student and as a teacher that the voices of children are so often stifled by teachers and other adults' need to control, our need to be the teacher, our need to cover government curricula, our need to deliver certain initiatives and programs, our need to label and to assess. I wanted to listen to the stories of children in an attempt to understand and interpret their experiences on school landscapes and the way these experiences weave together and shape the stories of who they are as people. This led me to my research puzzle which is how children's experiences on school landscapes influence them as they compose their stories to live by.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Beginning the Journey

Deciding on the methodology for this research was quite a journey. As I imagined my research upon entry into the graduate program I had envisioned designing and administering some sort of test that would provide statistics to “prove” something. As my journey continued, through classes and interacting with classmates and professors, I experienced a shift in perspective and values in terms of research. I began with a Western Philosophical mind as Lyle (2000) described “that has a positive distrust of affect and emotion, preferring instead reason and the qualities of detachment, distance and cool appraisal” (p. 55). I had entered this program with an idea that I wanted to prove a particular teaching strategy that would improve achievement in mathematics students using some sort of test and statistical analysis. Through experience with different professors and doing reading and writing of my own I began to see there was a different way to attempt to understand the world. Bruner (1996) suggested that there are two ways that humans make sense of the world. The first is logico-mathematical, which aligns with Western philosophy, and the second is a narrative understanding. It was this shift, from logico-mathematical to narrative understanding that led me discovering the research puzzle (Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007) that I decided to explore.

As I reflected on my personal journey, I realized that I have always equated success with outcomes, particularly marks on tests, assignments, and report cards. It was with this perspective, a Western perspective, I had come back to university intent on researching different teaching methods to improve achievement in middle years mathematics. I had decided this after seeing many students struggle in my math classes and express a lack of confidence and dislike for the subject. I started to understand that this view of experience, linked solely to achievement as determining a positive or negative experience in school, was a simplistic one. I have now come to realize the complexity of experience (Davis, 2004; Dewey, 1938). By equating experience to outcomes I was focused on only one of the many complex layers comprising the experiences of the children I taught. I expanded my understanding of the complexity of experience by using

Dewey's (1938) principles, continuity and interaction, as discussed in chapter 1 but also in viewing experience as being understood narratively (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1996). Experience is not something that occurs in isolation of time and space, it has links to the past and the future, and it is situated within relations to other experiences, places and human beings (Dewey, 1938; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007). People are not just the mark they receive on a report card, as Danny implied as he saw the 82% on his paper, identities have histories and each student has a whole life story that has led them to any particular experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999).

Through my experience at the university, I came to realize that it was the experiences of the children in my classrooms that were at the root of my interest, with achievement being only part of the whole story. As a researcher, I was interested in children's experience, but I had a very limited understanding of what "experience" meant. I equated academic success on tests and on report cards with a positive or negative experience. This was in part due to my own experience as a student where marks and report cards were the determining factor for whether or not I had a good experience. I had associated a "bad" experience with those who were unsuccessful in the school, either failing or struggling on a daily basis to achieve high grades. Furthermore, the culture around schools also contributed to this view of experience. The emphasis on achievement has been central to the educational institution for hundreds of years. The use of statistics beginning in the 1800's increased this emphasis as dichotomies based on achievement became evident (Davis, 2004). Achievement is consistently communicated to children in schools both informally and formally through their peers (Jackson, 1968), verbal communication with teachers, assignments, tests, report cards, and parent teacher interviews. As a teacher, there was not a day that went by where judgments were not made about a child based on his or her achievement. I wanted to explore experience beyond those judgments.

Why Narrative Inquiry?

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. I chose narrative inquiry because of the fundamental belief that "...narrative inquiry is stories lived and stories told" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.20). An interest in children's identity within classrooms led me to Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) concept of stories to live by as being a place where context, knowledge, and identity can be understood narratively. I was

drawn into the notion that people in narrative inquiry “are looked at as embodiments of lived stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). My struggle initially in the field when I began my research was in trying to understand the children in the classroom in terms of a mathematical identity that I could extract and understand. By shifting my perspective from the idea of identity to story to live by, I began to understand that there was a complex weaving of narrative threads that composed the stories being lived, embodied, by each child. I started to see that among these narrative threads mathematics is just one. I became interested in attempting to interpret and understand the experiences of the children on the classroom landscape with a more holistic perspective. When discussing narrative as a way of understanding experience Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote, “[o]ur excitement and interest in narrative has its origins in our interest in experience” (p. xxvi), and that experience can be captured by the idea of the stories people live.

Recently I have been a part of a story being lived by my godmother, Janice, her son Ryder, and the rest of their family that has reinforced this complex view of experience. It is my position in this experience that has allowed me to see the complexity of these stories and the ways in which the stories of individuals are woven together in certain places, and the influence that each individual has on the others’ stories. Janice was alerted to the fact that her son was having some problems at school. He has trouble paying attention and he was experiencing reading problems. These alerts came in the form of notes from school and calls from the vice-principal. When she asked the teacher and special education teacher what the problem was, she felt that she was given insufficient feedback as to understand the perceived problem. At home, she saw an eager reader, an imaginative and creative little boy who was not experiencing any reading problems. Janice and her husband were called to a meeting at the school to discuss Ryder’s problems and the possibility of testing for attention deficit disorder. The lives of the teacher, Ryder, Janice and her family members, all with unique narrative threads, are woven together in a complex experience. Ryder was being storied as a child with ADD, which in turn was affecting his social condition within the classroom and the relationship with his teacher. Janice expressed feelings of apprehension, worry, anxiety, and uncertainty as she lived out the experience and as she was affected by the teacher and Ryder and each of their experiences. This one small example shows the complexity involved in the weaving of narrative threads and the

power of the examination of experience in this particular way; thinking of experience as story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006 as cited in Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007).

I am drawn back to the grade 12 boys I taught, among them, Danny. I saw these boys for one or maybe two hours a day about 5 times a week. These boys were much more than grade 12 ELA students. Each of them had a unique story to live by, woven together with narrative threads that existed both on and off the classroom landscape. They were sons, brothers, boyfriends, employees, friends, nephews, uncles, cousins and veteran students, all in unique ways, shaping and reshaping the stories they were living by in my classroom. By reflecting on this realization, I came to see that I was interested in hearing the multifaceted stories of children that live on classroom landscapes. I wanted to attempt to understand children's experiences not through testing as I had originally intended, logico-mathematically, but by becoming part of their story and listening to their voices, their stories lived and told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I wanted to see beyond what I had previously seen in my students as a teacher, to explore the complexities which I knew existed. Pearce (2004) wrote that "...it is narrative inquiry that helps me see what lies beyond a painting, a storied moment" (p. 258).

Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry

In order to understand the experiences of children through narrative inquiry, I worked in collaboration with the participants over time within the context of their classroom to have the opportunity to live, tell, relive, and retell the stories that comprise the experiences in their lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Pivotal to listening to and becoming part of these stories was considering the commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007). These commonplaces framed the focus of my inquiry into the lived stories of the children in the classroom. They bolster my understanding of experience as I have discussed in relation to Dewey's (1938) principles of continuity and interaction. The first commonplace is temporality. As an inquirer, it was important for me to respect that each individual in the inquiry has a past, present, and future trajectory (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Reflection on my own life and the significance each of the pieces of my past has had on my life story along with my experience with Danny and his classmates helped me to examine this aspect of the children's experience on the classroom landscape.

I also had to consider sociality as a commonplace. This again parallels Dewey (1938) as he suggested that all human experience is social. In my inquiry a relationship between the participants and me as an inquirer was inevitable as I spent many hours immersed in their experiences in the classroom; this relationship was not one that can be removed or diminished as part of the inquiry, nor did I attempt to do so. This commonplace also concerns the personal and social conditions that both influence and are influenced by the children's lived stories. These conditions include their family life, relationships with other students in and out of the class, and the relationships with teachers. Lyle (2000) supports both Dewey and Clandinin et al (2007) when she cited Bruner and wrote that "most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture" (p. 49).

Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray Orr's (2007) third commonplace I considered was place, referring to the physical places and spaces that the inquiry took place in. This inquiry was specifically in the classroom. The significance of these commonplaces in interpreting experience is explained by Dewey (1938):

The conceptions of situation and of interaction are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the situation; or the toys with which he is playing; the book he is reading (in which his enviroing conditions at the time may be England or ancient Greece or an imaginary region); or the materials of an experiment he is performing. (pp. 43-44)

In this passage an essence of significance is placed on time, place, and relationships as they combine to provide the framework for experience. Considering the commonplaces of time, place, and sociality, I began to interpret and understand the experiences of the children with whom I was living alongside.

Participants

My inquiry was conducted in a fifth grade classroom in a small urban setting near a larger city. The school was kindergarten to grade 8 and predominantly middle class. I worked closely with two students in order to use the three commonplaces to inquire into the stories that these particular children are living out on the classroom landscape. The teacher was also an important

part of the inquiry, as she played a significant role on the classroom landscape. She helped shape the classroom space and was inevitably a considerable part of the social interaction with the children, resulting in her being part of the complex stories lived by the children in her classroom.

It is important to note that the teacher was not a participant in this inquiry because it was not about teacher practice. She did, however, have a significant influence on the child participants in the inquiry as I have mentioned above. There are many places in my field notes and in the conversations with the children that the teacher, Elaine, is evident. Elaine was affected by the research experience as she opened up her classroom to another adult on a regular basis for most of the school year. Inevitably the teacher was affected because a new adult in the room changes the dynamic of a classroom. As a teacher, myself, I know how it feels to have another adult in the classroom while I am teaching.

Elaine became a part of the research because of the special and unique way she ran her classroom. I found myself constantly writing in my field notes things that she did or ways the classroom was set up. In the naivety of my proposal stage for this research inquiry, I somehow believed I would be able to understand the stories of the children and hear their voices in separation from the teacher. As I came to realize throughout the inquiry and in internalizing the significance of the influence of social context on experience (Dewey, 1938; Bruner, 1992; Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007) I could not understand the children's stories without Elaine because she was so much a part of their experience on the classroom landscape and, as a result, in their stories to live by.

Another important participant in this study was me, as an inquirer, and as part of the research. I have found that throughout this process of reading, writing and imagining the inquiry I conducted, I could not help but reflect on my own experiences as a student in mathematics classrooms and school in general. I have slipped back and forth in time to places in my childhood remembering experiences that have helped shape who I am today, and how I came to see myself as a student. Through this inquiry, on a journey into the lived stories of children in this study, I experienced many of these temporal shifts to experiences residing in my past. These memories and connections to my personal past became part of the field text collection process and inadvertently weighed into my field text analysis. This research text arising from these field texts and analysis is an opportunity for me to lay my experiences and my story alongside those of the children.

Methods: Forms of Field Text

Field Notes

Throughout my eight months in the field, I explored a few different types of field texts. I kept field notes throughout the inquiry for each visit I had to the school. “These ongoing, daily notes, full of the details and moments of our inquiry lives in the field, are the text out of which we can tell stories of our story of experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 104). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) mentioned the importance of being the recorder of events outside of the event, or as a character within the event. At the beginning of this process I had imagined myself being the latter, in order to maintain authenticity of my living alongside the children in the classroom. However, as I transitioned into the field and became more comfortable with Elaine and that particular classroom landscape, it was best for me to be more of a recorder of events outside the event. This was what was best for Elaine and for the children in this particular classroom in order to maintain a consistency in their classroom dynamic. Out of respect for Elaine and the students, I maintained this role but was offered many opportunities to become a character within the event throughout the eight months I was collecting field texts.

As described in Murray Orr’s (2005) narrative inquiry, I planned to make minimal, essential notes during the day in moments that lent naturally to the opportunity, and the majority of notes to be written at day’s end in as much detail as could be remembered. This proved to be one of the most difficult tasks for me. I found myself, particularly at the beginning, feeling tied to my notebook for fear of forgetting something essential or missing something when I tried to remember at the end of the day. This feeling is indicative of the “young Erin” existing within the researcher Erin. I felt like everything was essential and did not want to miss anything. I collected field notes with pen and paper, and at home wrote more complete field notes in an electronic version. This gave me the opportunity to expand on the notes I had taken in the field, particularly my thoughts that went along with the events I had witnessed. I found that as I became more comfortable with the process, and began to trust my ability and memory, I felt less and less attached to the notebook and the notes I was creating, although they remained a reference point for my fuller field note creation.

Along with the descriptive field notes, I also maintained reflective notes. The reflective notes allowed me as an inquirer to watch outward and turn inward, essentially outwardly

observing and inwardly reflecting (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). At the beginning I imagined these notes in a dual column journal where the outward observations were recorded on one side, and personal inward responses on the other. I allowed myself the freedom to adjust this type of field text as I became immersed in the classroom landscape. I experimented with this dual column type as well as combining these two columns into one. I found that the single column notes with observations and thoughts marked with stars or asterisks worked best for the way I was thinking while I was observing. I realized it was most natural for me to have my thinking embedded in the field notes, but I noted the difference between an outward observation and an inward reflection. This is not to say that outward observations were completely free of the influence of inward thoughts. As I have already acknowledged, who I am inevitably influenced my observations. I was also able to insert inward reflections as I was typing my written notes. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe an inquiry where a journal was used as field text:

Davie's research journal is an interesting blend of detailed field notes on her visit to the school interwoven with journal reflections on how she felt about the experience. She records the existential conditions of what she is doing, situating them in a place, at a certain time, with detail of particular events noted. She then turns inward to give an account of her feelings... (p. 103)

I felt that my field text collection was similar to that mentioned above. As I made my notes electronic, I would leave observations in paragraphs with regular text and insert thoughts and inward accounts in italics. There were many times that I struggled with deciding which type of text to use, demonstrating the blend and weaving of outward observation and inward reflection.

Recorded Conversations

For face to face interactions between me and the children with whom I worked, I used audio recorded conversations. I chose to use conversations instead of interviews for several reasons as mentioned by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "...conversations are marked by equality among participants and by flexibility to allow participants to establish forms and topics appropriate to their group inquiry" (p. 109). I appreciated this approach because it aligned with developing and maintaining trust and integrity with the individuals in the inquiry. I really wanted the children to see me as one who traveled on this journey along with them, and them with me. I wanted them to see me as one who respected their stories as individual and unique. Going into

the inquiry I had created a list of general topics that I would be interested in discussing with the boys. Some of these included their thoughts around assessment and evaluation, their experiences within mathematics, their understanding of how others perceive them in the classroom, and their identity within subject matter.

Flexibility was important to me as the experience emerged to create new ideas and phenomena. When I began this inquiry, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter, my focus was on mathematics but this focus broadened as the children led me on various journeys through their unique experience with math being only a part. The children's relationships to other students and the teacher within the classroom became an important focus as well as the way they positioned themselves within the classroom as a member of their classroom community, for example a leader or a good student. Their experiences with assessment became another area of discussion as their experience this year differed greatly from past years. For me, flexibility in the conversations reinforced the concept that each child's story emerged in different and equally important ways. This was evident in my conversations with the two children with whom I worked. Each of the boys had very different conversations with me. Brent needed hardly any structure and our interaction truly became a conversation emerging mainly from his thoughts. My questions for him were largely constructed from his previous statements. Peter on the other hand needed more prompting and probing by me in order to carry the conversation. I knew that I needed to have more scripted questions or themes of discussion going into these conversations than with Brent. From these two different types of conversations their stories emerged in different manners, reflecting our conversation structures.

I opted to use an audio recorder during these important conversations because by doing so I was able to be a participant in the conversation without having to concern myself with recording the dialogue with text (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). For equality to be present in the conversations, as mentioned above, it was essential that I contributed equally to the conversation including being a listener. I attempted to do this by freeing myself of trying to capture the conversation via notes during the conversations. I had initially thought of doing three conversations with each child, but in reality, two was more reasonable for the teacher and for the timeline I had given myself for field text collection.

