

ABSTRACT

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: CROSSING THE DIVIDE:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY
TEACHERS WHO CHOOSE TO WORK
WITH CHILDREN IN HIGH POVERTY
SCHOOLS

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In this phenomenological study, I explore the lived experiences of five early childhood educators, teaching literacy in high poverty schools. My work is guided by the research question: “What are the lived experiences of White early literacy teachers who choose to work with minority children in high poverty schools?” As phenomenology demands, my work is grounded in philosophy, and I turn to the writings of Sartre, Levinas, Derrida, Levin, and Gadamer. For methodological guidance, I rely on the work of Max van Manen.

Through the voices of my participants, I excavate the meaning beneath their experiences. In my initial conversations with two of my participants, Will and Paula, I detect their chosen dedication to working in Title I schools, and their respect for children’s individual needs and multiple identities.

Identity continues to emerge as a central structure, both in the lived experiences of each of my five participants and in their pedagogical practice. While each of my participants is White, each one conveys a sense of having a multiplicity of identities, which enables them to connect with their students and families. Through their pedagogy, my participants also attend to the various aspects of their students' identities. They address needs relating to language, family, literacy, community, and the difficult choices and challenges that await their students in society.

Throughout our conversations, the notions of choice and of crossing boundaries remain central. These teachers choose to work in low-income communities, where they move back-and-forth from their middle-class homes. As they teach a transformative curriculum, they also cross the boundary of curriculum, as they attend to the demands of standardization.

Finally, I suggest that teacher education programs examine how boundary-crossing might inform their own pedagogical practice. Through pre-service teachers' exploration of their own identities and their experiences with families in Title I neighborhoods, they can become boundary-crossers, comfortably moving between two divided worlds. And, by learning how to integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking throughout all aspects of the curriculum, they can teach children about the socially transformative power of literacy.

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by

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2007

DEDICATION

To my parents

Isadora and Philip Hare

For teaching me to think and to question, and for showing me the world

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CHAPTER ONE
TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON OF CHOICE

Choices: The Roots of Action

The address, 96 Carisbrook Street, Sydenham, Johannesburg, and the phone number, 45-1405 are the address and phone number of my childhood home. I begin with this place and time to show the context for my present research interest, because it was during my childhood that I began to learn about choice. It was there, in *apartheid* South Africa, where I began to realize that human action involves making choices and that many of those choices have an impact on children and on society.

My Childhood Garden

Our house stood in the garden, my favorite place to be. And in my garden stood my willow tree – the grand, strong, steady tree of my childhood. This is the tree we climbed, the tree in which my brother built a tree house, the one on which we swung from a rope, jumping into a pile of leaves. I had other favorite trees in my garden – the ones that offered me peaches, plums, and figs. But my willow tree was special.

I lived with my mother and father and two brothers. My father, a barrister, fought civil rights cases and defended Black activists – members of the African National Congress (ANC) – for “crimes” which carried the death sentence. My mother taught social work at Wits – the great university in Johannesburg. They talked about politics with us, with their friends, and with their colleagues. They had illegal parties, illegal because their friends were black and brown and white, and their

friends wrote poems and plays and books and articles conveying the evils of *apartheid*. I listened to those conversations and I thought about them as I rode my bike down our street, up the hill and then along the best street of all, the one with no hills. That street was the one I could ride while singing, feeling happy and strong and free, and alone but never lonely.

My home was my nest, my haven, my warm space. My house and my garden were where I returned, after riding my bike, and after witnessing terrifying moments: police filing Black men into vans for not having a pass to be in Johannesburg after dark; and police knocking on our door in the middle of the night with their frightening German Shepherds, looking for my nanny's husband, who was not supposed to be living with her in her room in the small brick structure that stood in our garden. The police came to arrest our nanny's husband because she and my parents chose to allow him to stay with his wife, ignoring the inhumane and cruel *Group Areas Act* forbidding Black husbands and wives to live together within the confines of "white" Johannesburg.

Gardens and Deserts

As a White child living in Johannesburg, I attended a well-funded government school near my home, Fairmount Primary School. Today, when I look through my school yearbook, dated 1973, I see smiling teachers and children, dressed in soccer uniforms and bathing suits, and I read their poems and stories. They are all White. I see one photo of Black South Africans, the photo of the "African staff," five men wearing their prison- like gray overalls. They are the men who cleaned my school and tended to the grounds and the gardens. They are the men who were forced to leave

their wives and children back in the townships or the “homelands” and come to Johannesburg to maintain the school grounds for White children. Other than the African staff, my school was all White, reflecting the law of the land.

As a child, I loved my school. Our classrooms were positioned in a square configuration, with an open courtyard in the middle. The African sun touched us the moment we walked out of the rooms. We walked in our black shoes, and the school uniform that made me feel that I belonged at my school, with my friends. I loved the smell of my crayons, and the way my lunch sandwich fit so perfectly in its square plastic container, the sandwich that my nanny made for me each day, the nanny I loved, who sang to me in Zulu and taught me words in Swazi. I loved to color with the crayons that smelled so clean and pure. I colored the pictures of the *Voortrekkers*, the Dutch settlers who made the Great Trek across South Africa, so that I would learn, year after year, the grand metanarrative of the history of the Afrikaners. I colored in the pictures of the “Bushmen” of the Kalahari, labeling their body parts like scientists would label the parts of a frog, so that I would learn that the indigenous people of South Africa belonged to their own, separate world. I did what I was told. I learned my math, I learned Afrikaans, I learned to read and write, and I loved it all.

While I basked in the nurturing blanket of my “Whites only” school, Black children in nearby townships were dehumanized and oppressed. As a result of the work of Geoff Cronje, the chair of the sociology department at Pretoria University, and his collaborators in the *Broederbond*, “that inner circle of Afrikanerdom’s new political intelligentsia” (Sparks, 1990, p. 175), *apartheid*’s laws poisoned the lives of Black children. Cronje insisted that racial separation permeate every aspect of South

African society, including education. In 1953, a new *Bantu* Education Act was created. It stated:

Racial relations cannot improve if the wrong type of education is given to Natives. They cannot improve if the result of Native education is the creation of frustrated people who, as a result of the education they received, have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled immediately, when it creates people trained for professions not open to them, when there are people who have received a form of cultural training which strengthens their desire for the white collar occupations to such an extent that there are more such people than opening available. (as cited in Sparks, 1990, p. 196)

The powerful and relentless locomotive of oppression flattened all hopes and aspirations for Black children. In 1953, the South African government spent \$180 per year on the education of every White child, while offering only \$25 for Black children (Sparks, 1990, p. 196). 20 years later, in 1973, I sat in the assembly hall of Fairmount Primary School, watching a performance of “African” children from a school in Soweto, a cultural performance of singing and dancing. In the spirit of *apartheid*, we celebrated their musical ability and their preservation of their cultural traditions, which the government insidiously used as the *raison d’etre* for keeping different races “apart.”

With the power and the privilege to manipulate, to name, and to frame the parameters of society, the apartheid regime could, for decades, oppress millions with their culturally oriented rationale. But, today, as a researcher, I wonder: What about those children on stage, without the power and without privilege? What messages did they hear and perhaps internalize from the manipulated constraints of their existence? Looking back, I wonder what those children felt as they drove from the economic destitution of Soweto to the opulence of Glenhazel, a suburb of Johannesburg. I

wonder if on June 16, 1976, three years after the performance at my school, they were among the students who refused to sing the Lord's Prayer in their high school assembly, and instead sang *Nkosi Sikele I'Afrika* – God Bless Africa – the call for twenty thousand students to strike out against *apartheid* and against their inadequate schooling. I wonder how many of those children were shot and killed by police and by army soldiers during those fifteen months of the Soweto school riots. I also wonder how many of them are now living and prospering in their country, knowing that their suffering, while not defensible, was also not in vain.

As they were denied the basic human right to learn, children in the townships were also physically and psychologically traumatized. We read the experience evoked by Mark Mathabane (1986) in his autobiography, *Kaffir Boy*. Remembering a police raid on his township during the *apartheid* regime in South Africa, he writes:

For a minute I thought I was dreaming because from outside there suddenly erupted the same volcano of noise of a day ago. Dogs barked. People shrieked and shouted and ran. Sirens screamed. Children screamed. Doors and windows smashed. Feet clumped. I tossed and turned as if in a nightmare, but the persistent pounding and kicking at the door, and the muffled voices coming from the bedroom convinced me otherwise...I slowly crept out from under the table; the sheets of newspaper rustled; I felt a tightening in my stomach, as if a block of ice were embedded there and were now freezing my guts...I lost control of my bladder... (p. 16)

I learned about this kind of human cruelty and suffering when I was a child. My parents taught me about *apartheid* and took me to Soweto, “a sprawling conglomerate of dormitory units known simply as the South Western Townships” (Sparks, 1990, p.189). Soweto is a familiar name for Americans today, after the Soweto student uprising of 1976, and after American college students built Soweto-like shacks on campuses across the United States to demand divestment from South

Africa. But then, Soweto stood silently, an internationally anonymous landscape of poverty and oppression and isolation. My parents took me to Soweto and Alexandra to see that Black South Africans were denied the right to choose where and how to live. I saw homes built from scrap metal with no electricity or plumbing and families living on “the hem of life” (Morrison, 1970, p. 17). I saw barefoot children playing with toys they had made from empty cans and metal clothes hangers, playing on the dirt roads, the desert of oppression. Were their mothers loving and nurturing the white babies of their employers, feeding them, bathing them, and watching them play in their swimming pools, while their own children ran barefoot and hungry? Perhaps the fathers of those children were the men in the gray overalls who cleaned my school and tended its gardens, or the gardener who worked for my uncle and aunt, who, with my aunt’s help, marked an “X” on a work document because he could not write his name. Wherever their fathers were, they were probably not in Soweto, because in Soweto, there were no gardens to tend, and as they were most likely unable to read or write, gardening was one of the few jobs they could perform.

What about their teachers? Again, the forces of racism and oppression prevented those children from having teachers to stand by them. Manning (1987) explains:

In black schools in South Africa, some teachers have little more education than the students they teach. The black schools in 1983 had 6,700 teachers with nothing more than eighth grade diplomas and 13,700 with twelfth grade certificates...In all, ninety-four percent of the nation’s 45,000 black teachers are underqualified...Twenty-three percent of the black population drops out of school before the first grade ..Seventy percent...has an education ending at or before the seventh grade...Pupil-teacher ratios are forty to one in black schools compared with a ratio of nineteen to one in white schools. (Manning, 1987, pp. 75-76)

Planting the Seeds of Learning

As I learned about suffering, I also learned about choices. My parents taught me to observe the things around me, to question, and to think. They tried to plant the seeds of human decency within me.

My mother stopped our car one night to help a Black woman on the side of the road, who had been beaten and whose head was bleeding and she drove her to the hospital. At other times, she stopped and offered rides to Black women walking up the steep and winding road up Munro Drive in Johannesburg, often with their babies on their backs.

My parents taught me that human action is derived from choice. They explained why they voted against the Nationalist Party of South Africa to voice their opposition. They hosted illegal parties in our home and they invited me to talk to and learn from their remarkable and courageous friends. Names such as Joe Slovo and Athol Fugard, now the stuff of Hollywood movies, were mentioned in my home because they were friends or colleagues or acquaintances, and they were leading the struggle that my parents supported. In a country where a government that denied basic human rights to the majority of its people, my parents taught me the core lesson of both true democracy and of the human condition – choice.

As a child, I sensed the agonizing choices my parents made. “Why do we have a nanny?” I asked my father one day, realizing that every White family employed Black women in their homes, a mark of the stratified and racist society. My father’s answer was wrought with conflict, but the immediacy of his response still speaks to me today. “When a woman comes knocking at my door asking for a job so that she

can feed her children, do I help her by saying no?" he asked me in response, and I realized that he made his choices with thought and with care.

Saying Goodbye to My Garden

When I was 10 years old, my parents made the most difficult choice of all. They chose to come to America, where their sons would not have to fight in an army that drove tanks through the streets of Soweto and killed Black children who were asking for a fair education, while their mothers were knocking on the doors of White families in Johannesburg asking for a job. Rather than offer their lives and talents to a cruel regime, they "voted with their feet," as my father often reminds me, leaving behind their parents, siblings, friends, and careers, leaving behind their world. I was 10 years old. My parents, with their three children stood in Johannesburg's Jan Smuts Airport, about to emigrate from South Africa to the United States. They chose to leave their lives in the beautiful but plagued land of South Africa, where an oppressive, racist regime ruled the land. So I began to say goodbye. But I was not very good at it, not as good as I was at coloring my pictures at school or playing in my garden. I felt a big, sore lump inside me, a lump of tears that threatened to burst open like a thundercloud if I let it. So I tried not to. The pain was unfamiliar and it scared me, and so I learned to hold it inside where it was safe. My family said goodbye to the majestic mountains of Cape Town that graced the sky and the magnificent African animals that graced the land. We said goodbye to grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends, as the announcement bells chimed over the loudspeakers and a voice in English and then in Afrikaans told us that it was time to

board our plane. As I said my farewells, I felt despair and loneliness, “as though I were being cut off from vital sources of nourishment” (Abram, 1996, p. 25).

From this childhood experience living in *apartheid* South Africa, and then as a young immigrant to the United States, I begin my phenomenological turning toward the experience of making choices in a world wrought with social injustices.

Throughout this journey, I learn that choice is aligned with power and privilege, that those with power are able to deny choice from those rendered powerless, or, assume responsibility to work for their emancipation and to be true to their own ideals. I learn the lesson that I, too, must think about how I want to use my talents and skills – where, and for whom. I continue to learn that choice is a privilege and a responsibility and that I must be accountable to myself and to those around me.

As I grow and study and learn, I determine that literacy is a vehicle for self-determination and that I want to contribute to the society in which I live by teaching children how to read and write. I begin my turning toward the phenomenon of White teachers, like myself, who choose to devote their professional lives to teaching literacy to young children who are marginalized by those with power and privilege. What leads to this choice? What beliefs or experiences stand behind the choice that brings us to work with these children?

Will¹ is one of these teachers. He is a colleague of mine from my ten precious years at a remarkable Title I school. Since first meeting in 1990, he has worked as an English Language Learner (ELL) teacher, a staff development teacher, an assistant principal, and a principal intern. In each of his roles, he has chosen to work with

¹ All names of the participants, the children, and the teachers in this study are pseudonyms

economically disadvantaged children of color. In our conversation, Will illustrates his choice as he recalls his first interview for a teaching position:

My first interview, after getting my master's in TESOL from Boston University (I was a theater major in college) is as an ESOL teacher. I go in, I don't know that I've ever interviewed for anything in my life before. I walk in and there's a big table of ten people to interview me. And I guess in my answers, the woman who was in charge, could tell my interest in working with disadvantaged children. So she says something like, "Do you think you could bring the same passion to your work if the children are from wealthy homes?" I...had...no...answer! She basically led me to the door. I stuttered and sputtered and tried to come up with something but the answer was no.