Documents

I also used documents as field texts. During the process of deciding which children I wanted to invite to partake in this journey with me, I asked students to create a timeline of their experiences in mathematics thus far. I chose mathematics because of my interest in the subject as a place to start. I used these as stems for conversations with students in the class, and for a starting point to understanding their experiences. This exercise became a trigger to some of the students for feelings in the present or from the past, opening up possibilities for communication into rich memories and experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Negotiating Research Relationships

The teacher

Since narrative inquiry involves an extended period of time living alongside several individuals, it was essential to negotiate a fluid and natural weaving of my lived story as a researcher with the lived stories within the classroom. The first step was to negotiate a relationship with the teacher, Elaine. When I considered this relationship, I considered my position as a teacher for two years before becoming a researcher. I remembered that any new adult, change of schedules, or the addition or subtraction of students had dramatic influence on the classroom story and the children's individual narrative threads that comprise it. As the year went on and we got to know each other, discussing openly the roles that each of us were playing in the classroom, our previously forced meeting of lived stories became naturally and effectively woven into the overarching classroom narrative. This became a similar path for the relationship between Elaine and me, becoming more natural as the inquiry progressed.

My relationship with Elaine became an important part of my research in many ways. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote that a research relationship is one that is negotiated throughout the inquiry. The negotiation started with a visit to meet her several weeks before I planned to become involved in her classroom. It was then that I introduced her to my research puzzle and shared my ideas for how I saw the inquiry unfolding. Immediately she was interested in my research ideas, narrative inquiry as a methodology, and my critical thoughts about the education system. As the research progressed and our relationship changed over the course of my

time in the classroom, she became a sounding board for ideas, a discussion partner for my wonders and realizations, and a friend outside of the research. We engaged in many conversations generated by my observations, my reading or my research puzzle. She became a confidante and a source of support as I shared with her my sometimes uncertainty with this entire process. There were many times Elaine expressed to me how grateful she was for being part of this research inquiry because of the growth she experienced as a result of being part of it. This is just one example of how the participants of a narrative inquiry are affected by their experience of being in the research experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000)

We developed the relationship with open communication and a very open door policy on her part. We spoke often about respecting each others' needs, my need to be involved and her need to have time with her students alone to keep things smooth for them. I made sure to respect her need for me not to be there at certain points without being offended or hurt. In the same sense, I felt welcome when I was there with the exception of a few times when classroom life proved to be stressful and busy. Even then I had a sense that it was my own feeling of being underfoot that created doubt. This welcoming feeling, along with mutual respect and open and honest communication were the main reasons why the relationship developed into one that became so conducive to a comfortable research environment and my smooth transition into the classroom.

The two boys

The negotiation of relationships with the child participants was of utmost importance. In choosing the two students whom I lived alongside in the inquiry, I considered my experiences as a coach and a teacher. There were several students and athletes that I immediately found connection with. These connections were different for each student or athlete, but all were based on trust, respect, and communication. There are still students that send me emails or call me to invite me to watch them play volleyball or to go out for lunch, even years after the initial weaving of our individual narrative threads. These particular connections were made naturally and without pressure. As I look back at my own career as a student, there were certain teachers that I made a connection with as a student, and those that I didn't. It was in considering my perspectives both as a teacher and as a student that the two child participants emerged for me in this inquiry. Essentially the students chose me as I soon began to identify students with whom I

felt a mutual connection. For the first eight weeks I was in the classroom, I observed and participated with the class from a very general perspective, getting a feel for the students and their unique stories and personalities before I chose the participants. The two boys that became the participants in this inquiry were ones that I perceived to be open to me in ways that allowed me to live, listen, understand, tell, and retell their stories. They were also ones whose experience fascinated me, each for different reason. The relationship that I negotiated with each of the boys was quite different and developed in unique ways as I will show later in this work.

Negotiating Field Text Collection

Along with this negotiated relationship was the negotiation of the collection of field texts. Because this inquiry relied on trust, integrity, and respect, I wanted to make sure that the children I worked with were completely comfortable with the means by which we communicated. As I think back to the ways I felt comfortable communicating as a student in elementary school, I remember writing journals and letters to my teachers and my parents, even my friends even as a small child. I always felt safe communicating through writing, as I was somewhat shy as a child. Two way journals with my teacher were my favorite way to express my feelings and thoughts. In this particular inquiry, both of the boys were very open to taped conversations as the major means for communication. At the first recorded conversation I made sure to explain the audio recorder and the reason for using it. I explained the process of transcription and the fact that using the recorder helps me concentrate on being part of the conversation instead of trying to write down the important things they had to say.

A negotiation of the time and place for communication was also necessary. Originally I thought it would be negotiated with the child, but Elaine ended up also being a significant part of this negotiation. I did not want the conversation time to put the children in a position of being behind in their work or missing something significant. I wanted to make sure that spending time in conversation with me was not deemed by the children as something negative. The place for communication was negotiated with Elaine and the boys. Elaine's room worked nicely as it had several small adjoining rooms. I wanted to attend to the space commonplace in relation to these conversations. These rooms were familiar to the children and used on a regular basis as part of their school day for peer conferences, sharing stories, quiet time, or privacy time. It provided a comfortable, familiar, quiet, and non-threatening environment for our conversations. Since I had

done Writer's Workshop² conferences, observed little skits, and discussed novels with the children in these rooms, it was not something out of the ordinary for them or me.

There was also some negotiation in my collection of field texts in terms of the notes I kept in my notebook. I did not really consider this as something to be negotiated with the all children in the classroom until a few months into the inquiry when Elaine mentioned to me that some of the children were wondering what I was writing in my notebook when I was there. After she brought this to my attention I approached the class and explained that I am writing down some of the things that happen in the classroom during my visits that I do not want to forget. I gave them a few examples of things that I had written about previously. With Brent, one of the children I worked with, I read him a specific passage I had written about him after watching him read a story to his classmates and explained that I would be using notes like this and the conversations we had together to try to understand the experiences he had at school and then write about it in a paper for my school.

Negotiating a Space

Another important negotiation was between me, the researcher, and the place in which the research is occurring. "One can often be 'there' and feel like one does not quite belong" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 75). In order to find a space for me to belong, I asked Elaine to consider including me in daily activities along with her and the children. As I have already discussed, this became an area of negotiation as my role became more of an observer in the beginning out of respect for Elaine and the children. She felt that this group of children needed consistency in the classroom as she was working on creating routines and developing a particular atmosphere. As the year went on and my presence became more commonplace, I participated more in the classroom activities. Elaine invited me to try things with the kids and I was always welcomed to teach lessons. I found this somewhat problematic because I wanted to remove myself from the role of a teacher. As previously mentioned, this became one of my biggest struggles as a researcher, observer, and participant in the children's lived stories. However, with the two children with whom I worked more closely, a more personal relationship was developed

² Writer's Workshop was a common activity in the classroom where children went through a specific writing process of planning, drafting, editing by both self and peers, to a final composition that could be shared with the class in an Author's Chair

as we spent more time communicating on a personal level removed from the daily classroom routine. Originally I thought that the first month of the school year would be spent with the focus on creating a space for me as a researcher in order to be open for relationships to develop with the children, but it actually became an ongoing negotiation as the inquiry unfolded. This experience has helped me understand that when participating in a narrative inquiry the space that one must negotiate for oneself is not something static that can be found and resided in for the remainder of the inquiry. Because of the dynamic nature of the classroom landscape, the relationships that are developed and the changes that occur over the time spent there, one's space on that landscape is also dynamic thus needing ongoing negotiation.

Negotiating Out of the Field

As important as the negotiations into the field is the negotiation of the transitions out of the field. This is a delicate transition as time, energy and emotions have been invested in the intimate relationships that developed in the intricate weaving of narrative threads during the time spent living alongside the children on the classroom landscape. "It is critical to the trust and integrity of the work that researchers do not simply walk away when 'their time has come'" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.74). In order to respect these relationships and to maintain integrity in them, the transition out of the field occurred slowly. Collection of field texts occurred from October through to the beginning of April as I attend the school about two half days a week. I had intended this to be at least two full days of the week, but in negotiation with the Elaine and out of respect to her wishes, half days were much more realistic for her. To slowly transition from creating field texts to creating research texts, I attended the school fewer times, once a week, and then once every few weeks as the school year culminated. This process of slowly transitioning out of the classroom was important for my narrative inquiry because of the relationships that had developed over time. I wanted the children to feel that I respected the relationships we had developed as the inquiry unfolded; this included not only the two children I worked closely with, but all the children in the classroom as I had developed a relationship to the entire class. Out of respect for these relationships, I was involved with this classroom for the entire school year, but with a changing role as the year long inquiry progressed. I did not want the children to feel like I just disappeared as soon as the work was finished (Clandinin &

Connelly 2000). I wanted them to know that I cared about them as a class and as individuals and the time I had spent with them.

CHAPTER THREE

BRENT: THE RESPONSIBLE ONE

Getting to know Brent

When I first started visits to Elaine's classroom I was somewhat overwhelmed by the daunting task in front of me. Not only was this my first time back in a classroom in months, but it was my first time being in the classroom with the identity of a researcher. I knew I had to choose two children to work alongside in this inquiry and was faced with 24 of them, each living out unique stories in and out of Elaine's classroom. It was not far into my classroom visits when Brent started to show up in my field notes.

Elaine told the children that we were going to have a panel discussion. She explained the reason that we were sitting in the desks, and not with them on the floor, was because we are adults and we need to discuss some important things. She mentioned that she was disappointed in the behavior that was happening over the last few days with a substitute here in her place. She said that each of the three adults in the room, including me, was going to make a comment. I made my comment about being disappointed in their behavior because I knew how well they could behave when Mrs. Neider was in the room. Mrs. Neider then asked them to close their eyes and let my voice run through their minds. She asked them to listen to my voice one more time as I quickly summarized my point in a few sentences for them. She then asked them to sit quietly and let something shift inside of them. When they feel it, they are to open their eyes. A few of the children commented that they didn't feel any different, some commented they needed to interrupt others less, and another said he could change a little bit, but was mostly good. Brent seemed distraught and put up his hand. He said that he had two voices in his head and he wasn't sure which one to listen to. One was telling him he needed to change and the other was saying he is too hard on himself. (Field Note, October 17, 2007)

I remember this experience as one of the first times I attended specifically to Brent's story in this classroom. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) wrote that schools are places of story, stories composed by teachers, families, children, administrators and others living their lives there. Just as schools are places of story, so is each classroom. It was on this October day I began being

drawn into Brent's story as it was being lived out in Elaine's classroom. I had an interest in the way that Brent articulated his thoughts and I sensed honesty in them. A few moments after the two voices comment, Elaine asked the children to leave something behind in the circle where they were sitting. This could be a behavior, an attitude, or something they didn't want to bring forward with them. "Some sat for a long time with their eyes closed. Brent never did get up. It seems as though he was taking this very seriously and he was getting very emotional about it" (Field Note, October 17, 2007).

Experiencing this classroom moment gave me a small peek into the story of Brent. I began to realize there was tension within this child, he was aware of it, and he seemed willing to communicate about it. Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murray Orr, Pearce and Steeves (2006) "offer a way to understand the tensions experienced in the bumping up of lives" (p. 8). The authors described the tension as "competing stories," where two stories collide with one another (p.8). Brent's life was bumping up against that of his teacher, Elaine, the educational assistant, and me, a new adult in the classroom. In addition his story was bumping against the "dominant story of school" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p.8). As this bumping took place, Brent was left in a place of tension where his story was colliding, creating a dissonance within him, with the other stories being lived out on the landscape of his classroom. In his explanation of "hearing two voices," I sensed that Brent was putting into words the feeling of competing stories. The stories of the adult expectations were telling him that he needed to change who he was, while his competing story told him that he is fine the way he is and is being too hard on himself. The way Brent stayed sitting on the floor, cross legged with his eyes closed, alone, as all the other children had returned to their desks, gave me the sense that this was a child I wanted to get to know better, and to explore the tensions he seemed to be feeling and communicating.

As the first few weeks my visits continued, I began to spend more and more time with Brent. It did not take long to learn Brent's passion for drama. He continually made references to famous movies and actors. There were many times throughout the year that I was able to experience his talent for acting in various situations in the classroom. He was extremely interested in Shakespeare and his plays and was even writing his own scripts for *Corner Gas*³. I would often use recesses when he would stay in and research different things on the Internet as

³ A Canadian sit com based on life in small town Saskatchewan aired on CTV

an opportunity to sit next to him and explore with him. I had opportunities to partner with him in classroom activities, or join in on group activities. Through this interaction along with observing full class activity, I quickly learned that Brent was a student who was much like me as a student. He did as the teacher asked, he was quiet when he was supposed to be listening, and he was frustrated with the behavior of those who were not doing these things. In a conversation with him I asked what he thought about school in general. He responded by saying, "I like school most of the time unless kids are really out of turn like talking out of turn and stuff...Um, I don't like it when kids are talking out of turn like I said, or kind of talking back to the teacher 'cause then it's hard for us to work" (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008). He appeared to be a teacher's dream as a student, and content to be that student as he expressed tension created disapproval for those who did not behave in the way the dominant story of school expected.

I soon learned that behavior had always been an issue for this particular group of children. Blurting out, interrupting, lack of focus, high energy, and incessant chatter were common in my field notes during the first several months of school and were part of discussions among teachers on staff, including Elaine, and me as the inquiry unfolded. Many of the routines in the classroom were based on transitions from activity to activity, subject to subject or place to place. Behavior was inevitably part of the story of the classroom and woven through the stories of each of the children living within that larger story. Brent described this in a conversation when he was talking about the class when substitute teachers were in:

And I think that some subs like Miss Samson hasn't come back. She, she taught us once or twice and after those two times she's never come back. She's only taught the other grade 5 class. So I think possibly some substitutes don't want to come back here, which is kind of sad 'cause we are progressing. But the problem with some of those substitutes is they don't know what kind of potential we have. (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008)

In this statement he was very aware that the behavior of his class was something that was unacceptable in terms of school's expectations, the dominant story of school. He storied the class as being one that substitutes chose not to return to. Although he did not understand the way substitute teachers are acquired for a classroom, he had decided that it was teachers choosing not to return because of how "bad" the class behaved. Brent's story of who he is as a student was influenced by this overarching story of the classroom, particularly in terms of behavior. Miss

Samson happened to be in subbing for Elaine on the last day I visited the classroom and I asked her why she had not returned until now since it had been the full school year since her last job in this classroom. She responded that it had just not worked out that she had been called to return so it was not her choice as Brent had understood it to be. The way Brent used the term “we” in his discussion about the substitute shows that he identified himself as part of the whole, part of the behavior problem story. This short statement also reveals the tension that he felt because of this. By using “we” Brent owned the behavior issues in the class, even though he had identified himself as being set apart from the ones who talk too much in his previous statement. In addition, as I observed the class, he was clearly not one of the students that would be considered a behavior problem. He also expressed the tension in having the class storied as one with behavior problems as their “potential” was not realized beneath it. As I looked deeper into this statement alongside his tension of being storied part of the behavior issues, I had the sense that Brent felt there were many other aspects of him, other narrative threads in his story to live by, that were being neglected or veiled beneath the grand narrative (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) of the classroom.