Paula is another teacher in my study. She is a remarkable Head Start teacher.

She explains her choice:

Teaching is just in my blood...I think it was there when I was a little girl. There was nothing else I wanted to do but teach...

As I listen to Will and to Paula, I feel a connection to their passion, their visceral pull, and their childhood memories that underscore their choice. I recognize that the seeds of their choice lie deeply within them, and that their work resonates with their fundamental view of the world and of their own humanity. As I listen to them, I am also pulled back by memories of some of my own teachers, whose choices made enormous impressions on me.

Behind the Garden Gate: When a Teacher Humiliates

When I was 12 years old, on my first trip back to South Africa, I visited my beloved standard 1 (third grade) teacher. I walked to her house and I stood outside her garden gate with my friend, Debbie, and we rang the bell. Miss Friedman walked toward us and I immediately sensed that she did not mirror my excitement and joy. She did not smile and she walked with a purpose and a predisposition. The language of her body revealed anger and I felt afraid. As Merleau-Ponty describes:

Faced with an angry or threatening gesture, I have no need, in order to understand it, to (mentally) recall the feelings which I myself experienced when I used these gestures on my own account..... I do not see anger or a threatening attitude as a psychic fact hidden behind the gesture, I read anger in it. The gesture *does not make me think of anger*, it is anger itself. (as cited in Abram, 1996, p. 74)

Miss Friedman said, “Hello, Melissa. I hear you live in America now. And I suppose you go to school with Black children. (Yes, I answered.) Well, that’s never going to happen here in this country. Not over my dead body.” She turned and walked back into her house.

Her words shamed me, and left me feeling as though I had betrayed her. She convinced me that my life in America was a secret, about which I should be ashamed, and which was now a “public revelation...that is considered deviant, indecent, ill-mannered, or morally aberrant” (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 145). Her words stunned me, mocked me, taunted me, and perplexed me. They were “anger itself.” They branded me as a stranger and an outsider and they reminded me of my alienation – no longer belonging in *apartheid* South Africa, and not yet feeling like an American,

...like a person who, having lived among another tribe, can no longer wholly return to his own. He lingers half within and half outside of his community... (Abram, 1996, p. 28)

Her words stood between us, like the gate she did not open. There she stood, on the other side of the gate, the same teacher that I had once loved, but a frightening stranger in the feelings she now evoked in me. I could not speak, but felt the poignant question, “Why?” Why did she pelt me with those words and sting my senses with that hatred? Why did she choose to punish me with rejection? Why did she choose to reduce me, shrink me, render me stunned? Why did she choose to allow herself to

feel and express such racism? Was her racism born of her fear, as she watched so many of her students leave South Africa – a country with an uncertain future?

As I recall my encounter with my teacher, I turn to the work of the great South African playwright, Athol Fugard (1982), who depicts the terrifying ease with which a young man dons his cloak of racism in the face of the two Black men who have been his friends and confidants since his childhood. In “‘Master Harold’ ...and the boys,” Fugard gives voice to young Hally, whose playful verbal dueling with Sam and Willie is interrupted by a contentious phone conversation with his parents. When Sam offers advice about his father to Hally, Hally descends upon him with his rage:

...what you’ve been trying to do is meddle in something you know nothing about. All that concerns you in here, Sam, is to try and do what you get paid for – keep the place clean and serve the customers. In plain words, just get on with your job. My mother is right. She’s always warning me about allowing you to get too familiar. Well, this time you’ve gone too far. It’s going to stop right now. You’re only a servant in here, and don’t forget it. And as far as my father is concerned...all you need to remember is that he is your boss. He’s a white man and that’s good enough for you. (Fugard, 1982, p. 53)

Never before has Hally unleashed his racial hate at Sam. Never before had I felt a teacher’s nastiness directed at me. But that gratuitous nastiness resonates within me today, and strikes a cacophonous chord whenever I observe a teacher humiliate a child.

As I recall my encounter with Miss Friedman, I imagine how differently she could have responded to me. Why didn’t she hug me, and tell me that it was lovely to see me again? Why didn’t she ask me whether I liked living in America? If she had, and if she had allowed me to feel safe and cared for, I might have told her about my pain. But I could not. I could not tell her that I was lonely, that I had no friends, and that children teased me because I spoke and dressed differently, that we drank apple

juice that tasted funny, that mom cried a lot, that I wrote imaginary newspaper ads asking for friends, or that people in America called a garden a yard and that our yard felt empty and cold.

Today, as I begin to examine more deeply the phenomenon of the choices teachers make in their interactions with children, I turn to my memories so that I may find the “original shell” (Bachelard, 1994, p. 4) in which my phenomenological turning germinated. “I alone, in my memories of another century” (Bachelard, 1994, p. 13) can excavate the layers of meaning for a girl who was taken away from the home she loved, and who then returns, to be taunted with words by the teacher who once taught her to love books, to love reading, to love words themselves.

It is here that my turning toward the phenomenon of human choice continues and narrows. It is there, outside that garden gate that I begin to learn about the power and influence a teacher possesses as she interacts with her students. Outside a garden gate, I face the phenomenon of the power and the privilege that teachers have to influence and transform children’s views of themselves and of their place in the world, particularly when that place feels unwelcoming. I wonder how teachers experience the choices they make as they talk and interact with their students, choices that can result in powerful transformative influence.

Opening the Garden Gate: When Teachers Inspire

My journey continues throughout my years in American schools, where I experience the power of inspirational teachers. The teachers I remember with the greatest fondness and whose presence stays with me, alive in my memory, are teachers who taught me to communicate, both through the content of their subject

matter and through their interactions with me and my peers. They are teachers who devoted themselves to children, teaching us how to reach within ourselves to find a voice, a voice that can sing out, be heard, and touch others. They are teachers who showed me – through French, through music, and through the written word – that, “When you work you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music” (Gibran, 1979, p. 25).

Hansen (1995) offers an explanation of the powerful influence teachers have over their students. He writes:

Teachers can play a significant role in what young people learn, in how they learn to learn, in how they come to view learning itself. They can influence young people’s personal dispositions toward others, and toward their own futures. Their influence, for good or ill, can extend well beyond the duration of schooling; anyone who remembers teachers they have had can readily attest to this. (p. 9)

Hansen’s words resonate with my memories of teachers, each of whom had a profound influence on me and on my future, the future that is now. When I was twelve, I met Madame Williams, my French teacher who walked into the classroom on the first day of seventh grade, in a whirlwind of French and with a commanding presence, not allowing a single word of English to be uttered in her room. She made one exception, when, frustrated by the passivity of a classroom of pre-adolescents, she folded her arms and emphatically stated, “You are wasting the taxpayers’ money!”

Madame Williams nurtured my love of language and communication that I have felt since early childhood. As a Jewish child living in South Africa, my ear was already attuned to the sounds of many languages, sounds which Merlau-Ponty calls “a melody – a singing of the world” (as cited in Abram, 1999, p. 76). I am attuned to

Afrikaans, a required school subject and the language of the government and of most white South Africans; to Hebrew, the language of my heritage, of prayer, and of my extra-curricular schooling; to the Yiddish of my grandparents and my father and uncles; and to Swazi, Zulu, Xhosa, and Sutu, the languages of the majority of South Africans. I learn that through language, understanding among people can be fostered, and relationships can be nurtured.

I studied French with Madame Williams for three years, thriving under her demanding expectations and her refusal to accept failure, and I continued pursuing the language throughout high school and college. Today, as I read the work of the French phenomenologists, I recall with fondness how I read the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre, and Camus in the original language, and I remember the inspiration Madame Williams instilled in me.

Was it Madame Williams's own command and passion for the French language that propelled me to emulate her? Was it the message that her folded arms and indignant expression conveyed about her insistence that we achieve? Or was it my perceived belief that Madam Williams's uncompromising demands represented that she cared about me? Perhaps it was a combination of each, and perhaps the significance of my relationship with her offers another piece to the phenomenon I now am exploring.

In high school, I met Mr. Bud Reggio, my band and orchestra conductor, who nurtured my love of music, and encouraged my study of the piano and the clarinet. Like Madame Williams, Mr. Reggio demanded hard work and persistence, which he taught me are the paths to aesthetic beauty and the ability to communicate

universally. My music allowed me to survive adolescence and became an all-consuming venture, leading me into school musicals, chamber groups, summer music studies in the Berkshire Mountains, friendships and romance. Through my music, I am “a child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings...with the great black piano appassionato” (D.H. Lawrence, in *The Norton Introduction To Poetry*, 1981, p. 451).

As I played and studied my music, I experienced the remarkable ability that humans have to create beauty, and to use music to announce the triumph of the human spirit. I listen to the township jazz from South Africa and hear how simple instruments, like the toys made from wire in the streets of Soweto, produced music that is joyous and that celebrates life. I listen to the songs of Miriam Makeba, who transposed suffering into soulful and sometimes joyous singing. She sings “*Kawuleza*” a song that, as she explains, is about children in the “townships” shouting for their mothers to run and hide because the police are coming to raid their homes. I listen to “Negro” spirituals and wonder how slaves were able to sing under the scorching sun, while working in the fields under the watchful gaze of the white foreman. Did the sounds of their voices offer a reminder to them that they were alive?

I learned to play Scott Joplin’s ragtime, waltzes and marches on the piano, the amazing music of a Black man born just five years after slavery was terminated. In the introduction to my tattered, cherished book of piano music, *Scott Joplin:*

Collected Piano Works, Rudi Blesh (1971) writes:

Although creatively far ahead of his time and place, Joplin was also imprisoned in it. Beyond the publishing of piano rags and, perhaps, money and a certain circumscribed fame, where, in America, could he go?...He was

limited to the black world...If his conceptions were those of genius, still his genius wore a black skin. (p. xxi)

Thus, although victimized by the residual forces of slavery and the vitriolic passion of racism, Scott Joplin persevered and created a new way of communicating, a new musical language.

What lessons do I learn from these musicians? Can music be a catalyst for determination? Is it an expression of the human spirit that can never be taken away? Do I learn to turn to music as a way of embracing world cultures? Can the words of songs become motivating catalysts for children learning to read? Can I build a sense of classroom community through music?

Very recently, I am again reminded of the tendency of humans to turn to music for comfort and to forge out communities through the bonding nature of creating music together. On October 29, 2006, my daughter and I perform in a “Harmony for Humanity” musical recital to honor Daniel Pearl, the *Wall Street Journal* journalist who was captured and beheaded in Pakistan in 2002. As Shari plays Haydn’s “Little Dance” on her flute, I accompany her on the piano, and she, among a large group of other children, commemorates a man who loved to play music, bringing joy to himself and to those who listened. Shari joins an international community of musicians from more than forty countries, who honor Danny Pearl’s memory and humanity during “Daniel Pearl Music Days,” a weeklong network of musical performances dedicated to his mission of joining people together through words and music. I think about how music can heal, and how its sound rises beyond the bodies of those who create it, lasting for eternity.

Returning to my past, I recall how, when I was fifteen, from my high school orchestra pit, I watched Musa, my first great love, sing and dance on stage playing the lead role in “The King and I” as Mr. Reggio shouted at me, exasperated, because I was missing his conducting cues. From the orchestra pit, I fell in love with Musa, a remarkably talented performer and a devout Muslim. We pursued a four year relationship that taught me about the beauty of a culture and a religion that historically existed in conflict with my own. From a beginning bond of music and theater, I formed a human connection that took me into a large Muslim family, mosques, celebrations of Ramadan, and the study of Islam. I learned the power of human connections and how those connections can facilitate understanding and the reduction of prejudice.

Several years later, during my first year of teaching, I note that it is the end of the month of Ramadan, and I wonder if Farah, a Lebanese child in my kindergarten class, is observing the holiday, *Eid*. When I ask her, she beams and tells me about her family’s feast. Our class then makes a card for Farah, and she, again, is noticeably pleased. I realize the power of acknowledging a child’s identity, family, and traditions, and the fact that teachers hold the power to either create an environment that honors children, or one that silences them and smothers their identities. My awareness of Farah’s traditions and observances stemmed from my relationship with Musa, found through our musical connection. Is it necessary for teachers to have had their own experiences with diverse cultures in order to connect to their students? Can’t they give the children opportunities to share the parts of them that are important and proudly adopt the role of teacher as they bridge their identities from home with

their lives in school? Can teachers form relationships with their students that facilitate understanding and help to reduce prejudicial attitudes?

My music and my studies at Oberlin College are another part of my phenomenological turning. Through experiences with loss and grief, I discover the powerful and healing nature of interpretive writing. Each lesson – the profound loss of losing someone dear and the expressive force of writing – draws me closer toward a deep rendering of life. During these years, I lose my dear friend, Nancy, to cancer, and, six months later, my beloved grandmother, and I confront death, and learn its cold and lonely emptiness. I seem unable to overcome my grief and grasp how these two precious and vibrant women are now gone forever from my life. Death’s inevitability is, to me, a stranger and I linger in my grief and shock. As William Wordsworth so poignantly expresses in the poem, “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal,” I was in disbelief:

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force:
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees. (p. 26)

As I sit on the steps of my college dining hall, having just received the news of Nancy’s death, one week after I wished her a happy twenty-first birthday, my friend and teacher, Rabbi Shimon Brand, comes over to me. He puts his hand on my back, and sits with me in silence. I begin to cry. Shimon chooses not to remove his hand and he says nothing. I cry until the tears are gone because feeling Shimon’s

unhurried presence, I know that he will not leave and, therefore, that my grief, that *I* am important. From Shimon, I learn about compassion and caring and trust and the healing force a teacher has by letting a student know that she matters. As I remember this moment in my life, I think about how rarely teachers offer their time to students and how often they dismiss them, too busy with other demands.

On life's journey, we all face loss and grief, but not all children have people or places where they can express their sadness. Indeed, American culture often seems to discourage the open expression of feelings. The poet and educator, Georgia Heard (1999) writes:

All of our lives know deep sorrows and ecstatic joys and a hundred nuanced emotions in between. But sometimes this United States culture wants to drown sorrow in Smiley Faces and "Don't Worry Be Happy" songs; we don't allow ourselves to feel sorrow without feeling ashamed that there's something wrong with us. (p. 86)

But what if teachers are willing to take the time to listen to their students, and to invite them to share their feelings in the classroom, to offer that missing place in a child's life, to be that missing person?