Brent’s story was composed with the influence of his experience in this classroom as well as classrooms that came before. The dominant stories of school and this classroom influenced the way Brent was telling and living his story to live by, creating tension as he included himself in the classroom story using “we” and yet separated himself as “I” and “us” when he discussed the kids who talk out of turn. As the inquiry unfolded and my time in the classroom progressed, I began to observe situations that spoke to ways that Brent was positioning himself on the classroom landscape. As the relationship between Brent and me deepened, we became more and more comfortable in conversation. Both observation and conversation proved to surface the tensions he seemed to be grappling with as he composed and recomposed his story to live by and positioned and repositioned himself on the classroom landscape.

Composing a Story to Live by

Situating self

The Discussion Conductor

As soon as the lunch bell rang and the children were back in their desks, Sarah and Brent were at the front of the room waiting for the rest of the class to settle. They must have had a discussion with Elaine about starting the afternoon. Elaine introduced Sarah and Brent as being discussion leaders based on a Student Representative Council (SRC) meeting that had recently occurred. Brent began the discussion by saying “I am going to wait until everyone is quiet to start.” This was something reminiscent of Elaine’s rules for beginning anything. I heard her use this statement many times over the past months. When the class was quiet, he began reviewing what had happened at the meeting and reports that were to be taken back to each class. There were several issues that the SRC had asked the class representatives to get feedback on from their respective classes. Brent kept the discussion going as Sarah recorded answers on the board. As children voiced their opinions, Brent paraphrased the ideas into “jottable” points for Sarah. One student mentioned a problem within class and it began to snowball into children tattling on one another. Brent easily got the class back on track by asking if anyone who hadn’t had a chance to talk would like to give their opinion. At one point he looked to Elaine and asked, “How are we doing for time?” When he felt the discussion was coming to a close he said, “Cody, Morgan, Peter, and that is it.” Also reminiscent of a strategy Elaine uses in group discussion. As the discussion wrapped up, Brent asked Elaine if he could fill up the thermometer. This was a picture of a thermometer on the white board that was used as a visual demonstration of how the class was behaving on a particular day. Adding to the thermometer meant that the class was behaving well. I had not seen children add to the thermometer before; it was usually determined by the teacher. The discussion came to a close with Elaine complimenting Brent on how well he conducted a wonderful conversation. (Field Notes, November 27, 2007)

As I began to attend to Brent’s story, I constructed an idea of who I thought Brent was. I chose to include this above experience because it is indicative of the way I observed Brent to be positioned in this class from very early in the school year. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter,

he was the type of student any teacher would enjoy having in his or her class: well behaved, compliant, engaged and intelligent. In this particular situation he was doing numerous things, such as demanding quiet, paraphrasing, and making sure everyone got to share his or her opinion, all of which Elaine had been trying to teach the children for the first few months of school. I noted several times in this experience that he was exhibiting mannerisms Elaine used when she addressed the class. He took a strong leadership role, not only by being the classroom SRC representative, but specifically in the way he conducted the discussion with the class. He used Elaine's "teacher strategies" to position himself as the leader of the discussion. This showed up at the very beginning with a small statement like, "I am going to wait until everyone is quiet to start," when he demanded the attention of everybody. Most notably, at the end of the field note, he positions himself as one in charge of the group when he asks to "fill up the thermometer." This is used as a type of evaluation system for the class' behavior and he positioned himself as one who is responsible for carrying out this type of evaluation. It is important to note that he was not asked by Elaine to conduct this type of informal evaluation, but did so on his own. When I reflected on this field note again, I was reminded of how surprised I was at the maturity Brent exuded in the way he was able to control the classroom as a ten year old child. I remember thinking that he was exhibiting typical teacher skills. I had seen substitute teachers and other adults try to conduct similar conversations with this same class with no such luck. He was extremely polite and even when the "tattle-fest" threatened to eradicate the conversation, he remained calm and respectful of the opinions of those who were expressing themselves no matter how off track they became. In experiencing this along with Brent and his class, I sensed that Brent clearly took his role as the SRC representative very seriously. Having this role positioned him in a place of leadership that he proudly owned as he lived out this particular experience in the classroom.

I am drawn back to the moment that Brent sat cross legged on the floor with his eyes closed, refusing to get up, as he struggled with the task of "leaving something behind." The seriousness with which I sensed he approached that situation was again evident in this classroom discussion situation. The "discussion conductor Brent" is evidently the part of him that has helped him situate himself as one who finds it hard to do his work when the "others" are talking. The way he told this story, the way he positioned himself, had separated him from the "talkers" (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008). Laying these two situations alongside each other also

brings to the surface the tension Brent exhibited that kept him sitting on the carpet that day. As the discussion conductor Brent's story bumped against that of the adults and the class that particular day, it is no wonder tension was created within him. As the discussion conductor he was praised for being wonderful, respected by his classmates, and proudly owning the responsibilities bestowed upon him as the SRC representative, yet he is being asked to change his behavior along with the rest of the class.

The Good Student

Much of my discussion about the way Brent's situated himself in this classroom has been around my observations of classroom life and my interpretation of how he positions himself. In our first conversation together, I was interested in understanding how he positioned himself as a student:

Erin: Um, can you describe for me how you see yourself as a student?

Brent: I think I am a good student. Um, sometimes I mean you have a professional way and looking in there, although sometimes you kind of lose that per, like you gotta look good for the marks so that you can get into a good college and you can get a good job and but sometimes I think I'm not necessarily the greatest student 'cause you, you kind of get bored of acting like that.

Erin: Mmm. See, oh, I see so you said you need to look like almost act like

Brent And I, I currently do it for the fun 'cause I like to act but it's also

Erin: Wow.

Brent: for the marks. And then when I'm

Erin: Mmm, so you think you actually have to act when you're in class?

Brent: I don't necessarily have to act um, I think I put it the wrong way.

Erin: That's OK, you keep going.

Brent: Um, I think I am very good in class um, um,

Erin: Well there's expectations in a classroom isn't there?

Brent: Yes there's definitely expectations and so I try to do those expectations and then yeah, and so I don't know how to put this question.

Erin: That's OK, I think um,

Brent: I don't necessarily have to act.

Erin: No I think I know what you mean though. 'Cause you said that outside of school you're crazy.

Brent: I'm not necessarily clay, crazy (over talk)

Erin: Different then you are in

Brent: I'm different in this classroom. (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008)

In this part of our conversation Brent shared much of his story and how he situated himself in the classroom. Just as I observed him to be, he clearly stated that he believed himself to be a “good student.” He also mentioned his understanding of the implication of present experiences, the ones here in elementary school, on future ones. Even at this age, Brent was sharing his understanding of the continuity of experience (Dewey, 1938). Brent mentioned that he needed a “professional way of looking in [the classroom]” in order to get into college and attain a “good job” From this I had the sense that he had situated himself in this classroom as a good student because he has a sense of the influence it has on how he will situate himself successfully in the future. He made a connection between his experiences now in elementary school to his future grades, college, and a career.

Interestingly, he went on to mention that “I'm not necessarily the greatest student 'cause you, you kind of get bored of acting like that.” He seemed cautious about calling himself a good student because he referenced “acting” as being the way he achieved this status. As I struggled to make sense of this conversation and the significance of this statement, I started to see the way Brent used this term, acting, as a metaphor for the story he was telling and living in the classroom. Teachers construct classroom environments (Dewey, 1938), the landscapes on which children's stories are being lived out. It is within these environments that children's stories, are either accepted as being, as Brent said, those of “good students” or “the talkers.” As teachers construct classroom environments, they also bring with them expectations. As Brent and I discussed in our conversation, he was aware of these expectations and overtly strived to meet

them. These expectations are largely influenced by the dominant story of school. Many write about these typical expectations in traditional school systems influencing this dominant story with a long and complex history (Dewey, 1938; Jackson, 1968; Davis, 2004). Brent used the term “acting” as a way to describe how he made sense of living out the meeting of expectations on the classroom landscape.

Brent goes on in the conversation to tell me that he is “different in this classroom:”

So I think one problem is um, kids think I’m almost like a robot and so when they see me outside of class they say Brent, almost like is that the same person? And so it’s, it’s, I’m trying to, it’s hard to get that through to kids, through some of the kids heads, heads that I’m not a robot, I’m just trying, there’s expectations in everything in life and so I’m trying to put my best into those expectations... (Taped Conversation, February 28, 2008)

To further his acting metaphor, Brent suggested playing the role of a robot in the classroom in order to meet the expectations in school. He implied that the person he is off the school landscape is not the same person he is on the school landscape. He was using the acting and robot metaphor to describe his story to live by that encompassed his life as a student. This metaphor can be likened to Connelly and Clandinin (1999) as they wrote about professional identities:

They may even be, indeed, almost certainly are, multiple depending on the life situations in which one finds oneself. It is also common to think that people are somehow or other different people at work from who they are at home or at a social gathering, with their children, and so on. The identities we have, the stories we live by, tend to show different facets depending on the situations in which we find ourselves. (p. 95)

Although in this excerpt the authors are speaking about professional identities and professional landscapes, Brent’s metaphor spoke to his understanding of the idea that being a student is effectively putting children in situations of being a professional. He even uses the word professional in his conversation with me above when he described the way he acts in the classroom. He had identified the fact that Brent the student is different than the other facets of Brent. Most notable is the fact that Brent identified that he had mindfully changed his story to live by in order to meet the expectations of the classroom, in order to be that “good student.”

Situating self in relation to others

Influence of teachers of the past on subject matter identity

As the inquiry unfolded I had the overall sense that Brent had developed tension in the area of mathematics. He did not seem to enjoy math the way he enjoyed other parts of school, nor did he appear comfortable in it. Several places in my notes I wrote that I had noticed that he seemed uncomfortable in mathematics or he had expressed a dislike for it. In one instance, he and a girl from the other grade 5 class were supposed to be working together to solve a mathematics problem. I joined in with them as they attempted to solve the problem. I wrote that, “I noticed that Brent seemed very uncomfortable. He kept looking exasperated and didn’t have anything written down for his solution to the math problem” (Field Note, February 7, 2008). I continued to note the drastic difference I observed in him, “[t]his is such a completely different person from the one I had observed and interacted with this morning when his strengths were highlighted and he was operating in his comfort zone” (Field Note, February 7, 2008). I was referring to a morning session of writers’ workshop where he was involved in the writing of a script that he and another girl in the class were creating together. I recorded an outward observation of Brent’s frustration and discomfort but also included an inward sense that he was out of his comfort zone as I compared the two very different situations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I became quite interested in Brent’s apparent discomfort in mathematics and used it as a stem for discussion in our conversations.

In conversations with Brent we often journeyed backward and forward, past to present and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). When I asked Brent about what parts of school he liked and what parts he didn’t like he drifted back to a prior experience and responded:

Um, I don’t necessarily like math. You’ve got to have the right teacher in order to like math. Like Miss Rogers she was a grade 8 teacher she taught me...and I liked math with her. It was fun. And it, it was, it was, it was 8th grade and 11th grade math and I got it which was amazing...It helped because of the teacher. (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008)

Brent made two references to the importance of the teacher in his feelings about math in this particular situation. As Brent remembered his experience with Miss Rogers, it was still evident that he did not feel confident in his math skills when he said that it was “amazing” that he

understood the math Miss Rogers was teaching. With such an apparently good experience in math, I wondered why he continued to feel tension in and dislike for mathematics.

Earlier in the year I had overheard Brent talking with someone next to him and he said that he “felt bad in math.” I jotted this down on the top of my notebook as it was something that struck a chord with me personally because I was reminded of the tensions I felt as a teacher. There were times when I remember doing things that I know made children feel badly about themselves because of their behavior or in the name of teaching them a lesson. It was also reminiscent of Danny’s experiences in school as I understood them, and the years in which he “felt bad.” In a conversation with Brent I asked him why he felt bad in math. He told me that, “[i]n grade, in kindergarten I was told that I was not good at math. And usually I don’t let those things flow in my mind but…” (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008). I asked him if it was a teacher that told him and he confirmed. He continued to say, “I, I don’t usually let it like if you’re going to be an actor, you can’t let critics get inside your head. You have to let all those out” (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008). In Brent’s attempt to understand why he felt uncomfortable in math, he slid back five years to an experience he had with a particular person, in a particular place at a particular time. This typifies Dewey’s (1938) theories of continuity and interaction. The situation in Kindergarten had an impact on future experiences and is one that was still affecting Brent’s story to live by as a grade 5 student the day we had that conversation. The fact that he journeyed back to that particular time and place when asked that question shows the powerful influence it had on the composition of his story to live by.

As I consider both of these experiences, the kindergarten teacher and Miss Rogers, Dewey (1938) becomes essential in understanding the way that Brent’s story to live by has been influenced by teachers from his past and school experiences from the past. Brent’s story was changed, recomposed, because of his experience in kindergarten. Clandinin et al. (2006) pose that change occurs through retelling and reliving stories. Although Brent did not mention his feelings about math prior to kindergarten, there was inevitably a retelling and reliving of his story that occurred because of his interaction with his kindergarten teacher in her classroom. Dewey placed emphasis on this social aspect of experience, the influence of his teacher, highlighting the idea that all human experience is social and one cannot understand the experiences of individuals unless the social aspect is explored. Brent expressed the impact this experience had on shaping his story to live by when he said “ [a]nd so I’m not sure if it was the

fact that, that stayed in my mind and so, I, I had the littlest bit of confidence and so when I had the littlest bit of confidence I didn't progress and I didn't progress." Brent seemed again to be describing Dewey's theory of continuity. Brent identified that his experience in kindergarten resulted in a lack of confidence affecting his progression in mathematics.

If one considers Dewey's (1938) theory of continuity further, the experience with his kindergarten teacher then had an impact on his experience with Miss Rogers. Brent went into the experience with Miss Rogers with a story to live by that had already been influenced by many prior experiences, including that of kindergarten. His experience with Miss Rogers then influenced another retelling and reliving of his story to live by as it is obviously one that has impacted him deeply, significantly enough to be singled out as an experience that showed him that he is smart and that having a good teacher can make math enjoyable. Just as these teachers of Brent's past had a significant impact on shaping his story to live by, particularly on his identity in mathematics, his experience in Elaine's classroom presented another opportunity for telling and retelling his story to live by.

Elaine

Dewey (1938) wrote that one of the primary responsibilities of teachers is to shape the experiences of the children in his or her classrooms. Throughout the inquiry I experienced many situations that supported this statement as I attended to Brent's experience in Elaine's classroom. As I began to know both Elaine and Brent, I started to see a special relationship that existed between them. Brent was involved in Orff⁴, an extra-curricular music group led by Elaine, as well as the Enriched Learning Opportunities program, which was also taught by Elaine. These two programs gave Elaine and Brent opportunities to develop a relationship outside the regular classroom landscape. In addition, Elaine often connected to Brent's passion for drama with her daily teaching methods. Within the first few weeks of visiting the classroom I had already made a note of Elaine's use of drama. She was teaching the children the process for a fire drill and had the children act out the procedure before the drill was to happen. I wrote, "Elaine seems to use drama a lot in her classroom. This was three times just this morning" (Field Note, October 17,

⁴ Orff is an approach to teaching music education created by the German composer Carl Orff

2007). These three things, as well as Elaine's obvious love for each of her students, created a unique relationship between her and Brent.

As the inquiry unfolded, I began to see how Elaine influenced Brent's positioning in the classroom. Very early in the inquiry I sensed that she had a strong trust in Brent as being "the responsible one." He was often asked to give reports on classroom behavior as they walked from the library to the classroom, or to mark the class on a scale of one to five based on their transition from activity to activity. As time progressed, I recorded several times in my field notes that he was asked by Elaine to do special tasks in the classroom:

Brent was asked to hand out the papers to the class. I have noticed that Brent gets asked to do a lot of things around the classroom (lead discussions, report on progress, play instruments, etc). He seems to be a student that Elaine feels she can trust and rely on. (Field Note, January 21, 2008)

This inclination Elaine had to choose Brent to do things for her in the class is one I can relate to both as a student and as a teacher. I was a student, like Brent, who was often entrusted with tasks delegated by the teacher. Likewise, as a teacher I had a few students in each of the classes I taught that I felt I could trust with certain projects or tasks. This was inevitably something that the other students in the classroom wove into their understanding of who Brent was, influencing his position in the classroom. Jackson (1968) discussed the way that students constantly evaluate themselves and each other as they experience situations in the classroom together. Perhaps this is indicative of the clichéd "teacher's pet" term often given to children in Brent's position. The way that Elaine relied on Brent was something that did not go unnoticed by his classmates, yet I did not get the sense that Brent was given this clichéd title by his classmates. This was evident when one of Brent's classmates described him as "the spark of the class" in a passing conversation. Additionally, he was often one that many desired to sit beside or partner with. This may have been because of the way that Elaine focused the class on being a community where every member is important for their unique abilities and contributions to the community. She would find ways to highlight the strengths of all of the children in the classroom in different situations just as Brent was highlighted for his dramatic abilities the day he read "Horton Hears a Who" (Seuss, 1954) to the class.

I was interested in Brent's understanding of the way Elaine positioned him as "the responsible one," and the way it shaped the way he positioned himself and his story to live by:

Erin: Um, I've noticed quite a bit that Mrs. Neider chooses you often to do things for her. Some of those things are like you often lead discussions, I've seen you lead discussions or like, kind of like meetings that your class has um, lots of times she'll ask you to report on the classes behaviour um, even things like she'll get you to play the xylophone or she'll get you to you know you, do, why do you think she picks you for those things?

Brent: Um, I think it's partly because of the way I act and the, her expectations um, for some kids the expectations are very low and for some kids the expectations are very high and I, think my expectations are quite high and so I think I do those expectations well and so she can trust me to lead discussions and stuff like that.

Erin: How do you, oh sorry.

Brent: She, she might think that because I'm good I can maybe help somebody else be better, I think 'cause I'm not (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008)

I first noticed that he made reference to the expectations that Elaine had for him in relation to other students, showing he understood that her particular expectations for him were different than that of other students in the classroom. He continued to say that he understood it was because of how he conducts himself in class, meeting her expectations, that he is positioned as "the responsible one." By creating the dichotomy of those with lower and those with higher expectations, Brent seemed to be making sense of the way that Elaine positions him, and resultantly, others in the class. The reason that he is trusted, relied upon, or considered responsible is because he lives up to what he sees as high expectations. To further this dichotomy he said, "she might think that because I'm good I can maybe help somebody else be better." In addition to having the responsibility of meeting expectations to be considered "good," he talked about feeling the responsibility of helping others to be better. The way that Brent felt this responsibility bestowed upon him clearly influenced his story to live by. To see this influence I am drawn back to the discussion conductor moment when he was arguably exhibiting classroom management strategies as he modeled himself after Elaine, and took an opportunity to evaluate his classmates on their behaviour. The way Brent described himself as a "good" student is also evidence of the influence Elaine has on how he positioned himself and shaped his story to live by. He made direct reference to the expectations held for him and credited his meeting of these expectations as he described why he is a good student.

Relational knowing appeared to have considerable influence on the way Brent shaped his understanding of who he is as a student and who he is in this particular classroom. “As a way of living alongside others, relational knowing is an active construction of knowledge and, therefore, is a knowing within the moment based on a shared history with the other” (Hollingsworth as cited in Clandinin et al. 2006, p. 42). As I attempted to understand how Brent knew himself, how he told his story to live by as a student, I began to see how imperative this relational knowing was in this understanding. Brent knew himself as a part of his class, a long time labelled behaviour problem, and at the same time as one who is separate from the “talkers.” He knew himself as “bad” in math partially because of his interaction with a teacher in Kindergarten and said he needs more fun in math because of his interaction with Mrs. Rogers. He knew himself as a leader, someone to be trusted and relied on, someone who meets high expectations and can have a positive influence on others because of his relationship with Elaine. Each of these parts of him were shaped by his living alongside others, relational knowing, based on his history with his classmates and teachers.

On the surface one might believe that Brent was content with how his story was being lived out on the classroom landscape and how he positioned himself and others positioned him. As I began to attend closer to Brent story, and as I have already mentioned earlier in the chapter, many sources of tension were brought to the surface as the inquiry unfolded and he explored with me the shaping and reshaping of his story to live by.

Tensions in Stories to Live by: Turning a new leaf

As we discussed the fact that Brent was often the one trusted by Elaine and relied upon to be the responsible one, I asked him how he felt about having that responsibility.

Sometimes it's nice but others you don't necessarily want to be the parent like I, I know that I like having somebody else as a leader because then you, you don't have to look after everybody else. You can ah, look after yourself and you can just zone out and think and so ah, I like having somebody else as a leader because then I can maybe do my own thing so sometimes it's good but sometimes I don't really like it... (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008)

As I reflected on his description of this place of tension he was experiencing, I was drawn to my own experience as a student in a similar position to his, with high expectations. I was reminded

of those moments of anxiety and feelings of pressure that created tension for me as I strived to meet the expectations I perceived to be held for me by teachers and parents and those I had for myself. Brent identified the tension he felt in the role he perceived Elaine held for him as one who “help[s] somebody else be better.” He made a comparison to feeling like a parent, a position that presented tension for him as he felt like he was looking after other classmates rather than doing his “own thing.” We experienced similar tension as both originated from expectations of sustaining a story to live by. I can remember thinking, wouldn’t it be nice if I could just not worry about my marks and what other people think, forget studying and be content with whatever I get in the end?

I sensed a place of tension for Brent as relational knowledge, created moment by moment as he lived alongside classmates, teachers and others on the classroom landscape, created dissonance in his story to live by. In some ways he was happy to be “discussion conductor Brent,” “good student Brent,” and “the responsible one,” as it allowed him to hold a special position in the class that brought with it many privileges. In a conversation we had he mentioned that one day he and another student were allowed to go into a room and do a mini drama to show to the class. He said, “that was partly because of the trust and because she can, she could, she sees me in class as a good student and she, she wouldn’t necessarily pick somebody who was crazy or is you know that, she knows that we will get it done (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008). However, in this position Brent also felt as though he was a “parent” that he could not do “his own thing,” “acting” as though he is “a robot.” Thus he was in a place where his story to live by created tension within him as it is bumped against the many stories that he encountered on the classroom landscape as he lived alongside classmates and Elaine.

“Before” and “After” Brent

Around the beginning of March, the week after my first taped conversation with Brent, I began to notice a difference in his behaviour in class. He seemed more distracted, talked more, even out of turn, and took things less and less seriously in the classroom. When we sat down together in our second conversation, without directly referring to this change in behaviour I began by asking him how he thought other students viewed him as a student:

Brent: ...Ummmm, I think, ummm, well um, I think before the last interview I was pretty good. Um, I, I think the kids could come up and ask me things um, about class if they weren't neces- if they got it, didn't get it.

Erin: Can you give me some words that they might use to describe you?

Brent: Um, well mannered, um, I think of myself, like, it wasn't really fun being that person, like it was kind of boring, sitting there like this and so, so now I've kind of loosened up a little. 'Cause that wasn't fun. And, and like outside of school I'm, I'm way different then the person I am in school, so I'm trying to bring some of that person into class because that wasn't me.

Erin: So could you maybe describe for me um, what are those differences, what, what's changed? How would you describe yourself now as a student in the last few weeks?

Brent: Maybe not listening as much as I usually do. Ummmm, not, not maybe being as deep as I usually are. Because me being deep isn't necessarily me, that's something I learned to do in this classroom. So, I'm less deep... (Taped Conversation, March 18, 2008)

In this piece of our conversation I sensed that Brent began to explore the tension he felt as he grappled with his story to live by as a student, and communicated the way in which he had recomposed and was continuing to recompose it. He explicitly described the tension he felt as "before" Brent, which is how I will refer to him before our first conversation in February. He said "it wasn't really fun being that person," and "it was kind of boring sitting there like this." This tension he described was alluded to in our earlier conversation as he described himself as a robot in the classroom as one usually considers robots to be mindless, even controlled by another, doing as they are told without experiencing emotion or, in this case, "fun."

In this piece of our conversation Brent also communicated his struggle to weave together his stories to live by on and off the classroom landscape as he identified that he was a different person outside of school than he was in school. He said, "outside of school I'm, I'm way different then the person I am in school, so I'm trying to bring some of that person into class because that wasn't me" (Taped Conversation, March 18, 2008). I sensed that he felt he was being someone different when he was at school in order to satisfy his teacher and meet her

expectations. He was trying to make sense of the different facets of his story to live by as he clearly felt their existence as he transitioned on and off the classroom landscape. In our first conversation, as I quoted earlier in the chapter, Brent referred to this exact phenomenon, being different, when he described why he is a good student and when he said, “I’m different in this classroom” (Taped Conversation, February 26, 2008). He is someone who met expectations in the classroom essentially by being different, as he called it “acting”, while he was there. The difference in these two references, the one from the “before” Brent and the one from the “after” Brent, was the presence of tension in having to be someone different in the classroom than he was outside the classroom. The “before” Brent presented this phenomenon as a matter of fact, something he chose to do that others chose not to do. The “after” Brent identified this phenomenon as being a place of tension for him as he was trying to reconcile these two parts of himself. This became the catalyst in another retelling and reliving of his story to live by.

Retelling and Reliving a Story to Live By

If one is to consider a story to live by as stories one lives and tells, it is possible that contradictory plotlines arise within the story (Clandinin et al. 2006). “When these contradictory plotlines compete with one another tension becomes apparent, shaping awakenings that can lead to retellings and reliving of teachers’ stories to live by” (p.10). Although the authors were specifically talking about teachers, this idea can be applied to Brent’s situation. He had come to a place of tension where his story to live by developed contradictory plotlines that awakened him to “bring some of that person into class” as he struggled to make sense of the diverging stories he was living on and off the classroom landscape. His description of bringing part of who he was off the landscape to who he was on the landscape parallels Clandinin et al.’s (2006) idea of retelling and reliving his story to live by in order to move out of the place of tension in which he found himself uncomfortable with whom he was in the classroom.

In the above piece of our conversation Brent said that “being deep isn’t necessarily me.” Being deep was something that his teacher expected of him in the classroom, something he “learned to do in this classroom.” These six words communicate much of the tension that led to Brent’s retelling and reliving of his story to live by. This statement makes reference to his striving to meet the expectations of the teacher, the expectations in this particular classroom. “Being deep” became something Brent did as he lived alongside Elaine in her classroom,

knowing she expected it, even though it was something that did not make sense to him. This statement might also allude to the acting metaphor presented earlier in the chapter. He had learned what was expected of him and in effect acted in a way that pleased the teacher. Carr (1986) wrote that “[c]oherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing” (p. 97). If Brent identified that the way he was living out his story on the classroom landscape was not necessarily who he was, he is expressing his feeling that coherence in his story to live by was lacking. It was not making sense to him that who he was outside of class was not who he was inside of class. In order to regain coherence, to move from the place of tension created by conflicting storylines, Brent began to retell and relive his story. I recorded this after I shut off the audio recorder in our last conversation:

Brent explained a little more about his shift in personality and behavior in the classroom. He has not been happy even though his previous behavior was that which makes teachers happy. He said that he thinks that teachers would not be happy with his change but that doesn’t matter to him because he feels so much better about the change in him. (Field note, March 18, 2008).

CHAPTER FOUR

PETER: THE INTERRUPTER

Starting a relationship with Peter

Peter played a significant part in the story of the classroom before I met him and the other children. Prior to meeting the children in the inquiry, Elaine mentioned that there were some children who were louder voices in the classroom, often dominating the atmosphere. She made a specific reference to one boy because he was in fact labeled with a condition that supposedly explained this loud and often inappropriate behavior that created a challenge in the classroom. This boy ended up being Peter. He quickly attracted my attention for obvious behavior reasons: “While kids were in their desks, Peter was fidgeting, throwing pens, scissors, and talking out of turn...” (Field Note, October 15, 2007), or “Peter came in [the classroom] yelling loudly...” (Field Note, October 17, 2007). I started to see him frequent my notes more than anything or anyone else. I was fascinated by the way he conducted himself in the classroom, by the relationship he and Elaine shared, and by the way his classmates responded to him and he to them. As I sat there and observed the role he played in the dynamic of the classroom on a daily basis, I found myself shifting back to my life as a student, wondering how I would have reacted to Peter had he been in my classroom. I also found myself shifting to my days as a teacher wondering how I would respond to the situations as they arose in Elaine’s classroom and laying my experiences alongside the ways she was responding. These wonders and this fascination drew me into the story Peter was living out both on and off the classroom landscape.

Some tension was created for me when I decided that I wanted Peter to be one of the two children I journeyed alongside in this inquiry. I was aware of the many months and years of testing and retesting Peter had been through in his previous school years around the diagnosis of his condition. I was concerned, along with Shaun⁵, that perhaps this was not something that he would be excited about participating in. I decided against working with him and decided to work with another child. When I made this decision, I consciously tried to remove my focus from him and see “other” things going on in the classroom. Hard as I tried, he continued to pervade my

⁵ Shaun Murphy was both my thesis advisor and a co-researcher in this inquiry. We were both in Elaine’s classroom and shared field notes and experiences.

field notes and my thoughts while more and more wonders appeared. After much consideration, and with the support of Elaine, I decided that this was a child I wanted to invite to share his story with me.

Between the two boys, Brent and Peter, I was sure that Peter would be the easiest to develop a relationship with. He was very outgoing in class and out and he was extremely vocal. My initial assumption proved to be wrong. I made several attempts to slowly start developing a relationship with Peter by casually asking him how he was doing with what he was working on, or asking him about his weekend. I was very surprised when he often responded in one word answers or sometimes even ignored me. Unlike Brent, Peter spent his free time outside at recess, or inside playing games with friends during “red recess,” an indoor recess. I started to worry that I was not going to be able to have Peter share his story with me if I could not develop a trusting, meaningful relationship with him. I knew that relationships were essential for a narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and without this relationship with Peter, I would not be able to move forward with it. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) used a metaphor to describe the sometimes difficult process of negotiating relationships in the field:

At first, the forces of collaboration are weak and the arrangements feel tenuous.

Sometimes, this does not change throughout the inquiry, and one can feel on the edge almost as an uninvited guest throughout the fieldwork. For us, the early days felt a bit like it does when one is trying to start a car on a cold morning, and there is just enough power to turn the motor. Maybe it will catch and maybe it will not. (pp. 71-72)

I was at the point where I felt uninvited into Peter’s story and that he was keeping me at the edge. I began to worry that time was going by and I still felt like the engine was not going to catch.

I started to wonder about the relationships with teachers and other adult figures in his past school experiences and how this might affect a relationship developing between Peter and me. As already mentioned in above field notes, Peter’s behavior was not desirable for most classroom teachers. I also knew that he had an educational assistant that was designated to work with him. I wondered if the distance I felt he was putting between himself and me was in part because of his previous relationships with school related adults. I was a new adult character in Peter’s story and I sensed that he was attempting to find coherence (Carr, 1986) with his school related adult relationships of the past. Dewey’s (1938) continuity principle of experience also

suggested that the experiences Peter had in the past with teachers, educational assistants, and other adults as he lived out his story on school landscapes, have an inevitable effect on the experiences he is living in the present, including his relationships with Elaine and me.