As Noddings (2001) explains, the one who does the caring and the one who receives that care are inseparable. We should not separate the actions of the carer from the response of the cared-for. She talks about the "highly complex interactions of teachers and students through which learning is accomplished" and that "teaching is a relational concept" (p. 100). Is the expression of emotions a component of those complex interactions and of the relational concept of teaching? Do children learn better when they are not paralyzed by anxiety or sadness? Do teachers teach better when they know about their students' lives? And are these questions particularly

relevant for teachers in Title I schools, where, by virtue of their families' economic and social struggles, many parents may have less time for their children's emotional needs? Or, are these questions relevant because Title I teachers may misinterpret the emotional expression of children and their parents due to cultural barriers?

When I begin to channel my sorrow during a creative writing seminar with another remarkable teacher, Dr. Sarah West, I rest in the presence of the powerful healing nature of writing. Sarah is moved by my writing and encourages me to pursue the craft, helping me to confront a very personal and real pain in the context of a classroom. Sarah demonstrates the words of Maxine Greene (2001):

We...need to devise the kind of classroom situation in which a learner can...speak to others...once she puts it into words, and somehow can be helped to discover how to go about responding and resolving, if only for the time being. (p. 83)

As I write my way through my grief, I continue to be called by the power of text. Through writing, I recall my memories of Nancy and draw meaning from our precious friendship. The words form a memorial to her and to our time together.

These teachers, among others, seem to understand my desire to learn, to belong, and to express myself. They represent to me Nel Noddings's (2001) concept of a caring teacher. She writes:

...it is clear that caring implies a continuous drive for competence. In the virtue sense, it refers to a person who continually strives for the competence required to respond adequately to the recipients of care; in the relational sense, it refers to situations regularly displaying the kinds of interactions in which both parties are growing. (p. 101)

Still mourning the deaths of Nancy and my grandmother, I choose to leave the United States upon graduating from college, and travel to Israel. There, I have friends and relatives, and a sense of purpose. I live in Jerusalem, and work at a special needs

school and research facility run by the well known and controversial developmental psychologist Dr. Reuven Feuerstein. In English, French, and Hebrew, I work with Israeli and European children whose parents are given hope that, through Feuerstein's mediated learning model, their brain damaged or Down syndrome children will learn to read and write. I recall Dr. Feuerstein's white beard and black beret, and the way he interacted with the children and the lectures and presentations he gave to show how brain damaged and Down syndrome children could learn. I did not explore the scientific validity of Dr. Feuerstein's theory, but I experienced the sense of commitment and hope he and his staff maintained for those children.

Six months later, my mother sends me information about doing graduate work at the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study at Tufts University. Today, as I examine the educational debates surrounding literacy practices, I often take a sobering view of my age as I realize that I have followed the debate since I entered the education profession in 1988, by deciding to pursue my master's degree in applied child development at Tufts. At that time, "Literature enjoyed a prominent place in the nation's classroom" (Arya, 2005, p. 64), and there was a "resurgence of interest in Louise Rosenblatt's reader response theory, which emphasized interaction and interpretation during the process of reading" (Arya, 2005, p. 64). At Tufts, I become intrigued with the grass roots literacy movement widely known as Whole Language (Goodman, 1986), with its emphasis on literature, meaningful and authentic engagement with reading and writing, and the analogy it creates between learning to read and learning to talk. I learn about whole language, how to administer reading assessments using running records, intellectual and social development, children's

literature, and integrating developmental theory into teaching practice. I study the work of Marie Clay, Kenneth Goodman, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Howard Gardner, and other great thinkers, and throughout my studies, I gain the intellectual foundation to support what I had always felt. I learn how to honor and recognize the individuality of each child and match curricular and pedagogical practices to the developmental needs of each one.

Again, drawing upon my love of language, the whole language philosophy and developmental theories resonate within me. As I read beautiful literature to children, I see their faces communicate the emotions elicited from the stories, and I respond to their poignant questions. Watching very young children experiment with crayons on paper, and older children begin to write, I read fascination, motivation, determination, and creativity in their eyes. I think to myself, are these not the foundations of human communication? Is communicating and connecting with those around us not the essence of being human? I see, again, that literacy is the path to participation in society, to having a voice in one's community, and to feeling able to articulate one's thoughts, perceptions, and concerns. I realize that the love of learning that we instill in the youngest children can carry them through difficult and trying moments in their lives, and I am reminded why I have chosen to teach.

As I learn about interacting with text and interpreting meaning, I come closer to the scientific art of phenomenology and hermeneutics that I encounter formally in my doctoral studies at the present time. My pedagogical philosophy leads me toward my own style of learning, and closes the circle of my identity as teacher and learner.

Stepping Through the Gate: Crossing the Economic Divide

When I begin to fulfill my teaching certification requirements, I become a student teacher at the Edward Devotion School in Brookline, Massachusetts, the school that John F. Kennedy attended as a young child. There, where many children receive Title I services, I learn the meaning of the federally funded program. As Jean Anyon (1997) explains:

Mostly federal in origin, numerous programs and projects were begun in city schools in the mid sixties. One of the major programs was Title I of the ESEA, which provided assistance to schools having concentrations of educationally disadvantaged children, defined as children from families having annual incomes of less than \$3,000 or supported by AFDC. Title I provided funds for remedial reading, ...reduced pupil-teacher ratios, special teacher training...and specialized staff for social work... (p. 113)

I feel a sense of comfort in the benevolence of America, realizing that the government provides for children from low-income families. I believe that all children deserve the opportunity to reach their potential, and that economic disparities should not determine which children fail and which children succeed.

Beginning during my studies in Boston, and throughout my years as a public school teacher and a graduate student, I also recognize that *apartheid* does not only manifest itself as a political engine. Here, in the United States, economic disparities, usually falling along racial lines, shape a society that is, too, divided. Here in the United States, the divisive forces are more insidious, more subtle, and more ambiguous. Segregation is not “codified in law” and it is not a “national principle” (Sparks, 1990, p. 190).

On the contrary, 52 years ago, the United States Supreme Court rules in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated education is unconstitutional because it

is “inherently unequal.” In Topeka, Kansas, where Black elementary school children had to walk past their neighborhood schools, which were for White children only, and travel far distances to the schools assigned to Black children, a group of determined and committed parents challenge the racist system and win the legal battle. The Supreme Court rules that schools are to be integrated, pointing to the psychological damage that segregation inflicts on Black children.

In 1991, however, Jonathan Kozol reveals a damning account of American public schools. He visits schools across the United States, in thirty neighborhoods, talking to teachers, principals, parents, and children. Kozol writes:

What startled me most – though it puzzles me that I was not prepared for this – was the remarkable degree of racial segregation that persisted almost everywhere. Like most Americans, I knew that segregation was still common in the public schools, but I did not know how much it had intensified...Most of the urban schools I visited were 95 to 99 percent nonwhite. In no school that I saw anywhere in the United States were nonwhite children in large numbers truly intermingled with white children. (p. 3)

An analysis of William Julius Wilson’s work (1987) offers one explanation for the deep and continued racial divide in the United States, based on a reciprocal relationship between poverty and race. Wilson tells us that poverty among blacks in the United States is originally the result of slavery and the crushing devastation occurring in its wake. Temporarily and sporadically offset by a hopeful northern migration, responding to invitations for jobs in factories and mills, many blacks enjoyed employment and the income necessary to provide for their children. At that time, until the 1940’s, black communities were “vertically integrated,” (p. 49) meaning that groups of varying income levels lived together. While many were still poor, communal schools, churches, and businesses benefited from the presence of a

strong middle class. Men and women going to work each day provided role models for children whose parents may have been unemployed; intact families provided examples of family unity to children whose parents may have been separated; and businesses provided jobs for both skilled and unskilled members of the community.

However, according to Wilson (1987), as desegregation provided individual rights to Blacks, and then, later in the 1970's, when affirmative action laws offered educational and employment opportunities to qualified Blacks, middle class Blacks left the cities and vertical integration disappeared. Jobs also disappeared for those who, because of a history of poverty, were unskilled. Joblessness, then, led to further poverty.

Ladson-Billings (1994) offers a similar account. She writes:

Indeed, schools in large urban centers today are more segregated than ever before. Most African American children attend schools with other African American children. Further, as the whites and middle-income people of color (including African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans) fled the cities, they not only abandoned the schools to the poor children of color but also took with them the resources, by way of the diminishing tax base. (p. 3)

Thus, while elimination of the Jim Crow laws supported the efforts of better skilled and educated Blacks, the legal changes did not help the poorest of the poor. Until the present day, no subsequent social policies have been offered to improve their fate. Wilson (1987) and Ladson-Billings (1994), therefore, argue that class status as well as race, unsupported by mainstream American society, provides an explanation for the existence of the ghetto poor and for the continued segregation in America.

Today, then, as Jean Anyon (1997) notes, most residents of large American cities are African American or Latino; while in 1990, African Americans comprised

only 8.7% of suburban inhabitants in 12 of America's metropolitan areas. Our African American children, few in number in White middle class neighborhoods are conspicuously noted, as are the rare white faces in urban public schools.

My experiences reverberate with Kozol's (1991) observations and Anyon's (1997) statistics. I look upon classrooms that are either seas and hues and shades of white or brown, but rarely a rainbow of both. Thus, while our public schools reflect both the legal and political nominal integration mandated by the Supreme Court of the United States, they also reflect the continued social segregation marked by economic and social *apartheid*. Like the children from Soweto who came to perform at my school, most low income children of color in the United States live and learn removed from the comforts of White suburbia. Like the children attending Fairmount Primary School, most White children in America attending their neighborhood schools never even see the poverty in which other children of their age live. Given the obvious visual segregation that we see in American public schools, then, there exists constant reminders of the insidious, tacit forms of segregation and discrimination, of dividing.

When teachers create classes of children at the end of each year, in preparation for the following year, and typically divide children by race, gender, ethnicity, and ability, the implied goal is to integrate each class. If schools were truly integrated, such dealings with the lives and colors of children, like a deck of cards, would not be necessary. If schools were truly integrated, then teachers' selection of where to teach could not be examined based on the racial, ethnic, or economic demographics of the children. But this is not the case, and, so, my turning continues. I

begin to examine, as I make my own choices, the choice of veteran teachers to cross the divide, to step through the gate and teach children of color in Title I schools. What motivates them to cross the color lines and the lines between rich and poor?

As Jeannie Oakes (2000) explains, segregation penetrates even deeper than on the basis of race. Her works portray a system in the United States that hauntingly echoes the decree of the 1953 Bantu Education Act in South Africa. She writes:

More than four decades after *Brown*, school segregation remains, as do racially distinct, ability-grouped academic programs and extracurricular activities in racially mixed communities that can no longer legally segregate their schools. Within schools, these segregative arrangements continue to be bolstered by the argument that equal opportunities in a democracy requires schools to grant each student access to the kind of knowledge and skills that best suit his or her abilities and likely adult lives. To make the argument more palatable in a culture that, rhetorically at least, prefers to see itself as abiding by classless and color-blind policies, educators and policy makers have reified categorical differences among people. So, in contemporary schools we have gifted students, average students, "Title I" students...and so on, in order to justify the different access and opportunities students receive. (p. 105)

Do teachers ask why? Do they object to this discriminatory educational system? Do they protest the inequities? Alfie Kohn (2004) asserts that there is "collateral damage" occurring as a result of "No Child Left Behind," which does, in fact, exacerbate segregation. He describes the "diversity penalty" whereby "the more subgroups of students that attend a given school, the lower the chance it will be able to satisfy all the federally imposed requirements for adequate progress" (p. 92). He also raises the question as to whether schools are increasing their "tracking" systems "in order to maximize the efficiency of test preparation" (p. 92). As I watch first grade children "switching for math," being divided among classrooms and teachers according to their "ability," I have reason to wonder if Mr. Kohn is correct.

When we examine the root of the word segregation, we find that it comes from the Latin *segregatus*, meaning separated from the flock, isolate, divide (Barnhart, 1995, p. 700). The practice of segregating children in American public schools reverberates with my call to teach for human justice. If teachers honor the individual voices of each child, the music of their spirits, the pain they have endured, and the bravery and persistence they demonstrate, each labeled group of children would be comprised of only one child. Discriminating would be transformed into celebrating the uniqueness of each child and the hope and promise each one offers to the world.

Motivated and inspired by the ideals of whole language, my knowledge of children's artistic development, and the work of Vygotsky and Piaget, I return to Maryland and begin teaching in a Title I kindergarten classroom. My passion, however, soon becomes the target of a principal, who loathes my approach to teaching. She demands worksheets, desks, and other traditional practices, that I find troubling. And she demands that I turn in daily lesson plans to show my compliance. I am reprimanded for distributing the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) report on developmentally appropriate practices at back-to-school night, and reprimanded for not nominating one of my students to receive an award at a school assembly. Refusing to single out one child at the emotional expense of the rest, I band together with my like-minded friend and colleague, Sherrie, and hold a subversive awards assembly of our own. In my classroom, we gather together, sing songs to my piano accompaniment, and recognize each child for an individually created award. Our singing is not a clarion call to take to the streets in protest, but

rather a declaration of passive resistance, to give our children opportunity for celebration, not humiliation. Our choice echoes our power and our sense of responsibility to the development of our students. Our principal is angry and asserts her power by “writing us up.” But her anger is challenged by many parents who become my friends and my allies, and who request that I remain their children’s teacher the following year. I think about how many opportunities all teachers have to make choices that honor and protect their students and I believe that the opportunities are endless.

After the three years required by my school district to receive tenure and to be permitted to transfer schools, I send out letters to the principals of all the early childhood primary schools in the area. Within a few days, I receive a call from Suzanne Banello, who soon becomes my boss, my mentor, my dear friend, and a participant in my study. Like my parents did, I vote with my feet, and find a place where I am able to express myself without threat of punishment, and where I find people with whom I can connect and collaborate. As I am packing up my room, a colleague comes in to talk. She tells me that it is probably wise that I am leaving, because I “always did march to the sound of my own drummer.” I take my books and my drums and I depart.

Today, I wonder how other teachers committed to democratic teaching and to social equity respond to the demands and challenges of standardization and “accountability.” How do they remain truly accountable to children, to their learning as well as to their souls, as they are pressed to march to the drumbeat of conformity?

How can we facilitate collaboration and cooperation so that no teacher feels isolated and alone?