It was not until the end of January that I began to see a place where Peter and I could start to connect: through writing. Up until then I would not have guessed this would be the place we would begin to develop a relationship since I had actually noticed he was quite resistant to writing. One particular day, Elaine had asked one of the educational assistants to take Peter to the library to finish an unfinished assignment:

I went to check on Peter in the library where he was working with Mrs. White. ...I was worried as to what was happening in there because of early afternoon behavior and previous behavior when being pulled by the Educational Assistant to do work that was unfinished. When I got there, Mrs. White told me, in front of Peter, how focused he has been and how much he has written. I did overhear him talking with Mrs. White about a “chocolate” he was getting when he was done. (Reconstructed Field Note, January 29, 2008)

When I stumbled upon this situation in the library I was surprised when I found Peter sitting at a table silently writing in his “Composition” book which the children used for final stage Writers’ Workshop pieces. As I watched him, I sensed that he was quite enthralled with what he was writing. Mrs. White praised him very highly for how wonderfully he had worked and how much he had finished in such a short period of time. I wondered if his productivity and his quiet work habits were a result of this high praise and the “chocolate” he was getting, or if it was actually to do with the writing.

To me this brings up the question of external rewards being the driving factor in his behavior. In one sense, he is being productive and focused, even more so than usual, which is a positive. In another sense, he is doing it based on a reward/punishment system. Whether this is a good or bad thing I am left to wonder... (Field Note, January 29, 2008)

I left the library that afternoon with the notes above and the memory of how focused I sensed Peter was on that story he was writing. I was not sure how I was going to do it, but somehow I had the feeling that this might be a place for me to invite Peter to open up a part of himself to me. I still was not sure if my sense of his involvement in the story was correct. Was he was

actually as engaged in the writing as he appeared, or was he doing it for the praise and chocolate reward?

It was the very next day that my question was answered. Elaine told the children that she was going to take them to the computer lab to work on assignments. Peter decided he did not want to go to the computer lab:

During the time the children were all going to the computer lab, Peter decided to stay back because “I get to write.” I decided to take this opportunity to connect with him over something he seemed very excited about. I asked if he would share his story with me. He agreed to read me his story, about Pokemon, that he had been writing (about 8 chapters!). He was very enthusiastic while he was reading, using lots of expression and smiled through much of it. (Reconstructed Field Note, January 30, 2008)

This moment was a turning point in starting the engine in the relationship between Peter and me. I felt like his enthusiasm and excitement for what he was writing, served as a bridge across barriers I had earlier felt between the two of us as he was so willing to share his writing with me. While he was reading, I asked him questions about his characters and his ideas for following chapters. He also showed me a book of Pokemon characters he was using when he needed to reference the characters in his story. Peter continued to share his journey of writing his Pokemon story with me for much of the remainder of the inquiry. The story became a common place for us to spend time together and talk in a non threatening and trusting space on the classroom landscape.

Negotiating the relationship with Peter unfolded in a very different way than my relationship with Brent. I even titled this section differently than the corresponding section in Brent’s chapter because it was so different. Starting a relationship with Peter was one of the most difficult parts of this inquiry for me. This was much different than with Brent, where a relationship developed almost effortlessly. Many places for connection and communication with Brent surfaced both easily and early in the inquiry. I had to work much harder finding places for negotiating the relationship with Peter, and had to be patient. I remember many times thinking, I should just move on, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest does happen. I included this part of the inquiry, negotiating this particular relationship, because it was a significant place of

tension for me and became a considerable piece of my story being lived out, alongside Peter's, as an inquirer on the classroom landscape.

Composing a Story to Live by

Situating self: The Interrupter

Conceptualizing the way that Peter situated himself in Elaine's classroom involved a different process than that of Brent. I immediately recognized tensions in Brent's story to live by whereas I had a harder time identifying tensions and sources of tension in Peter's. Reflecting on this, my early impressions of Peter were that he did not sense tension in situations that I thought should be causing tension. I recorded one specific example of this as the children were doing a mathematics activity on the overhead with Elaine:

Samantha described one shape as having perpendicular lines and Peter yelled out "EEEEEEH" like a buzzer and continued to shout "oh oh oh oh" with his hand up, convinced he had the answer. At this same time Laney sternly told him that what he had done was "inappropriate behavior." Peter continued on as though he hadn't heard her.

(Field Note, October 31, 2007)

I was fascinated by a few things in this situation. I was interested in the response he had to Samantha's attempt to answer Elaine's question because I immediately thought that it was clearly inappropriate for several reasons. First it was yelled out of turn, and it was rude toward Samantha who was trying to answer the question. This moment drew out the teacher part of me as I quickly disapproved of his actions. The situation was also interesting because his classmate, Laney, who obviously also felt his behavior inappropriate, blatantly told him she thought so. Furthermore, Peter seemed to completely ignore Laney's comment and continued to say "oh oh oh oh" with his hand in the air. I began to wonder why a situation like this, where a classmate is essentially evaluating his behavior, seemed to create no tension for him. This wonder may come from my experience as a student with feelings of being constantly evaluated on my behavior and performance by classmates and teachers, a clear place of tension for me. Being told that what I was doing was "inappropriate" or substandard would have been, and still would be, devastating.

To examine the way Peter responded to Samantha's answer, loudly and out of turn, I looked at pieces of a conversation Peter and Shaun⁶ had together:

Shaun: How do the kids act differently when other teachers come in?

Peter: It seems like they talk more. They want to show the teachers what their personality type is. Um some people is I don't want to interrupt and some people is I interrupt but sometimes I can't help it and sometimes oh I want to interrupt 'cause I want all the attention.

Shaun: So what's your personality type like?

Peter: Um I interrupt sometimes but I can't control it because I don't know. I'm in the middle.

Shaun: So um do you know why you can't control it?

Peter: No not really... Um I think so really 'cause it just um seems like I've been doing it since grade 1 and I don't mean to it's just one of my things and my personality.

Sometimes I raise my hand and then if I don't get picked for a long time um and then I just sort of blurt it out. (Personal Conversation, January 24, 2008)

In this piece Peter shared with Shaun part of his story to live by. He used the word "personality" in this context seemingly to describe something being a part of that story, a narrative thread in his story to live by. He described himself as someone who interrupted to get attention when he spoke about showing "personality type." Then again when Shaun asked him what his personality type was like, he described himself as one who interrupts. Peter used a similar description of himself in a conversation with me when he was describing why his last year of school was so "horrific." "Well last year it's probably because of Jeremy. He was one of my best friends. He was also a big interrupter" (Personal Conversation, March 6, 2008). In this statement Peter implied that he himself is an interrupter. As I laid these two conversations alongside the classroom moment with Samantha and Laney, one can see how "[s]tories to live by are fluid, evolving, and profoundly experiential" (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2003, p.347). The story Peter told of himself as an interrupter had come from years of experiences in classrooms, evident

⁶ Shaun was the other researcher in this inquiry working alongside Elaine, the children, and me.

in him saying “I’ve been doing it since grade 1.” His identity as an interrupter had evolved over years and years of experiences in different classrooms with different teachers. This is supported as well by Dewey’s (1938) principle of continuity suggesting all experiences leading up to the conversations he had with both Shaun and me will have significant influence on those conversations and the person Peter was during those conversations. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote that we live out stories and then tell stories of those experiences. The story Peter told of himself evolved through living out his story, as he interrupted Samantha and was condemned by Laney, and telling of those experiences, as he did in his conversations with Shaun and me.

I now go back to my wonder about why it seemed that in this situation with Samantha and Laney he felt no tension where I felt there should be. I considered several theories in examining this notion, including Clandinin et al’s (2006) idea of conflicting stories as two stories bump up against one another. The authors describe conflicting stories in relation to teacher’s stories to live by. “Conflicting stories are understood as teachers’ stories that collide with the dominant stories of school. Conflicting stories are often short-lived as teachers are unable to sustain them in the face of the dominant stories of school” (Clandinin et al, 2006, p. 8). Tension may have been more predominantly present as Peter’s story to live by bumped up against that of his teachers of the past and the dominant story of school in his earlier years. I sensed that he was unable to sustain his story in the face of those that were dominating it, recomposing his story to match the plotlines of those dominant stories. He stated that his interrupting started in grade 1, which is typically where students begin to be immersed in the traditional school system, the dominant story of school, where rules and order pervade the lives of the children entering that landscape. After years of living a story on a landscape where it was proper to be quiet and sit still, and years of having behavior corrected, Peter began to retell and relive his story to live by as an “interrupter.”

The reshaping of his story to live by to match the plotlines of the stories of his teachers and the school might pose an explanation for why I did not sense the tension in situations where he was living or telling this story. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) suggested that a sense of identity, a story to live by, is influenced communally, in this case by other students and teachers. The way Peter told his story, as one of an interrupter, spoke to the influence that years of traditional education had on the shaping of his story to live by.

This influence on his story to live by was evident when I asked Peter what it meant to be a good student:

Peter: Well to me it means go straight through the day without at least below three interruptions. Um a super day is going through your whole, through a 6 hour day without no interruptions and that's what I think.

Erin: So it's just about interrupting. That's um that's what makes a good student is somebody who doesn't interrupt.

Peter: And um working well in groups and all that.

Erin: Working well in groups. So if you were to pick somebody in the class who's a good student why would you pick them?

Peter: Um 'cause usually they don't interrupt, they're silent, they listen carefully, they work well in groups, they help people out with help that I mean you would, they shush the person if they're interrupting (Personal Conversation, March 6, 2008)

Peter's life on the classroom landscape for the past several years had shaped his story as a student to be one that is intensely focused on interrupting or not. Years of having his interruptive behaviour focused on at school have made interrupting a pervasive aspect in how he made sense of his story to live by and the expectations those on the school landscape held for him. Continuity of experience (Dewey, 1938) explains Peter's response as he described a good student in relation to number of interruptions in a day. Years of being reprimanded for outbursts, interruptions, and other inappropriate behaviour combined with experiencing other, quiet, attentive students being praised for their desirable behaviour, contributed to the story Peter lived in Elaine's classroom. When I asked him to expand on his response, his list still focused on lack of interrupting, being quiet, or "shush"-ing someone if they are interrupting, something Peter had experienced with many of his classmates in the time I was in the classroom with him.

Situating in relation to others

Classmates

The more time I spent in the classroom, the more I attended to the sociality commonplace (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007) and the way that interaction (Dewey, 1938) influenced

the experience Peter had in Elaine's classroom. As a newcomer to the landscape, my early impression of Peter was that he was a very social being. This is largely why I had assumed, incorrectly, that creating a relationship with him would be uncomplicated. Peter liked to be the centre of attention, telling long jokes in the class Gathering Circle⁷, sharing his stories, and making anyone and everyone laugh, particularly a few of the other boys in the class. I recorded one of these moments in a field note as I was watching Peter interact with a few of his classmates and two teacher candidates, education students from the university. "Peter, Dylan, and Andrew were in a group together and were becoming easily distracted by each other. Peter was particularly distracting, trying to get attention from the other two instead of participating properly in the discussion" (Field Note, January 30, 2008). This was a common situation, with similar ones occurring on a daily basis. He also continually made reference to how many friends he had, or to who his best friends were. Peter's persistent focus on the social aspect of his story to live by, part of the principle of interaction, presented an interesting dimension as I attempted to understand how "others" became a part of Peter's telling and living of his story to live by.

Interestingly, my conversations with Peter involved a significant amount of discussion of his classmates both in general and specific terms. He often mentioned other students in the class when he was answering questions, even questions that were intended to be specifically about him personally. This was very different from my conversations and my experiences with Brent, who rarely mentioned other students in our discussions. By observing Peter and engaging in conversation with him I began to sense that his classmates contributed significantly to both sustaining and creating his story to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

Early in the year I noticed a sticky note on Laney's desk that piqued my curiosity. "Laney sits next to Peter. On Laney's desk is a sticky note with Peter's name on it. I asked her what this is for and she said that she is responsible for making checks when he is quiet for 30 minutes" (Field Note, October 15, 2007). I wondered about this for several reasons. I first wondered about how this positions each of them in their relationship with each other. Laney was in a position where she was assessing Peter's behavior by judging whether or not it was appropriate and using a strategy that is usually associated with an adult in authority (Oyler, 1996), specifically a

⁷ Gathering Circle was a morning routine to start the day where children and Elaine gathered in the centre of the room in a circle on the floor. It involved singing daily songs, an activity for each day of the week ie: Tuesday was joke day, and Elaine often shared stories, poems and music. Many class discussions also happened during Gathering Circle.

teacher. Conversely, Peter was in a position where he was being assessed by a peer who had been put in a position of authority over him. I also wondered about the way that Laney described it as a “responsibility” to make the checks. I was curious as to how this strategy came about or was put in place. I wondered why and how Laney was given this role. “I asked Elaine about this and she said that Peter asked if Laney could be his “checker” and Laney agreed to do so” (Field Note, October 15, 2007). This response from Elaine changed my whole view of this particular situation since I had earlier assumed that Laney had been given the “responsibility” of monitoring Peter’s behavior in this fashion by Elaine, the teacher. Instead this was something that Peter had initiated himself and chosen Laney to be the one who monitored his behavior. In a conversation with Shaun, Peter commented about the checklist, “Um well last year I had this checklist and if I got them all right like no interruptions then I got to go on computers or something and if I didn’t get it, if I interrupted then I’d get my check mark erased” (Personal Conversation, January 24, 2008). He continued to explain that in the previous year it was “random” who got to give him checkmarks. Peter’s willingness to suggest one of his peers be given responsibility for evaluating and monitoring his behaviour indicated the influence of his previous experiences in school on his present experiences. Peter was living and telling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) a story of himself as someone who needed to be monitored by someone else and someone who did not need to personally take responsibility for his own behaviour. This might also be influenced by years of having his outbursts or his interruptive behaviour being explained as a disorder rather than something he can personally change or control.

After learning about Laney being Peter’s “checker,” some other behavior seemed to make more sense, including the situation I described at the beginning of the chapter when Laney informed Peter that his behavior was inappropriate. The “responsibility” of being Peter’s checker seemed to extend beyond the sticky note to other places in the classroom. I wondered if this extension of the responsibility was also something negotiated by Peter as part of the role of the “checker?” I recorded another example of this extended responsibility when the children were supposed to be making an independent transition to a word study after completing their penmanship. “Laney tapped Peter’s shoulder and reminded him to put stuff in his binder as his papers were loose on top of his desk and his binder was on the floor. Peter responded very well, and put his things away” (Field Note, October 17, 2007). As I watched this occur, I did not sense

any resentment on Peter's part, and in fact, he hardly responded to her at all except by doing exactly as she had suggested. Again I sensed that Peter was content with someone else being responsible for his behavior rather than him being responsible for it by himself. I am left to wonder if this is related as well to the important role the commonplace of sociality (Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007) plays in Peter's story to live by. Is it possible that he was happy to have the attention from his classmates regardless of the type of attention?

The relationship between Laney and Peter is one that inevitably contributed to the shaping of Peter's story to live by. Just as Laney demonstrated the responsibility for monitoring Peter's behavior, many others in the class did the same. "While kids were in their desks, Peter was fidgeting, throwing pens, scissors, and taking out of turn. The sub tried both attention to him and ignoring him. Jeremy said twice, 'If Peter interrupts too much he has to go into a room'" (Field note, October 15, 2007). Similar to his reaction to Laney, Peter did not respond in a way noticeable to me as an observer when his classmate was sharing his opinion with the substitute. In another situation, another one of Peter's classmates took on the responsibility of his behavior:

Samantha looked very angrily at Peter who did not seem to notice. She raised her hand and said that Peter was acting inappropriately and she thought he needed to do it over again, the walk from the library to the classroom. Elaine explained that as a class, they were getting to a point where they need to monitor themselves for integrity. She added, to Peter, that a friend was telling him that he needed to do a better job. Peter got up and left the room to re-practice. (Reconstructed Field Note, November 19, 2007)

I began to sense that there was a type of community responsibility for monitoring Peter's behavior. It is important to note that Elaine encouraged the entire class to be responsible for monitoring the behavior of the community, but as I attended closely to Peter, I became alert to the situations where he was specifically monitored or discussed as a class. This seemed to be accepted by Peter as I observed the class and the way he responded to the other students. In his years as a student, Peter's story to live by as "the interrupter" and the student who needs a "checker" had been communally sustained by his classmates as they took opportunities to correct, monitor, and assess his behavior on a regular basis. To help understand the interaction of the students in the classroom, it is important to examine the role that Elaine played on the classroom landscape and in the shaping and sustaining of Peter's story to live by.

Teacher

The children were gathered in the middle of the classroom, cross-legged and buzzing with energy and excitement. I immediately looked around for Peter and could not find him in the crowd. This was typically a situation where he stood out, loudly, among the other students. Peter and Andrew then wheeled in a TV and DVD cart. Elaine announced them to the class, Andrew as the “technician” and Peter the one to get the TV and movie cued up and ready to go. While the others were instructed to get comfortable and ready to watch, the boys got the movie ready to go. When everything was ready, Elaine asked Peter to introduce the movie. He said the title, read the approximate running time from the case and asked the group to enjoy the movie. Andrew turned off the lights and also asked the group to enjoy the show. Elaine made sure to thank the boys for how helpful they were. (Reconstructed Field Note, October 17, 2007)

This moment was very early in the inquiry and I was just beginning to get a feel for the way that Elaine ran her classroom. I recorded this reaction after experiencing the situation with the TV:

This whole situation created such a community feel. Andrew was great at figuring out technical equipment and his expertise was used. Peter, who usually is hushed and given negative attention, was using his energy to contribute to the class. People in the community were filling in roles that they excel at and everyone treats everyone with respect as modeled and enforced by Elaine. (Field Note, October 17, 2007)

My initial reaction was to view this experience through my teacher lens. I had only been in the classroom a few times yet I already had the sense that Peter was someone who created many distractions for the class and demanded a lot of teacher and student attention. In this situation, he was making a very valuable contribution to the activity and channeling his energy in positive ways that did not distract the class nor require teacher attention. This classroom moment was one that drew me to the work of Nel Noddings (2003), and the teaching of care. Elaine was a teacher who I definitely believe taught in ways that Noddings described within themes of care. This is evident in the above mentioned situation when Samantha insisted Peter needed to change his behavior and Elaine responded by saying “a friend is telling you that you need to do a better job.” Although in many classrooms this may be considered “tattling,” Elaine used the opportunity to create a sense of community where “friends” help each other to become better

individuals. This sense of community, the air of caring that Elaine brought to her classroom seemed to be part of the reason that Peter responded the way that he did to his classmates as they communally monitored his behavior.

I started to wonder about the way Elaine treated Peter when I noticed that he seemed to be getting special attention, or given privileges quite frequently in the classroom. He was often asked to be “the drummer” in Gathering Circle, or asked to be part of demonstrations. He even seemed to be exempt from rules that the other classmates were supposed to abide by.

While everyone was instructed to sit quietly with books out, pencil crayons, and their hands on their desks, Peter had his Star Wars book out and was reading. Elaine did not force him to put it away. His classmates started telling him to put it away but Elaine did not. What does this tell Peter and the other kids in the room? Why does he become exempt from the rules that the others are required to follow? (Field Note, October 24, 2007)

As I observed this particular moment, I wondered why Elaine allowed this behavior that was clearly against what was being asked of the class. I was curious about how this positioned Peter in the classroom as someone who is not expected to follow the same rules as the other children. I wondered as well how this would affect the other students in the classroom who were following the instructions, as this would have been me as a student. In order to examine this particular situation, I laid alongside it Oyler’s (1996) notion of sharing authority in the classroom. Instead of being the one to monopolize the authority in the situation, Elaine created a situation where the children had the opportunity to have some authority over their own classroom (Oyler, 1996). Peter was situated in a place where he made a decision to put his book away, based on his position in the classroom community without the imposition of teacher authority.

I sensed that the relationship between Peter and Elaine was one based on mutual respect. Elaine approached him, as well as all her other students, in a positive manner with the utmost respect in every situation. Noddings’ (1986) ethic of care helped me to understand her approach to Peter and the classroom atmosphere. She seemed to consider how her words, actions and approaches to situations would affect the “caring community” (p. 499) she was trying to create. In situations like the Star Wars book I often wondered how she could possibly contain herself from grabbing the book and demanding he listen along with everyone else. She also used the sharing of authority (Oyler, 1996) to create the sense that the children had ownership of the

stories being lived out in their classroom. I was troubled at first by considering Noddings' (1986) ethic of care in relation to the way that Elaine created her classroom community. I started to consider that care is more complex than a pat on the head or a warm, fuzzy, loving feeling it may be simplified to represent. In Elaine's classroom, I sensed that care was not about the absence of tension but it was about recognizing the tension and learning to live with it.

When I consider the way Elaine shaped the classroom landscape and the space in which Peter was living out his story, it became difficult to make sense of the way that he understood himself and his position in the classroom. This child, who began the year by telling and living a clear story of "the interrupter," was beginning to retell and relive his story, just as I mentioned Brent did in the previous chapter. As I lived alongside the children in this classroom, it was evident that Elaine created a space for them to retell and relive their stories. He began to retell and relive a story of one who is an important part of the caring community. His interruptions became fewer and fewer and he would do things like look up to his classmates and say, "Thanks for waiting," when they had waited for him to organize his binder before moving on as a class. It was difficult to make sense of how he understood himself because although there were fewer behavior problems and caring community behavior became more frequent, much of the behavior from the beginning of the year as Peter "the interrupter" was still clearly evident. This seemed to show the fluidity of stories to live by and the way they evolve over time and through experience (Huber, Murphy, Clandinin, 2003).

To look closer at this evolving story, I considered again the relationship between Elaine and Peter. When Peter was talking with Shaun he mentioned that he thought that Elaine enjoyed him:

Shaun: OK. And how can you tell that Mrs. Neider enjoys you?

Peter: Well because I came in just a couple of minutes ago and she um and then she's just, just has a happy smile on her face and she's come, come get your recorder out. I want to hear you play. You're very good at this. So I don't think she would always have the smile on her face if I wasn't in the room. (Personal Conversation, January 24, 2008)

The way that Elaine approached Peter as a member of the caring classroom community gave him the impression that she cared about him so much that she would actually not be as happy if he was not there. I found this fascinating because there were many times that I thought that if I were

his teacher I would be so frustrated that he would not believe I was happy that he was there. Elaine's way of weaving Peter's story into that of the classroom, seemed to catalyze a retelling and reliving of his story to live by. Instead of always focusing on his negative behaviour, he was placed in situations where his skills created positive contributions to the community (Noddings, 2003) just as he did with Andrew and the TV. He and Elaine seemed to have mutual care for each other and "[w]hen we care, we want to do our very best for the objects of our care" (Noddings, 2003, p.60). Although this seemed like a wonderful and positive retelling and reliving of Peter's story to live by, tensions began to arise as he experienced the evolving story.

Tensions in his Story to Live by: Turning a new leaf

Although I did not sense tension to be present in the many situations like those with Laney, this does not mean there were not any. I mentioned early in the chapter that I had a difficult time identifying the tension because they didn't present as explicitly as I felt they did with Brent. In fact I was often puzzled as to why I could not sense tension in situations that I thought should have created it. However, after examining layers below the surface, layers of Peter's story to live by, some subtle and not so subtle places of tension became evident.

As discussed in the previous section, there were changes in Peter that began to occur in the days after Christmas holidays. A few months later I noticed a more pronounced change.

This morning as Elaine was going through the day plan she took a minute to stop and comment on the class. "You feel very mature and together this morning. Look at Peter. His posture, his planner is out. When I saw Peter this morning I knew it was going to be a good day" As she was signing planners she stopped again and said "You really need to watch Peter. Whatever he had for breakfast you need to eat too!" In gathering circle the kids got into groups of 5 and they each got a piece of someone's work. As a group they were to brainstorm the most wonderful things about it in 2 minutes. Again Elaine asked everyone to watch Peter because he's having a good day. Two of his friends gave him a quiet hi-five. After Peter shared part of his group's comments Elaine again said "Peter, I can't say enough about your focus this morning." This is the best day I have seen Peter have all year. He seems completely focused and has not caused any disruptions.
(Reconstructed Field Note, March 18, 2008)

I remember this day so clearly because I literally felt like Peter had changed over night to become a completely different student. Connelly & Clandinin (1999) described change as the creation of a new story to live by. The “interrupter” was now reliving his story as the student who was setting the example that others were being encouraged to follow, quite a turn of the tables from previous days, months, and years. I was curious about what Peter was feeling as he experienced this reshaping and reliving of his story to live by, such a defined change from the story he had been living and telling of himself earlier in the year. I was also curious why this change had so suddenly occurred. In another conversation with him, in early April, I asked him why he had suddenly “turned a new leaf” as he had called it:

‘I just got my report card, well this was before I saw my report card...I got in trouble ‘cause, from my mom because my report card wasn’t that good...now she’ll probably be so happy with me at the end of the year if I keep this up then she’ll be so proud of me because she doesn’t expect 5’s from me, she expects like 4, 3, 2’s.’ (Personal conversation, April, 2008)

Peter’s mention of his mother in relation to the change he experienced typifies again the way that stories to live by can be communally sustained or, in this case, changed or reshaped. Narrative threads that were woven together to create Peter’s story to live by on the classroom landscape extend beyond the boundaries of the classroom to off-landscape places like his home (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Although classmates and teachers are inevitable contributors to the communal creation of Peter’s story to live by, his mother is clearly another significant contributor off-landscape. Peter communicated in this conversation the significant influence that his mother had on the story he lived out on the school landscape. He described the place of tension that his report card marks, her feelings toward him because of those marks, and the expectations, or lack of expectations, that she had for him. I sensed that Peter was feeling upset that he had disappointed his mom and he believed that if he “kept this up,” referring to his “new leaf” as he retold and relived his story to live by, he would evoke pride from her, moving out of this place of tension.

Another reason I sensed Peter began to retell and relive his story to live by in the classroom was because he began to attend to relational knowledge, that is, knowledge created with others, living alongside others (Hollingsworth, 1994). “The concept of knowing through

relationship, or relational knowing, involves both the recall of prior knowledge and the reflection on what knowledge is perceived or present in social and political settings” (Hollingsworth, 1994, p. 77). I asked Peter if he thought he had “turned a leaf” for himself or if it was for his teacher or his mom. He said, “I just want to stay in the classroom and learn with my friends” (Personal conversation, April, 2008). Living alongside more than twenty other people in the classroom, Peter had realized that part of the overarching classroom story involved the behavior issues surrounding him and the frequent interruptions and distractions he created. “Some people like wanna get me out of the room so then they can work without me in the room with like, without interruptions so they, they want to try their best” (Personal conversation, March 6, 2008). As Peter attended to this prior knowledge, reflected on it, he realized that he could move from a place of tension where his classmates wanted him out of the room, to a place where he was happy to be able to remain in the classroom with his friends if he changed who he was while he was in the classroom. He extended this knowledge even further when he told me he understood how others felt when he was interrupting, “Now people are interrupting me and breaking up my chances of working” (Personal Conversation, April, 2008). He began to make sense of how his interruptions and distractions had affected the others living alongside him in the classroom and used this to reshape the story he was living.

Relational knowledge created by living alongside Elaine also seemed to play into Peter’s reshaping of his story to live by. I have already discussed much of this in the section above, in the way that Elaine, Peter, and the whole class created a sense of community in which Peter was positioned as an important and productive member. This inevitably contributed to reshaping Peter’s story to live by as a student. Additionally, Peter mentioned in a conversation with me that he is “so proud to be like getting all this attention even when I don’t interrupt” (Personal Conversation, April, 2008). He described this attention as different from what he was used to because “you’re not getting told to be quiet anymore” (Personal Conversation, April, 2008). This is evidence of Peter retelling and reliving his story to live by. Elaine’s approach to Peter, her attention to the ways he focused his energy in positive ways, and her consistent praise and acknowledgement of that positive behavior comprised relational knowledge that Peter began to attend to as he reshaped his story to live by.

“Old” and “New” Peter

Although the retelling and reliving of his story moved him from certain places of tension, with his classmates, his mother, and teachers, Peter described a new place of tension that was created as he made this transformation. In our conversation in April, I asked him if he felt like his personality was the same or if he felt like he could be himself now that he has turned a new leaf:

Peter: Um I’m trying to be, just everyone’s thinking I’m not, like out of school they liked the old me but in school they like the new.

Erin: Oh so you almost have two different...

Peter: Yep.

Erin: So who’s the old you?

Peter: Old me is like the interrupting me and the real like old me and the guy that comes up with all the ideas.

Erin: OK and then the new you in class?

Peter: Is shut your mouth, be quiet, get to work and don’t interrupt.

Erin: Oh do you like being that person?

Peter: Sometimes it makes me feel happy when I get like all these compliments and all that. But some people just like the old me like at recess ‘cause I’m usually more playful.

Erin: And do you like the old you?

Peter: Not in class but out of class yeah.

I sensed Peter had communicated Connelly and Clandinin’s (1999) notion of one’s identity showing different facets depending on the situation in which one finds oneself. The way he identified the alternate identity he had created to be successful in class demonstrated his understanding of how these different facets of his identity are acceptable in different situations. In class the new “shut your mouth, be quiet, get to work and don’t interrupt” Peter is desirable by his teacher, his mother and his classmates, resulting in compliments and positive attention, whereas at recess the old “playful” Peter is desirable. In examining this piece of our conversation I realized that although he referred to these different facets of his identity, his story to live by, as

“old” and “new,” his new story actually seemed to negotiate a shift back and forth between the “old” and “new” rather than eradicate the old, in order to match his movements on and off the classroom landscape. So as Peter began to retell and relive his story as a student on the classroom landscape, he began to shape two separate facets within this story between which he shifted accordingly as situations changed. Although this reshaping of his story to become this “new” Peter moved him from places of tension on the landscape, I sensed he has moved to another different place of tension, where sustaining this story is difficult and he only “sometimes” likes the new Peter.

Mrs. Neider is just getting used to the new me. She’s really used to the old me...If I can be like this for the rest of the year which will be a really hard job for me, then I’ll get like straight A’s all around and I’ll get compliments, I’ll get to rent video games because my mom will be so proud of me. (Personal Conversation, April, 2008)

Peter suggested that negotiating this new story, being the “shut your mouth” Peter inside the classroom is something that was very hard for him, yet the rewards, and praise received from others influenced the changes he made.

As the old Peter, he seemed content with who he was, “the guy who comes up with ideas,” “playful,” and even “the interrupter.” He was accustomed to having his behavior monitored by his classmates and his teachers to a point where it seemed routine. However, as he spent more time in Elaine’s caring classroom environment, one that encouraged him to become an important and productive member of the classroom community, he began to slowly reshape the story he was living by as a student. Attending to the relational knowledge being created alongside his classmates and teachers, Peter began to sense the places of tension in his story and the position he held in the classroom as one who often distracts others or needs to be removed from the classroom. To move out of this place of tension he reshaped his story to include two separate identities to appease the tensions he experienced on and off the classroom landscape. Over the extent of the inquiry, Peter told, lived, retold and relived his story to live by as I journeyed alongside him in and out of places of tension. I am left to wonder how his story will continually be retold as he moves on and off future classroom landscapes.