For 10 years, I work in an environment that does foster true accountability to children, to their learning as well as their general well being. Here, I also experience the happiest time I have had as an educator, in a place that encouraged collaboration and friendship and common goals. I spend 10 years at this school, where a vast majority of the children live in poverty and speak Spanish and other languages in their homes. Suzanne's fierce dedication to the children and to their families guides the work of teachers, and together, in collaboration, we operate according to the mantra, "children first." As well as attending to the academic learning of our young charges, we also facilitate a spirit of community, where parents are invited to Monday morning celebratory school-wide meetings, an annual Young Authors' Conference, musical evenings, English classes, an infant and toddler center, and other offerings. With parents as our partners, and an enthusiasm to learn about the latest findings for "best practices," my colleagues and I attend workshops that Suzanne arranges as well as weekend conferences and meetings. With a sense of conviction and dedication, a small group of us meet on one Saturday morning a month to discuss our teaching, and we travel to New York to visit The Manhattan New School, founded by Shelley Harwayne.

The inspiration I feel each morning as I walk into the doors of Hampstead Heights² and the freedom Suzanne grants me based on her explicit trust and faith in my work, motivate me to write. I document everything I do as the school's writing specialist. I collect data, I develop scoring tools for our young writers, I conduct

² A pseudonym

workshops on the importance of oral language to writing development, and I facilitate the creation of school wide writing assessments. I compile my ideas and my work and I continue to write. After three years, I have written a book, *Listening to Young Writers* (Landa, 2005), which is published two years later.

My closest colleagues and I know that these years will be remembered as the most inspirational years in our careers, and we know that when Suzanne retires, they will come to an end. And indeed they do. I remain at my beloved school for two years after Suzanne's retirement, watching the majority of my closest colleagues leave. After two years, it becomes clear to me that the only thing that has not changed is the physical structure of the building itself. The soul and the spirit of my community are gone. The "subtle shadings of (my) attachment for (this) chosen spot" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 4) are erased forever. I recognize the power of teachers and of their approach to children and families more poignantly than ever. I leave with the promise to myself that I will one day find a new attachment to a new chosen spot, to another place that honors children and teachers.

Tending My Own Garden

My new chosen school, however, does not come easily. After 14 years in Title I schools, I make the painful and difficult decision to spend a few years in a school that serves a significantly more affluent community. As I begin work on my Ph.D., I make the choice to work closer to home, to eliminate my long commute and simplify the logistics of my days. I choose a school with a large population of children from outside the United States, who are English Language Learners (ELLs). While many of the children live in ethnically and culturally diverse families, the vast majority of

them are children whose parents are doing post doctoral fellowships at the National Institutes of Health or who are affiliated with their country's embassy. Longing for Suzanne and my former colleagues, and facing the guilt of my choice, I tell myself that I will learn from working with English Language Learners who live in formally educated families, and that I will be able to make interesting comparisons to the children living in poverty that I have previously taught.

My time here provides me with stark contrasts to what I have learned about valuing and embracing all children. My experiences are reminiscent of Miss Friedman's humiliations, and provide many illustrations of how teachers can choose to make children, particularly minority children, feel "othered." Am I reliving my experience at that garden gate as I hear teachers' sharp tones with children, complaints about their parents, and as I realize that my views are rarely echoed by others? I participate in conversations with teachers who praise the standardization of curriculum, and who express frustration that I do not synchronize the sequence of my lessons with them. My explanations of how I include the children in my decision making as I plan learning experiences, and that I do not always know well ahead of time what we will be learning, are met with either silent or perplexed responses.

When I walk into my first staff meeting at my new school, I feel struck by culture shock. I do not see one face of color and I remember *apartheid*. I wonder what I have done. I wonder why I am here. I comfort myself by translating my emotional response to an intellectual observation. I remember reading studies about the disproportionate numbers of White teachers in the United States to the minority children attending public schools (Brindley & Laframboise, 2002). As the meeting

proceeds, I notice one of my new colleagues turning the pages of a Bloomingdale's catalogue. I feel repelled and angry, but again balance my emotions with my budding skills as a researcher. I am observing, "culturally insular perspectives" of someone who has not experienced "the cognitive dissonance necessary to reexamine their cultural beliefs" (Brindley & Laframboise, 2002, pp. 405-406).

Later that week, during a first grade team meeting, the same teacher voices anger and frustration that our superintendent has reduced class sizes in Title I schools. "Our kids deserve the same benefits!" she demands. I feel my eyes fill with tears and I quietly walk out of the room. I am not troubled by the idea that all children, perhaps, learn best in smaller classes, but I feel a tremendous sense of guilt as I recall my visits to the homes of my Head Start children, in which old sofas are the beds for two children to share, where cockroaches crawl freely, where hallways smell of urine, and where police remain vigilant about gangs, illegal drugs, and prostitution. I think about how their small classes offer them nothing more than a tiny fraction of what they deserve, and about the fact that I have left them. In Leder's (1990) words, I feel like an "absent body" as my physical presence and my mental presence are separated by a dissonance in my existence. As Anton (2001) explains, my "lived-body exists as a concerned flight toward a there beyond the here of its spatial boundaries" (p. 65).

In my new temporary place of work, I attend a meeting with the principal and the parents of an African American girl in my first grade class, who stutters. I hear the principal urging them to take Lilah for speech therapy, telling them that we don't want Lilah to feel different, that by being Black she already is different and that we don't want her stuttering to exacerbate her difference any further. Their efforts to

withhold reaction are palpable and I am stunned. I feel as though I am standing alone, as if in a secret garden, having walked through a gate that divides people from one another by color and money, finding myself without a fellow traveler.

During my second year, I begin to work with children in first grade who are already labeled “struggling readers.” At age six, they are already placed outside the gate, and the academic discrimination about which Oakes (2000) writes is in operation. I work with sixteen first grade children three times a week, as a reading teacher, helping them read, in a small room near their first grade classroom. On each occasion, I pick up the children from their class, and speak with their teacher for a moment. Each time I pick up Shawn, an African American child, in a frustrated, or disgusted, or irritated tone, Mrs. Roth says, “Take him – he’s not doing anything anyway,” or “He’s all yours,” or sometimes, “He’s driving me crazy today.” I immediately realize that Mrs. Roth does not like Shawn, and does not attempt to hide her feelings. I see a teacher dismiss a child, wash her hands of all responsibility for his learning, and convey her contempt for him in his presence. Does she feel frustration at her inability to connect with Shawn as she fails to persuade him to behave in her image? Is she transferring her frustration into anger and contempt? And as she washes him away with her words, is she diluting his feelings of self worth and value? The words of Dr. Haim Ginott (1972) ring true:

I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt, or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or dehumanized. (p. 15)

Rather than engage Mrs. Roth in conversation, or offer my implicit support by showing understanding and empathy for her frustration, I respond by calling Shawn, putting my arm around his shoulders, saying, “Let’s go and read!” and leaving the room. I channel my outrage at the cruelty of this teacher by loving and encouraging the child that she demoralizes, and by continuing to provide him with reading support even when he is no longer in need of the academic help. It is what I can do to provide Shawn with encouragement, caring, and love, to offer him some respite from the hate. And secretly, I hope that she feels some shame as she sees me show him the comfort and affection he, like all children, need and deserve. I choose to use my power to make Shawn’s school life joyous, to be an instrument of inspiration, to humor and to heal.

During one of our reading sessions, Shawn tells me, “My teacher is always upset with me. She wishes I was dead.” I think about how to respond to Shawn’s comment, and I decide that to deny his feelings by saying something like, “Oh, I’m sure that’s not true,” would be to disregard his perceptions and to disrespect his keen senses. Shawn is creating his own meaning. As Husserl explains, “...Meanings have relations to other meanings and form a network of ideal relations” (as cited in Moran, 2000, p. 101). Shawn knows hate. He knows the meaning of hate. He knows that his teacher’s actions are conveying the meaning of hate to him. I realize that his belief is his to own and for me to honor. I decide that I can only speak on behalf of myself, and so I answer, “Well *I* like you, Shawn. I think you’re a great kid, and I hope I get to be your teacher next year.” I subsequently choose to speak with the principal, share with her my conversation with Shawn, and request that he be placed in my second

grade reading and language arts class the following year. Will Shawn be able to heal the following year, I wonder, so that he can feel successful in school? Is it too late to convince him that school is a place where he is welcomed and respected and loved?

I wonder, both then and now, whether Mrs. Roth is providing an example of Allport's (1954) work, following the events in Nazi Germany, which theorizes that stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination occur due to an out-group homogeneity effect, whereby all members of an out group are viewed as the same? Is her lack of experience with African American children – a function of our racially segregated society -- predisposing her to intolerance? What is she experiencing as she makes her pedagogical choices for this small boy? If she has limited personal experiences in African American families, then what can our educational systems do to break down her barriers of prejudice?

What about that transformative influence? How does Shawn perceive his own Blackness in relation to his teacher's treatment of him? Is Shawn, like Toni Morrison's tragic character, Pecola, learning self loathing? Is he learning, as Morrison so magnificently articulates:

...The damaging internalization of assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze. (Morrison, 1970, p. 210)

What, then, does Shawn learn about himself and his identity from Mrs. Roth's choice of words and tone and attitude? Does he learn that he can do nothing well and that he will never learn to read and write? Does he learn that he is different and that by being different he is devalued? What does he learn about the world?

As I work with Shawn, I remain conscious of the work of Lisa Delpit (1995) who, in *Other People's Children*, discusses common school experiences for African

American children in what she calls “alienating environments.” Alienating environments. The word “alienation” emanates loneliness. It originates from 1548, borrowed from the Latin, *alienatus* – to estrange – and from *alienus* - of or belonging to another person or place (Barnhart, 1995, p. 18). I realize the ever present potential for teachers to create environments where minority children are being “Othered” and silenced, where they are named and labeled, so that they are taught that they do not belong.

I read about the Carlisle Indian School in 1879, which was established to “civilize” Sioux children and teach them Christianity and the “White man’s way,” which provides a stinging example of how American schools have relentlessly sought to acculturate children from cultures different from the mainstream. Sioux children were forcibly taken from their homes, forbidden to speak their language, and literally and figuratively stripped of their cultural appearances and behaviors (Cooper, 1999). And I read about schools in California in the 1960’s, said to be educating Mexican migrant farm worker children, forbidding the children to speak Spanish, and administering harsh discipline when the children used their home tongue. The legendary Cesar Chavez, who fought for the rights of migrant farm workers, told of how, when he was a child, he was forced to wear a sign around his neck that said, “I am a clown. I speak Spanish” (Krull, 2003).

The author and photographer, S. Beth Atkin (1993) dedicates her book *Voices From the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories*, to Cesar Chavez, and reminds us that children continue to be exploited on American farms. We read, “My Home,” by 10 year old Manuel Araiza:

When I was five, my whole family came here, over the hills, across the border. It was night...It was hot in Mexico, but it is worse here because there is only one window and it doesn't open and close so well...We help my parents in the fields...It gets very hot sometimes when I'm out there...I don't always go to the fields after I get home from school. Sometimes I study. I like to read...My parents are always telling me to study. Because when you get big you are not going to get work if you haven't studied. My teacher told me that, and my father. So, if I don't study, then maybe I won't get work and have money to buy my parents a blue car or a house. (p. 29)

I hear the hopes and the wishes in Manuel's words. I hear the voices of his father and his teacher, encouraging him to learn. I think about my conversations with my friend, Arturo, who grew up as a migrant farmworker in California, attributing his Harvard education to his teachers and his mentors at the Boys' Club he attended after school. I think about the impact of the way Mrs. Roth spoke about Shawn: "He's driving me crazy, take him, he's not doing anything anyway." I recall Shawn's devastating perception: "She wishes I was dead." I turn to van Manen and Levering (1996) to understand the shame he may feel, and I reflect on the choices this teacher has made in her interactions with Shawn.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) explore identity issues for Black American students, in the controversial article, "The Burden of Acting White." They identify two factors that define the relationship between White and Black Americans from the perspective of Black Americans, which they call "oppositional collective or social identity" and an "oppositional cultural frame of reference" (p. 181). They explain that conflict and opposition create this phenomenon, and that Black Americans react as a result of being excluded from "true assimilation" economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. Thus, according to the authors, the academic struggles of many

Black students exist, in part, on account of their rejection of academic engagement, which they regard as a symbol of White behavior.

Wainryb and Turiel (1995) caution, however, against generalizations about cultural groups. They write:

...the focus on differences between cultures brings with it the idea of uniformity and homogeneity within cultures. Cultures are portrayed through a particular ethos or orientation, rendering each one of them nondiverse...Accordingly, a diversity of perspectives is not accorded to a given culture or to its individual members. There is a failure to consider the possibility of a multiplicity of concerns and a plurality of social orientations coexisting in the social and moral judgments and practices of members of a culture. (pp. 288-289)

How do I reconcile the ideas that Shawn may be, in fact, rejecting the expectations of school due to his cultural identification without my making assumptions about him and his identity? As van Manen (2003) explains, “Categorical essentialism is dangerous because it sees things in absolute terms and derives moral convictions from fixed principles” (p. xvi). How do I manage “the tension between essentializing and stereotyping versus dismissing diversity issues entirely”? (Mercado, 2001, p. 668). Does the danger of assigning a collective identity to a group emerge when that identity is assigned *by individuals outside of that group*? Is it this external labeling that denies group members their individuality, their humanity and their voice? By responding to Shawn’s Blackness, does Mrs. Roth miss his boy-ness?

From the moment I see the Bloomingdale’s catalog, to the time I meet Shawn, and to so many other encounters, I experience an “absent body.” Shannon (2004) helps me frame my struggle:

It is not necessarily easy to name our values. It is often difficult to recognize that our values are in play when we teach. Like the work of scientists, the work of teachers is complex, messy, and subjective. Often our values are

deeply embedded in our practice and sometimes our values contradict one another. Often it seems impossible to think outside the boxes that others in authority draw for us. But when our values do not match theirs, naming our values, finding others who share them, and working to participate in the decisions that affect our teaching are democratically literate practices worthy of our time and energy. (p. 24)

Here, in this school, I often feel angry, alienated, and alone. I listen to teachers mock the claims of African American mothers that they are racist, determining the parents to be “crazy.” When I suggest we explore what may be leading to those assertions, I am dismissed. What does my sense of alienation in this new place mean? I am White and I have lived a privileged life, and yet I know that I do not belong here in this school, where the vast majority of the teachers are White, and where the vast majority of children live in middle class and upper middle class families. I create warm friendships with many families and I love my students, but the way this school reflects institutional discrimination troubles me deeply.

While, perhaps, my feelings and professional choices might be criticized by others as the paternalism of White liberalism (Delpit, 1995), I believe that they are, at once, an act of defiance toward the racial and economic segregation staining our schools. To me, my actions are a personally fulfilling endeavor, as I confront the labeling and alienating of minority children. It is through the problematic lens of making categorical generalizations about members of a minority group and, therefore, silencing their voices, that I examine my own experiences, to shed light and to help me guide my pedagogical practice.

My Secret Garden

As I think about how my own sense of alienation beckons me toward my phenomenological question, I begin to unravel my identity and understand my

intrigue with observing the influence teachers have on children's learning, when they each bring a different culture, ethnicity, and view of the world.

My Jewish identity, which is often defined by others in ways that silence my voice, arouses my sense of fear, and raises my indignation. It was within my family that I learned to challenge the forces of anti-Semitism, while also learning to confront societal racism. It is my Jewish identity to which I partially attribute the empathy I feel toward children who are treated as "other." Through my personal experience with being labeled, defined, and categorized by those in mainstream societies, in which I am, at once, an insider and an outsider, I look for seeds of understanding and interest toward marginalized children.

The complexities of being Jewish are many and are a constant source of examination for me. While I am defined as White, am often assumed to be Latina, and do not dress as a religious Jew, it is easy for me to hide my identity. Why is hiding this necessary? What are the emotional costs of doing so? Who is defining the identity that I hide? How can exploration of these questions guide me as I work with children who may be experiencing a similar conflict? How can teachers create an atmosphere that honors children who celebrate Ramadan, who do not celebrate Christmas and who speak languages other than English? How can teachers communicate to children that they do not need to hide because there is time and space and interest for them to share their identities in their classroom communities?

Beverly Daniel Tatum (2000) writes:

The parts of our identity that do capture our attention are those that other people notice, and that reflect back to us. The aspect of identity that is the target of others' attention, and subsequently of our own, often is that which sets up apart as... "other" in their eyes. (p. 11)

My sense of identity stems, in large part, from the events of the Holocaust and the subsequent creation of the State of Israel. Had I lived in Europe during the Third Reich, my fate and the fate of my family members would have been sealed in Auschwitz or Buchenwald, or Treblinka, or under any number of other horrific conditions. In Eastern Europe, the village of my father's family was eradicated, as was their language and culture, and these realizations are with me almost daily. I also am aware of the realization that I must slowly begin to teach my own children about these horrors, knowing that, through them, I am obliged to continue the mantra, "never again," while inevitably teaching them the painful lesson that by being Jewish, they, too, are the "other."

Throughout history, being identified by others as Jewish has subverted any citizenship or belonging to mainstream society, other than in Israel. Due to the actions and influences of others, a collective Jewish identity is sealed. Albeit ironic, we need not look any further than to the history of phenomenology itself, to find examples of Jews being stripped of their place and of their lives in their native countries and of being labeled as "other." The parameters within which Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, the one "to inaugurate the philosophical discipline of phenomenology" (Abram, 1996, p. 35), defined his own existence as a German, were restructured by the forces of anti-Semitism and the rise of the German Nationalist-Socialist movement. As Moran (2000) writes:

Early in 1933 the Nazis came to power in Germany and on 7 April 1933, a new law on "the re-establishment of a permanent civil service" was promulgated which prohibited non-Aryans from holding positions in the state service. Heidegger, in his capacity as Rektor of Freiburg University, countersigned this official decree of enforced leave of absence which affected

many Freiburg academics, including emeritus professor Edmund Husserl. Husserl was shocked by this move. He always considered himself a German nationalist, whose sons had served Germany in the military, and whose daughter had worked with the war wounded in a field hospital during the Great War. (p. 87)

As I listen to remarks that injure my sensibilities and my historical perspective, my Jewish identity remains a continuous and constant force in all aspects of my life. When I discuss private elementary schools with a graduate school classmate, she comments that one of the schools is “too Jewish.” I respond by saying, “Well I’m Jewish, so I suppose that doesn’t bother me,” but I do not engage her any further. I frequently must decide whether to answer pointed questions and comments about my views or whether to explain that I prefer not to discuss the topic for fear of discovering attitudes that will leave me wounded and questioning the integrity of my relationships.

When I tell a colleague that I have lived in Israel, he asks me, “How can you live in a country with such racist policies?” His question is not a question at all. It is a statement that offers no invitation for me to speak. I don’t speak, but I think about my Israeli family and friends, good and decent people, about the fact that Israelis are White Jews from Europe, Brown Jews from Arab lands, and Black Jews from Ethiopia, and that Israeli Arabs hold seats in the Israeli parliament, and I shudder from his attack. But he doesn’t ask and I don’t tell. I choose to hide my anger and sadness, and he does not realize that there is anything hidden.

My “liberalism” is questioned when I object to generalizations about particular Israeli administrations and policies being used to represent Israel “itself.” Images of Israel shown on the television give me glimmers of places I have lived and

worked, where I have friends and family, and where my children's great grandmother sits in her apartment as rockets fall because she is unable to climb the stairs into the bomb shelter. The images show a place where the blue and white star helps to heal the scars that were branded when the yellow star was pinned on millions of withering bodies and where I know I will never have to hide my identity. But most people don't ask and I don't tell. In discussions about oppression, I wait, usually not in vain, for the topic of the Palestinians to arise, and feel my muscles tense, not because I feel no distress at their human suffering, but because those conversations do not also include the state of siege and suffering under which Israelis live, they lack the complexities and layers of history, and they represent a language of affiliation that seeks to draw a line in the sand to demand that I must claim either humanitarianism or contribute to oppression. The parameters of the discussion are defined by an "either-or" perception, urging each of us to choose a position and enter the argument. Words become distorted, definitions are lost, and nuance is replaced by rhetoric as conversations about history and my identity whirl around me. But usually, people don't ask and I don't tell. They don't ask for my perspective and I don't tell, because by being labeled the "other" I am no longer part of the conversation. I hide in the eye of the storm where it is still, but where a sense of anxiety is near.

I wonder: How do teachers make sure that no child is excluded from the conversation? How can teachers create the space for all children to speak out and tell who they are, without feeling that they must hide themselves? Turning to van Manen and Levering (1996), we learn that "Secrecy can take many shapes in children's lives" (p. 3). They describe "feelings of power, punishment, shame, guilt, care, love,

and hate” (p. 4). Perhaps, then, children secretly harbor such feelings, feelings of shame, or hate, or anger as they sit in their classrooms where they feel misunderstood. How, then, can teachers find out about their “secret” feelings as a vehicle to their learning? Perhaps they simply need to ask.

Another Garden; Another Desert

As I begin to combine my teaching with supervising student teachers, I spend my working hours traveling between two public schools. Based on the average income of the families in their surroundings, the racial demographics, rates of unemployment and standardized test scores, the two schools paint portraits of the economic divisions in America’s public schools.

On one occasion, as I prepare to leave the one school in comfortable suburbia, where houses sell for \$800,000 and where lush flower gardens grow among green lawns, I overhear the unusual sound of laughter coming from a classroom. I later learn that the children were having a pizza party to celebrate their first place standing in the number of Sally Foster gift wrapping items they had sold for the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) fundraiser. I wonder if the children realize that at age seven, they have become marketing representatives for a large corporation, and I wonder if, in turn, their teachers realize that they are participating in the commercial privatization of the school. I think about the enormous financial gap between the two schools based on property taxes, and how the wrapping paper, decorated with smiling frogs, birthday greetings, and sports logos increases that gap.

As I walk out of the building, I pass the school’s framed standardized test scores proudly displayed like a prison panopticon, to remind us that we are being

monitored and that our performance is under surveillance. The charts boast the skilled work of the testing companies, the statisticians, and the printers, who are paid to announce the stratified performance of children fortunate enough to live in a zip code that, on average, assures their academic success. As I walk out, I see the old winter coats that the community has donated to its “sister school,” my next stop. There, on average, the children are Browner, poorer, and working to meet the standardized demands of a narrow curriculum, teaching them basic skills from a commercially produced textbook so that they can pass the tests but not learn critical, analytical skills to succeed in life.

In addition to their test scores displayed in the school’s lobby, their panopticon exists in the form of a class mission statement, claiming that “We will work hard so that we can get a scholarship.” You are poor, it tells them. Everyday, they are constantly reminded to internalize the gaze of their poverty as their teacher’s pedagogical practice demands that they sit in rows, doing worksheets, and learning skills for one test after another. Everyday, they are told to believe that meritocracy prevails.

Yet, I know that the societal barriers that confront these children are enormous. From my deep concern with racism and discrimination, and my love of teaching, I am motivated to learn more about the complex injustices these children face. I begin to learn about critical race theory, “an analytical framework developed primarily, though not exclusively, by legal scholars of color to address social justice and racial oppression in U.S. society” (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004, p. 245). I read the

work of legal scholar, Derrick Bell (1992), one of the first critical race theorists, who writes:

Perhaps those of us who can admit we are imprisoned by the history of racial subordination in America can accept – as slaves had no choice but to accept – our fate. Not that we legitimize the racism of the oppressor. On the contrary, we can only *delegitimize* it if we can accurately pinpoint it. And racism lies at the center, not the periphery; in the permanent, not in the fleeting, in the real lives of black people and white people, not in the sentimental caverns of the mind. (p.197)

I learn that by refusing to end his two year protest against the absence of women of color at Harvard Law School, he was dismissed from his position as Weld Professor of Law by Harvard University. Derrick Bell, like my father, voted with his feet.

I read the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who are among the first scholars to link the legal application of critical race theory to education. They write:

While some may argue that poor children, regardless of race, do worse in school, and that the high proportion of African-American poor contributes to their dismal school performance, we argue that the cause of their poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism. (p. 55)

In the pursuit of my studies, my mind and my heart resonate with memories of *apartheid* and with the segregation I have seen in my classrooms.

Given the racial and economic divisions in America's public schools – a reflection of American society – interesting choices present themselves to public school teachers. Thinking about these choices contributes to the refining of my phenomenological turning.

Veteran teachers, who have earned the privilege to choose the school and district in which they work, are able to consider the demographics of the children as a factor in making their decision about where to teach. Recognizing the social and

racial divides in the United States, I continue to wonder: Why do some teachers choose to cross the racial divide and choose to teach in schools where children of color are the majority? Do they realize that they cannot bridge the economic divide, but also realize that what they can do is offer their talents to give children the power of literacy? Do they know that while they cannot repair the world, neither can they wait to act? Are they motivated by respect and appreciation for cultural diversity? Do they feel a sense of moral obligation? Are they driven by empathy? Do they want to “function as change agents in a society that is deeply divided along racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and class lines” (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 104)?

Seeking a Path to Follow in Phenomenology

As I pursue the seemingly endless journey toward naming my phenomenon and methodology for my research, I find myself continually returning to the subject of teacher-student relationships, particularly regarding children of color. I am intrigued by the notion that in the school context, “Teacher quality is the single most important factor affecting children’s learning” (Lareau, 2000, p. x) and by school reform efforts that seek to build trusting relationships with marginalized children. I learn about Dr. James P. Comer, a child psychiatrist at Yale University, who created his reform model, The School Development Program (SDP), 36 years ago in two inner-city elementary schools in New Haven, Connecticut. According to Dr. Comer, test scores alone provide a measure of school success that is too narrow and incomplete. He, therefore, created a community-based approach that places emphasis on interpersonal relationships as well as academic achievement. He writes:

A good education should help students to solve problems encountered at work and in personal relationships, to take on the responsibility of caring for themselves and their families, to get along well in a variety of life settings, and to be motivated, contributing members of a democratic society. Such learning requires conditions that promote positive child and youth development. (p.1)

Comer's primary goal was to provide "social capital" and to fill developmental gaps for poor, minority children, who came from marginalized and disenfranchised families. Yet, I experience a consuming need to understand what those "personal relationships" look like, sound like, and feel like – to dig deeper than any conceptual theory can articulate. I seek to understand: **What are the lived experiences of White early literacy teachers who choose to work with minority children in high poverty schools?**

Guided By Teachers' Voices

By selecting phenomenology as my methodology, I address my concerns by uncovering meanings beneath conceptual ideas, and by paying homage to the power of the subjective, personal voices of teachers, including myself. As I converse with caring teachers interacting with minority children, I am creating a space for brilliant and committed educators to share their lived experiences and to reveal themselves as they perform their craft. Through conversations and observations, I am probing their memories and ideas, their "forgotten ground of...directly felt and lived experience" (Abram, 1996, p. 43) which prompt their pedagogical practice either consciously or subconsciously. I do this because, as Comber and Kamler (2004) tell us:

The most important variable at school in making a difference for students is the teacher. It is the teachers' expectations, their enacted curriculum, their classroom talk, their relations to young people and their actual ways of inducting students into specific textual practices that most effect outcomes. (p. 294)

This phenomenological study, then, examines the lived experience of teaching literacy to young children for five early childhood literacy teachers, who have the historical, social, and educational privilege that allows them to choose where to work, and who have chosen to work with children of color in Title I schools. What do they say about their experience of choosing to teach in a Title I school? What do they say about the power and privilege that permeates their choice? Once in the classroom, where they live and work with their low income students of color, many of whom are English Language Learners, how do they experience their pedagogical choices that intersect with the racial, ethnic, and social differences between themselves and their students?

I turn my ear to the voices of teachers, to listen to their words. I turn away from conceptual analysis and quantifiable observations, and create a space for myself, and for the teachers themselves to find meanings and truths in the power of human subjectivity and perception. I choose a methodology that, according to van Manen (2003):

...permits probing of the deeper meaning of what it is for persons (teachers and students) to be human, to become more human, and to act humanly in educational situations. (p. 95)

I turn to the phenomenon of non-minority early literacy teachers who choose to cross racial and economic divides and teach in Title I schools, a phenomenon that germinated from my childhood experiences with cruelty in South Africa, with inspiration, with the knowledge that choice is the seed from which all action grows, and from my love of engaging with text. I read, I write, I reread, and I rewrite,

planting ideas, pruning them, and insuring that each individual textual piece contributes to the integrity of the whole study.

Walking Through The Chapters

According to van Manen (2003), phenomenological research “is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence” (p. 31). The project, says van Manen, is “driven by a commitment of turning to an abiding concern” (p. 31). Phenomenology is also, as stated by Abram (1996), “...the Western philosophical tradition that has most forcefully called into question the modern assumption of a single, wholly determinable, objective reality” (p. 31).

Max van Manen (2003) writes, “Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science which studies persons” (p. 6). He continues to explain that “Hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity. Research and writing are aspects of one process” (p. 7). As I pursue my “project,” I follow the methodical structure outlined by van Manen (2003):

- Reduced to its elemental methodical structure, hermeneutic phenomenology research may be seen as a dynamic interplay among six research activities:
- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
 - (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
 - (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
 - (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
 - (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
 - (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 30)

This chapter has been my articulation of my abiding concern and commitment to the world. I stand as a Jewish woman of Eastern European origin, who was born

and lived in *apartheid* South Africa, and who immigrated to the United States.