CHAPTER 5

LESSONS FROM “THE GOOD STUDENT” AND “THE INTERRUPTER”

Reexamining “Young Erin”

My journey alongside Brent and Peter in Elaine’s classroom became an experience that I could not have projected, predicted, planned for, or set forth in a proposal. I began the journey, as the “note-taker” that sat at the edge of the classroom and attempted to capture the experience in my notebook. I sit here now in a state of reflective awe as I try to put into words the complexity of the time, space, and relationships that I experienced in Elaine’s classroom. I started this thesis with stories of myself as a student, “Young Erin” striving to impress, to achieve perfection, feeling safe and comfortable in the school environment. After embarking on this inquiry, this journey alongside Brent and Peter, I see the experiences I had as a child and a student in a different way, layered much deeper than the memories I seemed to choose to retell. I had smoothed over the story of my childhood and as a student in my memories. Now I see that “...memory is a narrative reconstruction of events” (Lyle, 2000, p.52) in which I had attempted to create a smooth and coherent story of success and achievement within the context of school. Yes I acknowledged places of tension particularly in performance and achievement, but I somehow always managed to move from that place of tension by doing just that, performing and achieving.

In her dissertation, Pearce (2005) wrote about how living alongside the participants in her inquiry, “awakened me to the complexity of attending narratively to an understanding of community in schools” (p. 255). In my inquiry, living alongside Brent and Peter awakened me to the complexity of attending narratively to the experiences of children in school, their stories to live by. This awakened me to even consider my own story to live by as I reconstructed the events of my past as a student. When Brent talked about the way he felt uncomfortable being like a parent sometimes in the class I was reminded of similar feelings. I remember doing group assignments, being the one who was constantly keeping people on task and monitoring their work, even doing their work if it was not done or not done properly as I saw it. I also remember the stress this caused me as I dreaded group work for this very reason. When Peter talked about liking himself in school only part of the time I was reminded of the many times I thought to

myself, “why can’t I just not be the teacher’s favorite so how I do on this test or assignment does not matter so much?” The relatively smooth and uninterrupted story I had reconstructed of myself as a happy, safe, comfortable, good student slowly evolved into one with many more places of tension, complexity, and interruptions, as I attended these similar places in the stories being lived by Brent and Peter.

Children as Compositions

Bateson (1989) wrote that the lives of humans should be considered as compositions. One dictionary definition of the word composition is “the act of combining parts or elements to form a whole” (composition, n.d.). If one considers Bateson’s notion of human lives as a combination of many parts that combine to form the individual, it becomes easier to acknowledge the complexity of the children in our classroom. This can be likened to the idea of stories to live by, a complex weaving of many narrative threads to form the unique story of each child. I am intentional in using the word children instead of students as I write this because I feel “student” limits the individual to a pupil, a learner, in the classroom whereas “children” acknowledges the humanness of the lives being lived out in the classroom. Children are sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends, athletes, musicians, actors, singers, *and* students. Being a student is part of the whole, but it is just that: a part. Each of the children who come to us in our classrooms is a complex composition; each presents a unique story that has been shaped in different places, at different times, in relation to different people.

I learned from this experience alongside Brent and Peter that “...no one, no life, is completely knowable” (Pearce, 2005, p. 267). Too often I think that teachers are looked upon as people who are supposed to *know* their students. We are supposed to be able to report their abilities, their knowledge, and their difficulties down to a specific percentage grade on assignments, tests and report cards just as Danny experienced in his years as a student. This is perpetuated by a culture around teaching that gives the impression that because we are teachers, because of the position we hold in the lives of the children, because we hold a teaching certificate, we can in fact completely know or understand the children in our classrooms. Bateson (1989) and Pearce (2005) challenged this notion because of the complexity of the layers that compose the individuals that teachers claim to completely know. When I began the inquiry, Peter was singled out as a child with a label, a reason for his behavior deemed inappropriate year after

year. If Peter had only been the boy with the label I wouldn't have been able to understand him in all his complexities. I came to know him as a boy who loved Pokemon, loved to be active, loved football, loved video games, wanted to please his mother and Elaine, and paid close attention to relationships with his peers. He was a son, an older brother, a friend, a nephew, and a grandson. This inquiry, the time spent in a relationship with him, listening, observing, and attending to his story, helped me not to reduce him to the label he had been given and to delve deeper into the layers composing him: layers often shrouded by a label.

Pearce (2005) suggested that through her inquiry she located herself in a multiplicity of ways, a “student, teacher, counselor, teacher-educator, a daughter, a sister, and a parent” (p. 257). I too felt these multiple selves as I experienced the journey of this inquiry. I found myself drifting from piece to piece, layer to layer, to parts of me that compose the researcher as I walked alongside Brent and Peter. I drifted to my childhood, my memories of being an elementary student, to my experiences as a prospective teacher, to the present experience as a researcher, and back to my years as a classroom teacher. Being drawn to each of these pieces or layers of my composition, the narrative threads of my story to live by, remind me that each and every portion becomes a significant piece of the whole, significant to understanding who I am as a person. I am a musician, an athlete, an animal lover, a sister, a daughter, a wife, a cousin, a niece, a granddaughter, a mother, and a friend. I live my life in many ways, a multiplicity of ways, and so do Brent, Peter, and the other children in our classrooms.

Consideration as a teacher

The curriculum

I began to think about how understanding children in our classrooms as compositions influences the work of teachers. I turned to the work of Aoki (2005) to consider curriculum-as-planned, that which is mandated to be taught by powers outside of the school, and curriculum-as-lived, the experiences being lived out by the individuals in the classroom. Aoki suggested that because teachers live daily with the students in their classrooms, they know each of them as unique individuals. As a teacher I can vouch for this as I remember the personalities of students beginning to fill the classroom space on the first day of school. There was also no doubt in my mind that Brent and Peter were unique compositions as I wrote in the previous chapters of this thesis. Problematic is the fact that the planned curricula are created as a “plan for faceless

people” (p. 160). The unique compositions, unique stories that are being lived out in our classrooms are not considered. These faceless curricula create a “fiction of sameness” made possible by “wresting out the unique” (p. 161).

I am reminded of Peter and the way that he described the need for him to change, to be someone different when he was in school than he was outside of school. Brent grappled with this same notion as he explained the different stories he lived on and off the classroom landscape and the tension this created for him. Over several years of school these boys were stripped of their uniqueness, the depth in their individual compositions, in order to appease the dominant story of school and the delivery of the faceless curricula. Both boys clearly communicated, through words and actions, their understanding of what it means to be a good student, to align with the dominant story of school. Brent being the “discussion conductor” and describing the way he acts in class as “professional” and Peter telling me you need to “shut your mouth, be quiet, get to work and don’t interrupt.” According to both of these children, it meant living a different story than they lived elsewhere in their lives as the uniqueness of their stories was wrested from them.

Although curriculum guides are planned based on a fictional sameness, the inevitable is that individuals will all experience the planned curricula in different ways because of the unique composition of each of the children. When teachers present curricula and assess and evaluate children’s achievement in relation to curricula, they must consider “that there are many lived curricula, as many as there are self and students, and possibly more” (Aoki, 2005, p. 204). If teachers teach under the guise of fictional sameness, the multiplicity of lived curricula in their classrooms are not respected.

Living in relation

Eakin (1999) wrote about the extent to which we are relational selves living relational lives concluding that “all identity is relational” (p. 43). This aligns with Connelly and Clandinin’s (1999) notion of communal creation and sustaining of stories to live by, as well as Dewey’s (1938) principle of interaction. It is with these thoughts in mind that I consider the influence that school has on the composition of the children who enter our classroom, the shaping of their stories to live by. It is in relation to teachers, classmates, peers and curricula that children shape and reshape their stories to live by.

Brent's math experience with his Kindergarten teacher surely demonstrated the way that particular teacher, that particular moment in time will forever remain part of the story Brent lives and tells of himself as a mathematics student. Likewise, his experience with Miss Rogers will also remain part of that story, combining to create the whole composition that is Brent. Aoki (2005) wrote that "teaching is understood not only as a mode of doing but also as a concrete mode of being-with-others" (p. 361). The role of these two teachers in Brent's life clearly extends beyond the act of teaching mathematics. A relationship existed between Brent and each of these teachers as he crossed paths with them in his lived story of school, and these relationships each contributed to the shaping of that lived story as being his teacher meant being part of that story. It was through years of living in relation to teachers and classmates within the dominant story of school that Brent came to consider himself a 'robot' as a way to understand his story as it is lived out in Elaine's classroom.

Peter was also shaped by his school experiences as he labeled himself "an interrupter" because of the way he has been responded to year after year in classroom after classroom by his teachers and his peers. This relational knowing (Hollingsworth, 1994) became a catalyst in reshaping the story he lived out in Elaine's classroom. Peter knew himself as an interrupter, based on the stories others told of him, in this case both teachers and classmates supporting Eakin's (1999) notion of relational selves. He also used relational knowledge to understand how he needed to change in order to become one who is *not* considered an interrupter: years of having his behavior corrected and living in relation to students praised for desired behavior.

Children spend many hours with teachers and their classmates in school. Murphy (2004) wrote that "[o]ur stories to live by are shaped by the nested relationship we maintain in our lives (p. 305). It is not difficult to concede that teachers and classmates in classroom spaces heavily influence the stories to live by of the children who enter our classrooms because of the bumping up of stories and the relationships consequently developed among them. These stories are not always smooth and coherent but sometimes interrupted and riddled with moments of tension as the bumping up occurs and children encounter experiences over time in relation to others on the classroom landscape. It is with this in mind I consider the way that the stories to live by in Elaine's classroom were interrupted.

Unpacking “Interruptions”

I first want to reflect on the way the term “interrupt” has been used typically when discussing classrooms and the lives being lived out in classrooms. Interrupting, or being an interrupter, is considered rude, unacceptable behavior in a classroom within the canonical or dominant story of school. Peter epitomized this systemic understanding when he described being a good student in terms of *not* being an interrupter. To him, his behavior was rated in terms of how many interruptions he had made in a school day. Furthermore, he told me that Brent “is changing his leaf from wicked good student over to my side like interrupting guy” (Personal Conversation, April, 2008). Again he created a dichotomy, two sides, good student versus “interrupting guy.” Brent also demonstrated this similar understanding when he said he didn’t like it when kids talk out of turn. Although in school interrupting is seen as something negative, something to avoid, something uncharacteristic of the good student, there are ways that interruptions and interrupting may be perceived differently.

Brent’s interrupted story of self

As I began to examine this notion of interruption, I thought about Murphy’s (2004) understanding of breach and canonicity as a feature of narrative (Bruner, 1991):

Canonicity refers to the culturally accepted stories of a group of people. For example there is a canonical script for behaviour in school for children and teachers. This might be described as an expression of the sacred story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Crites, 1971) of school and in Crites’ terms he would name it a mundane story. In some of our conversations the children told stories that aligned them with the mundane story shaped by the sacred story of school. In other conversations the children or Lian told stories that breached the story of school. These breaches put them in conflict with the larger story of school. (Murphy, 2004, p. 281)

Brent’s description of “professional” behaviour in the classroom, or his comparison of himself in school to that of acting like a robot demonstrated his awareness of the canonical script for behaviour or the sacred story of school. He told stories that aligned him with the sacred story as he declared himself a good student and explained that he knew there were expectations in the classroom and he did his best to meet those expectations. Brent also began to tell stories in our conversations that could be considered “a breach or interruption in [his] story of school”

(Murphy, p. 281). He told the story of how he made sense of Elaine's trust in him to be "the responsible one" in their classroom. According to him it was because she knew he would meet her expectations and could help others do the same. He later told the story of how this made him uncomfortable sometimes, as he did not enjoy being considered "a parent" to other kids. This became a breach or an interruption of his story of school. He had aligned himself with the expected behaviors of school for a long time but realized he "was being somebody for necessarily the teacher, not necessarily for me," (Taped conversation, March 18, 2008).

Essentially Brent interrupted his own story of self in school. He explained that he felt he was not being himself when he was at school but was instead being someone different in order to please others. He did not like the discrepancy in his stories on and off the classroom landscape and in a sense he felt misunderstood by his classmates and peers as they seemed to only know him as the "robot" he was acting as he lived out his story in the classroom to align himself with the sacred story of school. When he told me that he did not think that teachers or his parents would like the shift in his story of school, he acknowledged his understanding that this interrupted story of self was putting him in conflict with the larger story. Brent found himself in a place where his story of self in school was in conflict with his larger story of self that encompassed the other parts of his life off the school landscape. In trying to smooth over this tension, to move out of a place of conflict, he interrupted that story of self in school to align it with the story of self he had out of school. In the process, he found himself in another place of tension, in conflict with the dominant story of school as the interruption breached the canonical script.

Interruptions, tensions and liminality

Brent's interrupted story of self emerged from and created tension in his story to live by. It emerged from a conflict in his story of self and created a new conflict in his story of self. When interruptions in our stories to live by occur, we are placed in a liminal space, an unstable space (Murphy, 2004). According to Heilbrun (1999):

...to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another. But the most salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing. (p.3)

Brent entered into a state of liminality as he interrupted and shifted his story of self in school. When he was sitting on the floor with his eyes shut, struggling to decide which voice in his head to listen to as the rest of his classmates returned to their desks, Brent was in a liminal space. He had begun to feel the unsteadiness and the lack of clarity in the tension he felt in the story he was living within the dominant story of school that became part of the motivation for interrupting and shifting his story of self. One might be wondering why I am writing about conflict, tension, unsteadiness, and lack of clarity in a section that is supposed to be discussing a perception of interruption that is *not* deemed negative. The key is in the perception of these things: conflict, tension, unsteadiness and lack of clarity.

The question remains, is being in a state of tension something to avoid? I remind you of the approach that Elaine took to tensions in her classroom as I wrote about it in chapter 4. She did not strive to create an environment with an absence of tension, but instead recognized that the tensions exist as a reality and taught the children to learn to live with them and deal with them as a community. This reminded me of a teacher Aoki (2005) wrote about:

Miss O knows that it is possible to regard all tensions as being negative and that so regarded, tensions are “to be got ride of.” But such a regard, Miss O feels, rests on a misunderstanding that comes from forgetting that to be alive is to live in tension; that, in fact, it is the tensionality that allows good thoughts and actions to arise when properly tensioned chords are struck, and that tensionless strings are not only unable to give voice to songs, but also unable to allow a song to be sung.” (p.162)

Elaine also seemed to understand that to be human is to be in places of tension. If one is to look at the way both Brent and Peter “turned a new leaf” or interrupted and shifted their stories to live by in school, these would not have occurred without the presence of a conflict in their stories to live by with the dominant story of school or the stories others told of them leading them to a place of tension. From these conflicts, these places of tension, stories of self are interrupted and one finds oneself in a place of liminality, “a state of necessary in-betweenness” (Heilbrun as cited in Huber, Murphy & Clandinin, 2003, p. 351). Brent needed to be in this place of liminality, in-betweenness, to allow him to attend to the tensions he was feeling as “the good student” and the “responsible one” as he rested in a space between the “Before” and “After” Brent. Murphy (2004) wrote that “when a story of self is interrupted we pay more attention to that story. This is a statement about heightened attention” (p. 285). As Brent began to attend

more closely to his story of self in school, he was able to see the way he wanted his story of self to shift. He interrupted his story of self because he was not happy with it. John Pierpont Morgan said that: "The first step towards getting somewhere is to decide that you are not going to stay where you are" (as cited in Bergland, 2007, p. 52). Without the presence of tension and conflict, interruptions of stories of self, and living in a liminal, unstable space, there would be no reason to decide not to stay where you are.