Although I am White, according to the definitions of American society, my reality is largely defined by being a Jew. My history involves oppression, isolation, and the genocide of my people, language, and culture. I have felt the sting of anti-Semitism and I have witnessed the violence of racism. I believe that my own experiences with discrimination, fear, and outrage, and my childhood that was infused with lessons on social justice, fuel my empathy for children and families of color. It is, of course, also because of the power and privilege I do have, that I have the time and the opportunity to pursue this research.

In the hermeneutic tradition, I write my way to understanding the phenomenon I have chosen, passing through some gates and stopping at others. In this chapter, then, I offer my own lived experiences with early literacy environments and pedagogies that reflect democracy, equity, and inspiration, so that I may begin to unfold the layers of choices that teachers confront and begin to understand their experiences with power, privilege, and pedagogy. I also engage in conversations with Will and with Paula, and together we look for the meanings in their words and in their experiences. In Chapter Two, I continue to uncover the meanings behind the gate, the meanings in teaching low income young children to become literate, as I turn to etymologies, literacy researchers, and a variety of other sources and literature.

In Chapter Three, I continue my hermeneutical engagement as I explore phenomenological philosophy. Max van Manen (2003) tells us that:

Hermeneutics and phenomenology are human science approaches which are rooted in philosophy; they are philosophies, reflective disciplines. Therefore, it is important for the human science researcher in education to know something of the philosophic tradition. (p. 7)

As I interpret the writing of various philosophers to determine which ones best help to uncover my phenomenon, I address a fact about Martin Heidegger – whose philosophy of *Dasein*, the Being of beings, is regarded as central to the field of phenomenology – that guides my philosophical inquiry in unexpected ways. I learn that, “On 1 May 1933 Heidegger voluntarily and very publicly joined the Nazi Party, and immediately became deeply involved in the Nazification of the University,” (Moran, 2000, p. 211). This alarming fact emphasizes for me that just as I position myself in the world, as a teacher and a researcher, and position my participants as early literacy educators, I must position Heidegger. Just as I expound on my choices and the choices of my participants, I must address the choices Heidegger made. I explore aspects of his biography, raise the possibility that his philosophy and his life choices were mutually enabling, and explain how by actively turning against the minority, he violates the parameters of democratic teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, and human justice. Given Heidegger’s central place in phenomenology, the alarming choices he made, and the stark contrast between what he represents and what my work emphasizes, I believe that attention to Heidegger is warranted.

Addressing Heidegger, and then embracing the work of Sartre, Levin, Derridas, and Levinas, I explore philosophy that helps guide my work and translate the theoretical understandings into the practice of teaching.

The realities of the economic and racial divides continue in our schools. Most teachers are White, but the numbers of low income children minority children are growing. The United States remains a monolingual society where English literacy is the first marker of social success. As I pursue conversations with non-minority early

literacy teachers in Chapter Four, I realize that the conversations may be difficult. They will certainly be complex. Through their words, will I learn more about which gates children are invited to enter and which gates will keep them out, on “the hem of life”?

While the conversations may be difficult, they are important. I must ask questions. I must explore the experiences of teachers to unearth perceptions of power and privilege and pedagogy that impact children’s learning, because if I don’t ask, they may never tell. Through the continued silence, we will continue to witness how, “Repression of realities, Anglo style, is above all else a frenzied immersion in privilege and luxury” (Manning, 1987, p. 145).

The unearthing that occurs through our conversations, then, allows us to watch the seeds of understanding grow into the themes that convey meanings and messages. In Chapters Five and Six, I pursue this process of unearthing and of interpreting, making pedagogical recommendations for ways in which teacher education can become more humanized. Given the inextricable relationship between teachers’ beliefs about children and their pedagogical interactions, pre-service teachers need to probe and explore their world views, biases, and attitudes toward low income children of color. Through my detailed account of the thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences of remarkable teachers, I will uncover themes that can be incorporated into teacher education programs. As van Manen (2003) explains:

What the phenomenological attitude gives to educators is a certain style of knowing, a kind of theorizing of the unique that sponsors a form of pedagogic practice that is virtually absent in the increasingly bureaucratized and technological spheres of pedagogic life. (p. 154)

I live in America, where my work with and for children is my garden, my solace, and my haven. As I work, seeing the uniqueness of each child, I hope that my students find their own garden, their place of comfort. I wonder if, perhaps, their gardens, like mine, are within themselves, and can grow and be nurtured with their teachers' help, in spite of the loss, grief, and fear they will confront along the journeys of their lives. We cannot repair all the ills of society. But through understanding our own perceptions, we can help children learn to plant their own gardens, gardens in their minds and in their hearts, and by nurturing them, help them to nurture themselves.

In the next chapter, I take another step on my hermeneutic path. I begin to explore the significant meaning behind the work of early literacy teachers, who nurture children intellectually and emotionally, teaching them to become literate, while honoring their voices.

CHAPTER TWO
THE MEANING BEHIND THE TEACHING

Voices in the Classroom

In this chapter, I identify the individual chords that play in Title I early childhood classrooms, in order to see and hear the chorus of literacy teaching, in which all children's voices are honored, and where they are invited to join the song. With the words of two remarkable teachers, Will and Paula, I begin to open up the gates and step inside of classrooms, so that I can open up the meaning in and of White teachers teaching young, low income minority children to become literate. Will is my colleague from Hampstead Heights, whom I introduced in Chapter One. Paula introduced herself to me one year ago, when she contacted me about my book on teaching literacy. Writing to say that she has read my book and would like to talk to me about it, I offer to visit her Head Start classroom. Entering Paula's classroom, I feel a strange sense of familiarity, as though we have met on an earlier occasion. I recall her face and her voice and a sense of comfort in her presence, a recollection that is later explained during the course of our first conversation. I know immediately that I want to enter into conversations about teaching and about early literacy with Paula, which, with Paula's generosity, I have the opportunity to do. Through my conversations with Will and with Paula, and through careful reading of their own writing, here in this chapter I peer beyond the gate, to where we see places and people that sing and celebrate literacy. By listening, looking, and feeling the power of their work, I begin to understand the lived experiences of these teachers.

Nkosi Sikele iAfrika–When Protest Hymn Becomes National Anthem: Teaching as a Political Act

When I examine the etymology of the word literacy, I am first taken to the word literate. Its origin is in the Latin word, *littera*, meaning “letter.” The word “literacy,” then arose in the late 19th century, meaning “the knowledge of reading and writing” (Chantrell, 2002, p. 304). What do these etymologies tell us? First, we determine that since the original germination of the word, being literate has been associated with education and with being learned. Second, we see that literacy is associated with the written word. This comes as no surprise to me, as I consider the historical associations of being literate with power and access to institutions of learning, to books, and to teachers. Perhaps the most profound and personal experience I had with this notion was during the first free and democratic election in South Africa.

My parents and I joined the line of South Africans, and walked into the South African consulate in Washington, D.C. As we were handed our paper ballots, I immediately noticed the color photographs on the paper: Nelson Mandela, King Buthelezi, and the other candidates for president, with their names and political parties printed beside the photos. I immediately realized that the photographs were there because of the vast numbers of Black South Africans who could not read the words. They were there for my aunt’s gardener, for the children of Soweto, now old enough to vote, and for the “nannies” who had cared for me and the other White children, unable to do any other work because they were unable to read. They had

been condemned to illiteracy as one of the guarantees that the *apartheid* regime could continue to oppress them.

Thus, as I begin to untangle and interpret the work of early literacy teachers working with children in Title I schools, I, again, turn to South Africa. It is April, 2006, 29 years after standing at Miss Friedman's garden gate. I am a doctoral student and a classroom teacher, visiting South Africa for the first time in 16 years, to present a paper at a conference in Cape Town. I have agonized over the decision to return to South Africa, to return to the place of my childhood that I have longed for, anxious about what I would find. But I am urged to go, particularly by my parents, and by my colleague, Jim Greenberg. After being introduced to Jim by his grandson, one of my second-grade students, he encourages me to attend the conference, the International Society for Teacher Education. Jim has already invited me to work with him on a project, hosting a group of South African students visiting Maryland, and during our week together, I already have been reminded of my love for the country and for its people. So I go.

With one day in Johannesburg, I make it a priority to visit my primary school, to return to Fairmount so that I can quiet my memories and reconcile realities with my imaginings. For years, I have been living "in the unity of image and memory, in the functional composite of imagination and memory" (Bachelard, 1994, p.16), outlining the places and spaces of my beloved school in my mind.

School is one of the most significant dwelling places of childhood, where memories are created, where "memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening...a community of memory and image"

(Bachelard, 1994, p. 4). School is one of the “sites of our intimate lives” (p. 8), where children learn about the world and about themselves. Standing in the open corridor with my mother’s life-long friend, Sheila, and my doctoral advisor, John, three hours after stepping off the airplane that brought me across the world, I look into the courtyard and feel delight and comfort as I realize that my daydreams and memories have been true to me. I see the courtyard where I lined up each morning to have my uniform checked and I see my former classroom.

I then hear a familiar voice behind me, a woman, speaking the words, “Hello, Melissa.” I turn around and I see Miss Friedman. The woman whom I first adored, and who later humiliated me calls to me again and I am, again, stunned in her presence. A complex range of emotions emerge and are displayed in my confused response. I reach out to hug her, to hug the teacher who taught me to love reading and writing, and to reach for joyful days of long ago. But once I introduce her to Sheila and to John, I take a reflective stance, and feel increasing discomfort as I look at her. I remember how she had betrayed my trust and crushed my innocent admiration of her. I remember the hateful words she thrust at me. And I wonder if she, too, remembers. Does she remember the humiliated face of a girl she shamed and rejected? Does she now feel guilt and shame turned inward? Or does she harbor new found anger that she wishes to thrust at me again?

In *Childhood Secrets*, van Manen and Levering (1996) describe how we adopt a “plurality of ‘selves’, depending on the people around us” (p. 99). They explain that “We may be a different person at home than at work or school” (p. 99). Here, in this moment, as I turn around to face her, to face the familiar voice speaking the same

words, “Hello Melissa,” I continue my phenomenological turning toward teachers and choices and their effects on children while I, myself, am at once, woman and child, teacher and student. My plurality of selves is called upon by two words spoken by a woman whose influence continues to have an impact on me after 30 years. What choices did she make, and what consequences did they have for me? Perhaps she has been an influence on my choice to work with children of color in high poverty schools. What would she say if she knew?

Not knowing my history and, therefore, not perceiving my shock, John nonetheless eases the tension with humor. After I introduce the trio to each other, he asks, “So, what kind of a student was Melissa?” I feel a glimmer of pleasure as I hear her say that I was an excellent student who loved to read, a glimpse back to the days when Miss Friedman taught me to love learning. I do not know why she is there, whether she is visiting from her nearby home, or whether she is still working there, and I do not ask. I stand beside her as she talks to Sheila and John, and I look at the small black dog by her side. I recall the days of my childhood, where the sign “*Pasop for die hond*/Beware of the dog” was a common feature on the garden gates around my neighborhood. I remember dogs poised behind those gates barking at black passers-by, but not at me. I wondered how those dogs had been trained to bark according to skin color, and I wonder now if this mascot of Fairmount Primary School has undergone a retraining since the dismantling of *apartheid* and if his owner has done the same.

When we finish our conversation, Miss Friedman encourages us to walk around the school, and I guess from the authority of her invitation that she is still a

member of the school community. I wonder what “authorizes” her to speak with and for children today.

John, Sheila and I first enter the library, and see a poster on the wall. It reads:

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa: We, the people of South Africa, recognize the injustices of our past; Honour those who have suffered for justice and freedom in our land; Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity. We, therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights...and free the potential of each person.

And the words of Hannah Arendt (1951) ring true:

There remains the truth that every end in history necessarily contains a new beginning; this beginning is the promise, the only “message” which the end can ever produce. Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man...This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man. (p. 478)

As we continue our tour, we see classrooms full of “every man,” the boys and girls who are the new South Africans, and the teachers who are facilitating their forward passage. Other than a few White children in the preschool wing of the school, all the children are Black. They are the children of the Soweto generation, singing *Nkosi Sikele iAfrika* as their national anthem rather than as a song of protest. But where have all the White children gone? If the dismantling of *apartheid* has resulted in school integration, why are the classrooms not reflecting that integration?

From the poster of the constitution, to the presence of Miss Friedman, I am struck by the apparent blending of pedagogy with social and political trends, a central component of the phenomenon I am exploring. I recall the words of Paolo Freire (1998), “It is impossible to humanly exist without assuming the right and the duty to

opt, to decide, to struggle, to be political” (p. 53). I also recall my readings by Sonia Nieto (2002) who articulates that education is always a political undertaking and, therefore, never neutral; that equity and social justice are at the core of education; and given structural, societal inequalities and lack of access to equal education, power and privilege exist in school discourse. Indeed, from the words “over my dead body,” to the words “South Africa belongs to all who live in it,” the political struggle presents itself by teachers and in schools. I wonder what the struggle has been like for Miss Friedman. Where have her choices led her?

My awareness of the integral nature of politics and world views to teaching is aroused again when John asks me what I think I would have done if my parents had stayed in South Africa. “I think I would have been an activist or a journalist,” I answer. My answer is immediate, but subsequently it causes me to think and wonder. Had my family stayed in South Africa, I might have chosen political activism or journalism to publicly combat the *apartheid* regime and to join the ranks of others seeking emancipation and social and political equality. Yet, here I am in America, where I have chosen to be an educator, where segregation is not the law of the land but, nevertheless, remains as the residue of laws past. Have my choices been easier, or perhaps more difficult? I spend my working hours in the divided terrain of the American public schools, teaching children to work as a democratic community; to talk, to create, and to bring their identities into the classroom; to participate in nuanced discussions of issues relevant to their lives and guiding pre-service teachers to do the same. Remembering South Africa, and recognizing the continued

segregation in the United States, I turn to the words of Maxine Greene (2001) to articulate the political nature of my work and of the educators whose voices I share:

...the sufferings linked to feelings described as invisibility, nobodiness, and voicelessness have infused my approach to the teaching act as have the conceptions of human rights and civil rights, including the right to full membership in a community. (p. 82)

Whose Voices Do We Hear?