Interrupting my story of self as a teacher

As I considered Brent's interrupted story of self, I drifted to my own story of self, particularly that as a teacher, and the way it was interrupted during my experience teaching Danny and his four classmates that I wrote about at the beginning of this thesis and the tensions I felt when my story of self as a teacher conflicted with the story of those students and that classroom. In hindsight, I can see that my story of self going into that school year was aligned with the canonical script, the sacred story, of traditional school and what teaching and learning was as it emerged from my teacher education and years of my own experience as a student. It was idealistic and naïve but nonetheless, it was the story of self that I lived.

Entering into my experience with the boys in Danny's class became an interruption, a breach in that canonical story of self as a teacher. This interruption made me attend closely to my story of self (Murphy, 2004) as a teacher and the tension I felt as my story bumped up against the stories of Danny and his classmates. In this time of tension I found myself in a place of liminality. I felt I was on uncertain ground unsure of exactly what I should be doing or even what I wanted to do to smooth over the conflict and tension. What I did know was that I was in a place that existed between the story of self as a teacher that I knew, and one which I had yet to become. I realized the story that I was living was not the one I wished to live anymore (Murphy, 2004). I did not want to stay where I was.

It was because of my experience with Danny and his classmates and the way they interrupted my story of self as a teacher that I began to reshape that story. I may not have written this thesis had it not been for that interruption because my new story of self as a teacher also includes me as a researcher, something I could have never predicted if you had asked me prior to my experiences with those five boys. These boys made me realize that I wanted to get

somewhere else, I was not content with the story I was living out in that classroom in relation to them.

My story was not the only story interrupted in that classroom. I started to think about the way that I interrupted Danny's story of himself as a student. He had been living a story of self as a failure and had been storied as a failure by years of teachers and classmates. I deliberately attempted to interrupt that story of failure and place it alongside a new story of success:

Interrupted stories arise from our understanding of the original story placed alongside the new story. In the tension we experience between the two we must attend or choose not to attend, but in that moment we attend never-the-less. (Murphy, 2004, 285)

I wanted Danny to attend to the tension he experienced as I tried to show him that he was a capable and successful young man. I wanted him to see how the story of self as a failure conflicted with the story of self he lived in my classroom. These conflicting stories moved him to a place of liminality where he was unsure of himself in a place between two stories of self. I don't know where Danny is today or anything about his story of self. I also do not know about Brent's story of self as a student as he enters a new classroom with a new teacher in a new grade after his year with Elaine. I do know that it was because of interruptions, the tensions created by these interruptions, and the places of liminality that existed as stories of self were interrupted that Brent, Danny, and I were all able to move from a place where we were unhappy with our stories to new places as our stories were reshaped. I have come to believe that one can consider that, in some cases, knowing when to interrupt is a gift.

Making space for "turning a new leaf"

When stories are interrupted, tensions arise and those stories are reshaped to smooth over those places of tension. I began to wonder about the way this conception impacts classroom spaces and the children and teachers living in these spaces. I again return to Elaine's classroom and the way that Brent and Peter each went through an overt shift in their stories, or as Peter described it, "turning a new leaf." If children are going to experience interrupted stories and reshaping of stories, the turning of a new leaf, there needs to be space in the classroom in order for this to occur.

I thought specifically about Peter and the label he carried with him through his previous years of schooling. Elaine's classroom was a place where children were loved and cared for no

matter who they were or what stories they were living out in that classroom. Peter's label never became an excuse or a reason for him to be regarded differently than the other children in the class. He was treated as a contributing member of the caring classroom community, one who was respected and expected to respect others. Peter voiced this feeling when he said that he did not think Elaine would be as happy if he were not in the classroom. Perhaps this is one reason Peter felt that his year in grade five was so much better than previous years. In Elaine's classroom Peter was not stigmatized by the label that accompanied him to her classroom. She did not treat him in a way that kept him stuck as "the boy with the label." As he lived out his story in the classroom he was given space to turn the leaf he described near the end of the inquiry.

Brent had a similar experience in Elaine's classroom. Although he clearly stated that he thought teachers would not be happy with the "After Brent," Elaine did not show any change in her love and care for him as a member of the classroom community. Admittedly Brent had changed some of his "good student" behaviors to ones that may have been considered not as desirable, but Elaine mentioned to me in an informal conversation that he seemed happier overall. Many teachers would frown upon, or even take action against, a model student deciding that they needed to change their model behavior. In a sense "the good student" became as stigmatizing a label as that of Peter's. However, Elaine provided a space for Brent to explore that change.

Considerations as a teacher

Classroom environment

I began to wonder how this space was created by Elaine or how it could be created by other classroom teachers. Her ethic of caring, her fidelity to the children in her classroom, and the relationship she had with each and every one of them (Noddings, 1986) was significant in achieving this type of environment. What Elaine did in the classroom was always done with the person, the child, in mind. This was evident in small things like the smiles and good mornings that each child was welcomed with as they entered the classroom, or the respect that she both gave to and received from the children. The environment she created was one in which children felt cared for, loved, and safe to be themselves when living out their unique stories.

Another significant aspect of the classroom that allowed the children space to reshape their stories was the community environment. As I considered this notion of community and the way it was created in the classroom, I remembered one particular experience early in the inquiry:

Three students were to sit around the drum in the middle of the room and two boys were both going for the last seat. I noticed they both offered each other the spot “You can have it” “No you can have it.” A girl ended up going in place and the boys went back to their spot in the circle.

I felt like this really showed the power that Elaine has given the children in solving their own problems and treating each other with respect. In many places having two boys wanting the same thing may often result in pushing and racing for the position. These boys needed no interception from anyone else to respectfully solve their problem. Both responded very maturely to the situation without it becoming an issue any further. (Field Note, October 10, 2007)

Notably, Elaine did not interject in this situation at all. The children solved the problem completely independently of adult intervention, something one might not always witness in a classroom where teachers often intervene when confrontation arises or children ask the teacher to intervene.

In my field note I mentioned the power that Elaine has given the children in a situation like this one and was drawn to Oyster’s (1996) writing around shared authority in the classroom. “Central to the notion of shared authority is the context of pedagogical change” (p.19). In this particular case, Elaine is demonstrating a significant pedagogical change by giving up some of her authority in the classroom, the authoritarian type power typically exhibited in traditional classrooms that leads to constant teacher intervention in problem solving and often “tattling.” In this classroom, the authority was shared among the members of the community including Elaine and the children, which encouraged the children to become responsible for the functioning of the community as they did in the above classroom moment. In classrooms where children do not feel that everything is dictated by one person in authority, the teacher, there becomes space for individuals to take responsibility for their own stories being lived out in that classroom space as opposed to teachers dictating the way that story is lived.

Curriculum considerations

I take this opportunity to go back to the work of Aoki (2005) in curriculum as planned and lived. Perhaps another context of pedagogical change needs to be in the approach teachers have toward both of these concepts. Oyler (1996) wrote about the experience of one teacher and her approach to planning curriculum:

Anne's decisions about instruction and planning were determined in large part by publishing companies, as articulated in teachers' manuals. The underlying belief she was operating from was that classrooms are sites of knowledge transmission; the teacher is the transmitter of this knowledge, and the textbook companies make decisions about sequence and content. (p. 19)

When this traditional approach to planned curriculum is taken, the space for children to shape and reshape their stories to live by is diminished. When the classroom becomes a place for teachers transmitting a prescribed knowledge to a group of children, the composition of their unique stories to live by is disregarded. Teachers become the dictators of those stories seizing from the children the power to shape and reshape their stories to live by. Furthermore, a greater emphasis must be placed on understanding the curriculum-as-lived as I discussed earlier in the chapter. If teachers can respect the conception that children construct knowledge according to past experience (Dewey, 1938; Oyler, 1996) they can then respect the ensuing notion that the individual experience of each child should be, and will be, unique to that child because of the unique stories leading up to their present experience. "Teachers and students are co-actors as they dialectically shape the reality of classroom experience" (Aoki as cited in Pinar, 2005, p.4). Children are entitled to this co-actor role from which they have traditionally been deprived. It is from within this co-acting role that children gain the empowerment and the space to shape and reshape their stories.

Aoki (2005) wrote "To educate itself means, in the original sense, to lead out (ex ducere). To lead is to lead others out, from where they now are to possibilities not yet" (p. 350). If teachers embrace this as the goal of teaching, to educate in Aoki's terms, they are giving children the freedom and the space to become who they want to be. Teaching cannot be directing students to places we think they should go or places we see them going, but instead leading them out from where they are as they sit in classrooms to places we cannot predict and therefore not direct. We

must lead rather than direct because we do not know the intricacies of the stories, the compositions, of each child who enters the classrooms in which we teach.

The way that Brent and Peter experienced the daily curriculum in Elaine's classroom led them each on a journey through shifting their stories to live by. The boys had very different lived experiences in the same classroom as I wrote about them in previous chapters, both acknowledged and respected by Elaine. Elaine did not direct them to remain in the tiny box created by the stories they told of themselves and others told of them as "the good student" and "the interrupter." Instead each of them felt safe and empowered enough to overtly shift their stories from the ones they were living within those labels they had been carrying for a length of time.

Final thoughts: Humanizing Teaching and Learning, Teachers and Students

Teaching and Learning

When I began thinking about how to summarize the learning I have had throughout this inquiry and in the writing of this thesis, it was initially overwhelming. It felt as though there had been so much learning that words could not do justice. However, I came across two points that I believe encompass the "big ideas" in my learning journey alongside Brent, Peter, and Elaine. The first point came from Noddings (1986) when she wrote:

It should, indeed, be our goal in all of education to produce caring, moral persons, but we cannot accomplish this purpose by setting an objective and heading straight toward it. Rather, we approach our goal by living with those whom we teach in a caring community, through modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. (Noddings, 1986, p. 502)

My experience with Brent and Peter has shown me depth in the layers of their lives, their stories, as they are lived out in the classroom. The lesson plans, the objectives we set for these lessons, the curriculum guides mandated by outside sources, are all surface level ways in which children interact with their classmates and teachers on the classroom landscape. Beneath these formalities is where more attention needs to be paid. It is within these depths that children are shaping their stories to live by, their identities. This not only includes being caring and moral persons, but persons who believe they are strong, valuable members of a community to which they are

capable of contributing their strength and value. The most important point in Noddings' quote above is "living with those whom we teach in a caring community." Teaching should not be about separating student and teacher, or "good" students from "bad" students. It should be about living together, learning together as human beings in relation to one another, acknowledging the contributions that each member of the community can bring to the rest to enhance the teaching and learning that occurs within that community, that particular learning landscape.

I am left to wonder about a place where teachers move beyond the instrumental aspect of teaching where competence is considered being skilled in the technique of controlling students (Aoki, 2005). If accomplished, effective, competent teaching is focused on, as Noddings described it, "setting an objective and heading straight toward it," the human aspect present in the relationships among the members of the classroom community including teacher and students will be overlooked.

Teachers and Students

This brings me to the second point that encompasses the big ideas in my inquiry. I have mentioned above that teaching and learning needs to be considered as a human act in the state of relation between teachers and children. If this is to occur, then the view of teachers and students also shifts. Teachers and students must not be reduced to being-as-things (Aoki, 2005). Aoki contended that teachers are stripped of subjectivity and humanness if they are viewed in this manner, as instrumental, and I would argue likewise for students. In traditional education, students are also viewed in a somewhat instrumental fashion, as a "thing" to intake information and reproduce it for evaluative purpose thus stripping the humanness from the children in our classrooms. Danny was a student in my classroom to whom I was supposed to teach proper essay form. If my job as the teacher was limited to this objective and his production of a proper essay, the entire experience becomes one of sterility where we are each viewed as "things" rather than humans in a relationship: humans with complex stories and years of experiences influencing the acts of teaching and learning.

Aoki (2005) argued that a new view of teacher competence that does not limit itself to technical skills, classroom management, curriculum planning, and evaluation is necessary:

To help explore this view of competence, let us uncover the root etymology of 'competence.' The disclosure of the Latin root reveals a fresh view. The Latin root is 'com-

petere,’ ‘com’ meaning ‘together,’ and ‘petere’ meaning ‘to seek.’ In a root sense, then, to be competent means to be able to seek together or to be able to venture forth together. This root meaning of ‘competence’ as ‘communal venturing’ holds promise for a fresh view of what it means to be a competent teacher. (Aoki, 2005, p. 130)

This new view of competence seems to bear the understanding that the acts of teaching and learning are ones which a community undertakes, as opposed to the endeavours of individuals. The responsibilities for teaching and learning do not need to be designated to teacher and student respectively, but rather accepted by all in the community. This alludes to Oyster’s (1996) notion of sharing authority in the classroom because it does challenge the typical role of the teacher as the sole authority figure. It also draws on relational knowing (Heilbrun, 1996; Hollingsworth, 1999) and the principle of interaction (Dewey, 1938). If we acknowledge the fact that teaching and learning are done in relation with others as social processes, the role of teacher and student moves away from being-as-things toward being-as-human where the humanness is not only acknowledged but considered valuable. This view also leaves room for the notion of children as unique people living out unique stories in a shared learning environment. If teachers are able to work together with students in the acts of teaching and learning, it seems more likely that the individual experience each brings to the community will be valued and respected. Danny’s previous experiences as a student, his confidence in his ability to be a learner, and some of the challenging situations he was living became a significant part of my teaching him English that year. With this new view we can “...begin to do the work of attending to each other without an imposed script of school” (Huber, Murphy, Clandinin, 2003, p. 359).

Lasting Wonders

In writing this research text I have become more and more curious about the rest of the children in Elaine’s classroom. I attended closely to the story of Brent and Peter and how they were shaped by living in relation to the others in the classroom. I now wonder how the others in the classroom were shaped by Brent and Peter and the entire experience of Elaine’s classroom.

As I write about these big ideas above I am left with more wonders. If the goal is to create classroom environments where individual stories to live by are valued and respected, where teaching and learning and teachers and students are considered human as opposed to “things,” how do we move toward this goal out of the present “script of school” where being a

competent teacher is so instrumentally focused? Noddings (1986) wrote about the struggle between fidelity to a subject matter and fidelity to the person, the child. I would liken this to Aoki's (2005) two definitions of competence in teaching as described above. Fidelity to subject matter falls within the instrumental view of competence whereas fidelity to the child aligns with the new view of competence.

Both Brent and Peter are living examples of this fidelity struggle. Brent was living a story he didn't feel was true to himself because he was pleasing teachers by living the plotline of a good student in the dominant story of school. He was living up to the expectations of teachers at the expense of being true to himself. Likewise, Peter was influenced and shaped to believe that who he was on the out- of-classroom landscape was not okay on the in-classroom landscape because it did not align with the dominant story of school. These clearly became situations where fidelity to the "script of school" came before the fidelity to Brent and Peter as people. In Danny's situation I was told that if his marks were good, people might actually think he is good at language. Obviously this made the "obligation to the institution" (Noddings, 1986, p. 500) more important than the persons whom we teach.

My wonders remain in the practical. How do we move from one perspective of competent teaching and learning to another? How do we move to a place where the stories to live by of each student are part of the teaching and learning process? What must happen in order for the dominant story of school to be reshaped so that a "good student" identity does not have such limited characteristics that so many are excluded from this group and ostracized by the education institution? How can we begin to view our classrooms as communities where each individual brings forth valuable learning abilities and valuable knowledge to teach and share with the rest of the community?

It is not just students entering our classrooms each successive year in our teaching careers, but children with unique stories to live by. They bring to our classrooms these unique stories with multiple plotlines and characters that have shaped them to be the individuals they are as they enter the classroom. They are not just stepping into our stories as our students, we are stepping into each one of their stories as a character who will continue to shape and be shaped by them as people who live their own stories on classroom landscapes.

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