In my own work with young children, teaching them to read and write, I learn that the field of early literacy is a particularly contentious, politically charged arena, which I entered as a graduate student at Tufts, and which followed me to my first American public school teaching experience that remains with me today. According to Teale and Yokota (2000), who also address the contentious nature of literacy practices, “Perhaps the reason for the vehemence of the controversy is that so much of school success hinges on reading” (p. 6). As Comber and Kamler (2004) state, “Internationally, study after study has documented the comparatively low performance of low socio-economic and marginal groups of children on standardized measures of literacy” (p. 294). And as Heath (1983) points out, “The school is not a neutral objective; it is an institution which has the goal of changing people’s values, skills, and knowledge bases” (p. 367).

Given this trend, an ongoing debate between literature-based reading and writing programs and phonics-based approaches continues to rage. Pearson and Raphael (1999) explain the two over-simplified and diametrically opposed positions:

Those who advocate the simple view argue that since the code (the cipher that maps letters onto sounds) is what students do not know, the sooner they learn it the better. Get it out of the way early so that students can begin to engage in regular reading – by translating letters into the sounds of oral language and then using the same cognitive processes that enable listening comprehension

to understand what they read. The other side argues that since making meaning is the ultimate goal of reading, it is best to start off with that very expectation: if teachers offer lots of “scaffolding” to help students determine textual meaning(s), they will, as a natural by-product, acquire the cipher for mapping sounds onto letters. (p. 23)

Claiming to combat the trend marked by high levels of illiteracy among minority children, current policy makers in the United States have clearly voted for a skills-based approach to teaching, thus de-emphasizing the significance and, therefore, the use of literature, and stripping educators of their individual authority and autonomy. I, however, choose pedagogical practices that challenge the efforts of the current conservative hegemonic alliance of policy makers and publishers. I am pushed to deliver a prescribed, commercialized curriculum that emphasizes teaching discrete skills in isolation at the expense of authentic and rich literature, and whose policies deny me my intellectual and professional judgment. But, I do not follow prescribed texts in the manner delineated by publishers who do not know my students, but whose book sales fill their wallets as they seek to privatize our schools. I challenge the assertions of No Child Left Behind, under which teachers are told what to teach, how to teach, and where schools are penalized for not reaching externally determined standards. As Shannon (2004) explains:

Under Bush’s No Child Left Behind, many teachers find that their choice of instructional materials is limited to a few official alternatives and that the penalties for lack of student progress are detailed. These additions blur the lines between this position and moral literacy because there is now one definition of responsibility and duty. (p. 23)

I resist the hegemonic concept of moral literacy, promoted by former Secretary of Education, William Bennett, who demanded that, through text, children learn a specific set of virtues and morals, largely based on Christian religious values

(Shannon, 2004), and I resist the limitations and prescriptions of NCLB. We cannot standardize curriculum and pedagogy without standardizing children. And when we standardize children, we force them into the mold of White, middle class, mainstream modes of behavior, thought, and perspective, and negate the sanctity of their identities. As Mercado (2001) argues, “When we dismiss them, the dominant culture prevails and minority cultures are subjected to deficit explanations” (p. 668).

When teachers focus only on skills-based worksheets, where is the opportunity for them to watch children’s faces as they read powerful literature? If teachers follow a curriculum guide in a lock-step manner, a guide written by people who have never met their students, why would those teachers take the time to find out about their students’ interests, interests that can lead to powerful writing and other meaningful learning? The connections I have made with teachers and with my own students occurred because the time and space for human contact were available. Individual and unique qualities, interests, and feelings flourished, and voices sang out. The alternative, namely, the force of standardization, silences the voices of teachers’ creativity and humanness, and of any child who stands beyond the parameters of the mainstream culture.

Resisting current trends in literacy education, I also know that the defiant, resistant, and passionate Whole Language movement became “shrouded in romanticism” (Pearson & Raphael, 1999, p. 24) and, while philosophically sound, it became distracted and detracted by its own radicalism.

What, then, does early literacy teaching with culturally and socially marginalized children look like? How do teachers reconcile standardization with

maintaining high standards for each individual? What does it mean to teach for literacy? What is the political work in the choice of where to teach? How do teachers maintain the balance between beautiful books and skill based worksheets? These questions begin to help define successful literacy teaching as the phenomenon under investigation.

Nothing teachers do, say, teach, or believe, is neutral. We are, by definition of being human, biased, working from our individual biographical experiences. As Lisa Delpit (1995) notes, “We all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply ‘the way it is’” (Darling Hammond, 1997, p.151). By virtue of being human, teachers can never be the objective deliverers of standardized curriculum that some would like us to believe. The effort to deconstruct education into small pieces attempts to dehumanize the relationships between teachers and their students, yet teaching remains fundamentally a human process.

The poet, Georgia Heard (1999), writes about “cracking open” words, so that we can “show” rather than “tell” about an experience. I turn to the power of phenomenology to do the same. I seek to paint a portrait in words, to create images of teachers of young children in their lived experiences with teaching literacy. Writers learn to read their worlds. Artists must learn to see shape, color, and line. Musicians must train their ears to hear tones, rhythms, and melodic lines. What about teachers? What do they feel as they look at the faces of the children? How deeply do they look

and what do they see? What do they do with the information they acquire from their human encounters with low-income, young children of color?

I begin by conceptualizing a classroom as a musical stage where teachers blend and harmonize their world views with pedagogical theory and practice. I am conscious of my beliefs, bolstering those that render productive learning and interrupting those that impede children. I turn to researchers and theorists who investigate emergent and early literacy practices, and I integrate their approaches into my pedagogy.

Whereas prior to the end of the 1980's, virtually all educators endorsed a notion of reading readiness, researchers and teachers at that time developed the concept of emergent literacy (Teale & Yokota, 2000). These proponents of emergent literacy suggest that rather than waiting for children to achieve a standard set of criteria before delivering reading instruction – reading, writing, and oral language develop concurrently, begin to develop during infancy, and form fertile ground for literacy instruction at all levels. They honor the natural development of language and its multidimensional paths, calling to my mind the words of David Abram (1999):

We do not, as children, first enter into language by consciously studying the formalities of syntax and grammar or by memorizing the dictionary of definitions of words, but rather by actively making sounds – by crying in pain, and laughing in joy, by squealing and babbling and playfully mimicking the surrounding soundscape, gradually entering through such mimicry into the specific melodies of the local language, our resonant bodies slowly coming to echo the inflections and accents common to our locale and community. (p. 75)

Based on the theory of emergent literacy, I begin. Emergent literacy underscores my work and my pedagogical philosophy. Every child is a reader, and every child is a writer. I believe these words and I communicate them to my students.

Scribbles are celebrated, and gently turning the pages of books is hailed as a hallmark. I write:

By deliberately and consciously looking at emergent writers separately from young writers who are beginning to use more complex writing skills, we recognize and acknowledge the enormous strides in learning that these beginning writers demonstrate. If we judge them with the same standards as we use for more advanced writers, emergent writers appear to be *lacking* in ability, and our perception is that they are “behind” the rest. If we look at them at their own stage of writing development, we celebrate each small step they take, understanding that they are well on their way to mastering the complex body of knowledge that is the English language. (Landa, 2005, p. 27)

When I turn to the work of Pearson and Raphael (1999) who seek to balance the scale between the two extreme views of literacy, I reflect on the sights and sounds that transpose those concepts into lived experiences. As they describe authentic, real world literacy experiences, I am reminded of how I teach my students to write letters, to send invitations, and to write books that are read and responded to. I recall that their letters and invitations result in classroom celebrations with their parents, and that their books stand proudly in our classroom library under a sign that says, “Published Books By Local Second Grade Authors.” Variations in classroom discourse appear every morning during our class meeting, when I ask, “Who has something to share?” and when the discourse – the control over topics and turn-taking – is fluid and varied. As a classroom community, we hear about new puppies, birthday parties, soccer games, and sick grandparents, family members who are far away, as well as fears and sadness. Discussions begin as children gather in their book clubs to talk about books they are reading, and conversation occurs as I conduct a writing conference with each one to discuss their current work in progress. I demonstrate “a range of teachers’ roles with varying levels of control” as I read

beautiful picture books and chapters of longer books out loud, as the children read poems and “big books” along with me, as I conduct guided reading lessons, and as I give children time to read silently and independently each day. I maintain “a balance between externally demanded standards and teachers’ determined expectations” by complying with the preparation and administration of standardized tests, while also presenting children with individual reading and writing goals that I have created with them. And through conversations and writing, I create opportunities for children to respond to literature and to a variety of genres of text.

Living between the worlds of standardization and individuality is profoundly challenging, but it is mitigated by the creativity and diplomacy that helps us live together as complex individuals in a complex world. Aoki (2005) offers an analysis of this challenge by describing a “truly educated person”:

...a truly educated person speaks and acts from a deep sense of humility, conscious of the limits set by human finitude and mortality, acknowledging the grace by which educator and educated are allowed to dwell in the present that embraces past experiences but is open to possibilities yet to be. Thus, to be educated is to be ever open to the call of what it is to be deeply human, and heeding the call to walk with others in life’s ventures. (p. 365)

Kathryn H. Au (2000) describes a classroom in Hawaii that elicits images in my mind of the kindergarten classroom in Boston, where I did my student teaching, and of my own Head Start, kindergarten and first grade classrooms. She describes print all around the room, lessons that teach systematically and that model and scaffold children’s literacy development, reading and writing workshop, and the gradual shifting of responsibility from the teacher to the children. She explains that “Instruction in phonics, sight vocabulary, and other word identification skills should always be placed within the larger context of purposeful literacy activity” (p. 54). Au

raises two other points that resonate within me, reminding me of strategies I incorporate in my own classroom. She prescribes a “balance between teacher-directed and child-selected literacy learning opportunities” and stresses that “we should connect instruction to the child rather than expect the child to connect to instruction” (p. 54).

In my own classroom, rather than participating in a tracking approach, I create fluid teaching strategies that address the particular learning needs of each child at any given time. By using “guided reading” strategies outlined by Fountas and Pinnell (1996), individual writing goals and a balanced literacy model that involves reading, writing, listening, and speaking, I recognize that young children learn at different rates and that their abilities are not static entities to be labeled. As I teach, I think about “the growth of each child” and not the “sanctity of the curriculum” (Pearson & Raphael, 1999, p. 23). In our first conversation, Paula explains it as:

The love of taking a young child who is like a sponge and watering it and watching it fill and develop, like a flower that blooms and watching the parents who didn't know what they could do...to see the pride and the joy they had in the growth of their children...and that might be a child who is reading or a child who doesn't even know a color. It's very exciting to take that child...to scaffold that child to wherever he or she could go.

As I teach, I, too, think about where my children can go. I think about their limitless potential and their individuality. One of my former students, a child named Lara, embodied a tapestry of emotional needs and behaviors that demanded a great deal of my attention. Lara would often interrupt me, and would respond to being ignored by coming over and tapping me or pulling on my shirt. She insisted that she needed to go to the bathroom, to the nurse, or to get a drink numerous times each day.

We worked hard together and Lara flourished. She was remarkably dramatic and expressive when she spoke and when she read, and the other children loved listening to her read out loud. She also wrote numerous stories and poems. At the end of the year, her family moved away, and her mother asked me to write a letter to her future teacher as she worried that Lara would be labeled, or misunderstood, or dismissed. And so I wrote:

August 28, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Melissa Landa, and I am a teacher in Rockville, Maryland. Last year, I had the pleasure of teaching Lara Frank, who is now a student at your school. At her mother's request, and because I believe Lara is a remarkable child, I feel that it is important to convey to you my impressions and experiences with her.

Lara is a highly intelligent and emotional child, who reacts as strongly to her internal desires and thoughts as she does to external events. In my class, she frequently expressed the need to take a few minutes away from group activities, to attend to one or another personal need of her own. I found that when I allowed her a limited, agreed-upon number of times to excuse herself, she was able to adhere to our agreement, participate well, and alleviate her anxiety.

I was often delighted by Lara's creativity, expressive nature, and talent with language. She sometimes read out loud to her classmates using remarkable expression and fluency, which the other children thoroughly enjoyed. She wrote wonderful and engaging stories, both alone and in collaboration with classmates. And, she wrote some beautiful poetry, which I believe her mother shared with you.

Throughout my sixteen years as a classroom teacher, and during my doctoral studies at the University of Maryland, I have often reflected on the educational adage that children should not have to be ready for school as much as schools need to be ready for children. With that in mind, I made many efforts to accommodate Lara's individual needs and she thrived.

I am sure you will enjoy Lara as much as I did, as she begins to trust her new environment and show you her many talents. I am happy to offer further information, should you have the need.

Please send Lara my warmest regards!

Yours truly,

Melissa Landa

Lara and I remain in touch through email. With her mother's help, she also sends me photographs of her in her new surroundings. In her last email, Lara wrote:

Hi Miss Landa,
Sorry I have not written back sooner I havent had much time to email anyone.
I am another year older wich means a new taecher this one is very very nice.
How is it teaching college students? I am also doing great.

Again, I think about Lara's intense emotional needs, and the demands they placed on me to accommodate her while also motivating her to excel. I know that if I had expected Lara to conform to every externally imposed curricular and behavioral standard, rather than adapting them to her individual identity, she would probably not have flourished and we would probably not be writing to each other two years later.

Children's Literary Lives: Variations on a Theme

"Cracking open" the concept of early literacy practice further, I begin to examine aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy. Many researchers have explored culturally relevant pedagogy as a way to teach and to interact with poor children of color. Gloria Ladson Billings (1995) explains this term as a "dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture" (p. 467) that seeks to bridge gaps and mismatches between home and school.

In her ethnographic study of three communities in the Carolina Piedmont, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) describes language as power and explores how teachers

can facilitate the acquisition of that power to all children, by honoring their home cultures. She writes:

Teachers' central role was to pass on to all groups certain traditional tools and ways of using language. A critical component in the process was allowing children to articulate how what they knew related to what the school wanted them to know. (p. 354)

As students learned how to “code switch” between their language systems from home and in schools, they were taught to be ethnographers of their own lives and explicitly understand their own use of language. They examined their own ways of learning, thinking, and “organizing information.” From here, they became self-aware, enabling them to draw upon relevant and useful knowledge from both home and school.

During one of our conversations, Will describes his efforts to embrace the identities of the children he teaches:

I did the standard wide variety of cultures in my read alouds and I made sure that my writers' workshop allowed the kids and encouraged the kids to write about experiences from their families that exemplified their culture both here and in their home countries. But – I don't know how to say this next part, 'cause I'm not really sure what it is. There's something about acknowledging either a word or a food in the middle of something you're talking about that will just light the kid's face up. You're talking about a frying pan, a story that has a frying pan...”You know, you can cook meat in there, or *platanos*. I LOVE *platanos!*” And it's like they've seen God. Their faces light up. It's like, “Ah! He knows me!”

A study by George, Raphael, and Florio-Ruane (2003) further illustrates this concept as it explores the theme, “Our Storied Lives” with a class of third graders. The children are taught to explore their own cultural identities and culture in general, by examining multicultural literature. They also emphasize the important role of schools and teachers,

as cultural institutions...compelled to look at our students closely and to be aware of their cultural knowledge, which influences how they view the world and ultimately how they respond to schooling. (p. 328)

The authors offer guiding principles for effectively teaching both literacy and respect for diversity. When I read their work, I think about classrooms both as reflections of our society, and as transformative communities that have enormous potential to instill democratic and respectful attitudes in children. In spite of the racial and economic divides in our schools, every child brings a unique identity into the classroom. Each child is unique, living within a distinct family unit with its own modes and styles of behavior. When children and teachers, then, come together, they embody “Cultures (as) webs that we actively weave through our behavior; all our cultures are interwoven” (George, et al., 2003, p. 323). Like variations on a theme of music, each child presents different ways of speaking, ways of listening, ways of reading their world, and ways of leaving their creative mark. And yet, all children, in their own way, join in the chorus. By recognizing that “Students and teachers are primary resources for cultural knowledge, teaching each other as they share their own autobiographies” (George, et al., 2003, p. 323), classrooms resonate with the stories of lived lives, the feelings of love, loss, and longing, and a chorus of voices that touches as it teaches. Viewing personal stories as meaningful and being respectful of children’s and teachers’ individual identities, we recognize the very personal nature of teaching and learning, which is my primary inspiration for teaching young children.

When I share Langston Hughes's poem "I Loved My Friend" with them, I think about Nancy, the friend I lost to cancer in my senior year at college, and I help them make their own personal connections to the words. We read:

I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There's nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
Soft as it began,-
I loved my friend. (p. 52)

Our unique stories, our very individual and personal identities form our culture, with a small "c." We begin here and learn about Culture, and to love, and not hate, because those unfamiliar cultures are, in our minds, connected to those we have known and loved.

But what does culture mean? What is its origin? The etymology of culture is from the early 16th century, and is described as "growing, or cultivation of the mind, faculties, or manners" (Chantrell, 2002, p. 130). The focus of the word is on intellect, behavior, and growth, eliciting images in my mind of a classroom. Indeed, should a classroom not be the place where we gather our individual intellectual curiosities within determined standards of behavior?

As we honor children's individual cultural identities, we can find reason to celebrate. When those celebrations are actual, lived events, we are able to include family members, school administrators, and the children themselves, showing them the power of being literate. On one such occasion, my students and I agreed that a "Celebration of Reading and Writing" was in order. They had created many beautiful projects, revealing the process of their thoughts and efforts as well as their creativity. The room was dripping in print.

On the day of the big event, I told the children that they would be tour guides, that they would lead their family members around the room, reading all the displays, and completing a packet that I created. The displays included biography posters, poems, class-created books, and other literary works of art. The displays were a celebration of reading, writing, and of culture – the Cultures of each child, and the culture of our classroom community. (A sample of the packet is found in Appendix A.)

Courageous Singing of The Words and of the World

With each day, and in many ways, we conduct a symphony that children and teachers have composed together, an effort that invites all children to read and write, to listen and to speak, and to create “a melody – a singing of the world.” What does this melody sound like? Or, rather, what do the multiple melodies sound like? Who conducts the choir and how are the voices taught to blend, so that no voice is smothered?

At the beginning of the last school year, when my second-graders are still adjusting to their new environment, I observe that some of my students are physically pushing each other. I talk to them about hands, and about how we can use our hands to help and to work together. We create a poster, on which each child writes an idea. Then we read, “Hands can hold a baby, clap, write, help someone with their homework, play games,” and a variety of other ideas. And one song is sung.

Literature provides another powerful stage for the sounds of children’s voices to be heard and honored and to become the voices of literate people. Through

powerful literature, we invite children to share their thoughts, articulate their memories, and ask their questions. Mills and Stephens (2004) articulate this art form:

When readers engage in the process of creating the poem, they bring their personal passions, expertise as readers, intentions, and knowledge of language and of the world to the task....As a consequence, while children in the same classroom may comprehend the text in similar ways, they will necessarily interpret it in personal ways, and in so doing, create unique poems. (p. 48)

Teaching literacy offers us a meaningful avenue for teaching about human experiences and for promoting conversations about our lives. While reading books to children and leading them to becoming independent readers and writers, we simultaneously engage in transformative teaching, creating spaces for all voices to be heard. When we invite children to draw and write about topics of their choice, the invitation is reciprocated as we are privileged to look into the lives of our students.

During the spring, as I begin to teach my second-graders about the lives of people who led struggles for freedom, I read a story about Ruby Bridges to them. I ask all the children in my class to think about a time they were teased, or to make any other connection to the story they can think of. Christopher pulls me aside to tell me his private story. When Anna joins us, he does not object. As he talks, Anna sits close to him, listening with concentration and concern. Christopher begins:

When I was in preschool I wanted to go on this jungle gym and this boy said, "Whites only," and pushed me off. Then he started chasing me and I tripped. Then he put me in this place and closed the door and I was almost locked in. When the teacher took him to the classroom he said, "I wish blacks were never born." In kindergarten, my dad told me not to talk to him. My dad told his parents what happened but they didn't care. So my dad told me some kids' parents' teach them wrong.

I remain quiet and calm, because I want the moment to remain in Christopher's hands, with him conducting the conversation. I look closely at his face

as he speaks and I stay nearby, as Shimon did for me. I stay close and calm, so that he knows that I will not walk away while he still has important things to tell. Again, I wonder about how often teachers dismiss their students, communicate that they are too busy to listen, and let their students know that there are other, more important tasks to be accomplished? Why, then, would those students be inclined to talk or write or offer their thoughts when their teachers determine they are finally ready to listen? Here, in this moment, I ask Christopher about how this experience made him feel. He replies, “It made me feel bad and sad. Just because I’m black doesn’t mean I should be treated differently.” Through the articulation of his memory, Christopher is able to express his indignation and his conviction. By sharing his memory, he evokes the caring and compassion of Anna. Through both the memory that Christopher shares, and the present moment where two children and their teacher talk about how cruel human beings can be, Christopher and Anna form a community of trust and sharing.

Together, they create a space where, as Bachelard (1994) explains,

memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening....a community of memory and image...(p. 5)

Together, they show how,

through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days...we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood. (p. 5)

As St. Amour explains:

By combining children’s natural storytelling abilities with quality multicultural literature, students’ language skills and students’ appreciation of cultural differences are enlarged and enriched. Narrative abilities – particularly stories – are a natural vehicle for building on children’s oral language skills to develop literacy with print. If these stories have a

multicultural focus, it is only natural that readers will develop an appreciation of both cultural similarities and differences. (2003, p. 47)

Through literature, children are also invited to become “critical” readers, to immerse themselves into the messages conveyed by the stories they hear and to actively untangle and deconstruct their own meanings. By doing so, they also begin to understand that authors present their own perspectives, that we can analyze and explore in relation to the world we experience around us.

But are the lessons taught always the lessons learned? We may wish to teach our children that Martin Luther King was great and brave and that he helped make our country better, but perhaps they learn that it is dangerous to be a Black man who speaks out loudly. We may want to teach our children that Ruby Bridges was a brave girl who helped to integrate our schools, but perhaps they learn that some White parents do not wish their children to go to school with Black children. What about the haunting terror that stems from the realization that seemingly good and decent people can be utterly cruel and evil? What might our children think and feel when they realize that mothers and fathers, not monsters, screamed at and taunted six year old Ruby Bridges as she was escorted by federal marshals into her school. What might they feel when they learn that when Martin Luther King was a child, he ran home crying after being told by his friend’s mother that he could no longer play with her white son? In the words of Elie Weisel (1965):

Yes, good and evil coexist without the one influencing the other; the devil himself strives for an ideal; he too sees himself as pure and incorruptible....Civilization? Foam that crests the waves and vanishes. Lack of morality and perverted taste for bloodshed are unrelated to the individual’s social and cultural background. It is possible to...respect parents and neighbors, play a role in public life, and begin one day to massacre men, women, and children, without hesitation and without guilt...One may torture

the son before his father's eyes and still consider oneself a man of culture and religion. (p. 5)

So we talk. I tell my students about my memories from South Africa and about how sad and cruel people were. I tell them about the schools, and how Black children and White children were not allowed to go to the same schools. I tell them about the buses, and how the Black people were forced to ride on separate buses, or made to go upstairs on the double decker bus if they were accompanying a White child.

I then remember my own experience on one of these buses, after Sara picked me up from my nursery school, which was the lab school of The Teachers' Training College. Sara worked for my grandmother and, after our immigration, lived as a member of my family in the United States for many years. Remembering how much I loved being greeted by "Sa" after school, I also recall our bus ride. We climbed on the bus and I sat down. Sa then motioned to me, took my hand and we went upstairs. The law allowed a Black woman caring for a White child to ride upstairs, but did not allow such a pair to sit on the lower section. I do not share this story with my students, from fear of overwhelming them with too much of my own history, and alone I read the book, *Journey to Jo'Burg: A South African Story*, and I feel the anguish of the characters:

As they turned toward the road, there was a bus with the word "PARKTOWN" in big letters on the front. It was slowing down a little way up the road and the doors were opening. Through the front windscreen they could see the driver was black. "Come on, Tiro!" called Nadeli, pulling him by the arm. They were just about to jump aboard, when someone shouted at them in English, "What's wrong with you? Are you stupid?" Startled, they looked up at the angry face of the bus driver and then at the bus again. White faces stared at them from inside as the bus moved off. (Naidoo, 1986, p. 26)

My teaching feeds my memories, which fuel my energy to teach children about good and evil. I do not share everything with them. They are still very young. But I do tell my students about the good and kind people, and how they worked to change the laws. Together we create a book that shows the beauty of South Africa, from the land to the animals to the people. Through our conversations, which reflect transformative teaching, the children themselves are transformed. They side with good, learn to recognize evil, and learn to openly discuss their thoughts.

Will some people view such lessons as reflecting the danger of transformative teaching? Will they object to inviting children to read and talk about difficult topics? Or are they afraid of entering those conversations themselves? Paula calls them “courageous conversations” as she refers to the necessity that teachers talk about issues of race and “otherness” among themselves. She explains how important it is for teachers to ask themselves, “If I was there, how would I handle it?” She says we must put ourselves in others’ shoes, because, although, we will not “walk the walk” of our students, our attempts to feel empathy toward them will help us understand their lives. She explains that we have to take risks, the way we expect our young students to do the same.

Vivian Gussin Paley (2002) engages in a courageous conversation in her book *White Teacher*. She discusses the labels she, as a White teacher, uses in reference to her Black students. She writes:

“White girls” did not slip easily off my tongue as did “black girls.” I saw white children as individuals. If I used the group label “white” it was to round off a generalization made about blacks. Sonia had been quick to point out that I never said “The Jewish children.” As a Jew, I was at all times aware of the individual differences among Jews. It was unlikely that I could come up with a generalization about Jews which would be meaningful to me. When I heard

non-Jews utter such indiscriminate remarks, I invariably suspected them of ignorance, indifference, or prejudice. Yet I did not hesitate to speak of the “black girls.” That this should be so affected me deeply. (p. 131)

I believe in the importance of these conversations, because our children have great minds of their own and their perceptions are powerful. They see the world around them, they hear the words being spoken, and they feel the injustices. In the words of the Lebanese poet, Kahlil Gibran (1923/1979):

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which
you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make
them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living
arrows are sent forth. (p. 18)

Transformative teaching provides the time and space for children to learn about the world that they already perceive. We may never be certain about what our children think, and White teachers looking in on Black children can never know what they feel. But when teachers remain at a far away outside gaze, avoiding difficult topics, they cannot even glimpse the lives of their students. When we do ask, however, and when we turn to literature to be our co-teachers, we create the space for children to think and we begin to learn the power of literature, “not because readers acquire information from it but because literature provides additional experiences” (Mills et. al, 2004, p. 49). We can guide children to “use the power of reading to

better understand themselves and their world and to take action so that they are better, their school is better, their world is better” (Mills, et. al., 2004, p. 47). We create opportunities for little boys to tell about painful experiences around race, and for their friends to sit and listen and show caring and compassionate behaviors. We offer opportunities for children to protest and to shout, “That’s not fair.” In a classroom where children are asked to say what they think and to make personal and heartfelt connections to books, we hear the choir of many voices singing together. Throughout a second-grade study of people who led struggles for freedom, children’s chants of decency, empathy and compassion for Ruby and Rosa and Harriet and Martin and Cesar and Nelson ring out:

“That’s so mean!”

“That’s not fair!”

“How could they do that?”

Together, we experience what Leder (1990) calls, “An echo of the same,” as “Compassion has made one body of us” (p. 162). Little by little, feelings of alienation among children, that they are “belonging to another,” may subside. Little by little, all children learn that the heroes of past days were great people, great human beings, and that they, too, can be good and decent and kind. They learn to look at each other and judge not the color of their skin, but the content of their character. They learn to say, “That’s not fair!” not only for themselves, but for each other.

Their learning about compassion leads them to the indignation that fuels all transformative work. As Leder (1990) explains:

Compassion actualizes the one-body state not only through this affective body bond but by the actions that follow. The natural expression of compassion is

service. Insofar as I embody within myself the suffering and needs of others, it follows naturally that I will seek to alleviate these sufferings and fulfill these needs. They are, in an important sense, mine. (p. 163)

Like the conversations among teachers, the conversations with children may be difficult. However, the realities of the world's injustices, and the realities of the economic and racial divides continue and we must break the silence. As we listen, we will be hopeful that throughout our students' lives, they will make contributions to the world that heal rather than hurt, and by doing so, nurture themselves.

Writing is another poignant and powerful way for children to express their thoughts. By creating a writers' workshop environment, teachers invite children to discover meaningful topics for writing, have conversations with the teacher and with their peers about their writing, and learn how to incorporate the creative craft of published authors. Beginning with conversations about their lives, and with discussions about books that have struck responsive chords in our students, the writing begins. As Lucy Calkins (1994) articulates, human responsiveness is, once again, vital. She writes about the writing conference, in which children bring their drafts to their teacher for discussion:

Why is it so difficult to give a simple human response? I think it is because we try so hard to be helpful we forget to be real...we worry so much about asking the right questions that we forget to listen...we focus on asking the questions that will draw out more information, not realizing that it is listening that creates a magnetic force between writer and audience. The force of listening will draw words out. Writers will find themselves saying things they didn't know they knew. And so we let the writer know she has been heard. We tell the youngster we are sorry about her grandfather. Sometimes that is enough. (p. 232)

Literacy – reading and writing, listening and speaking – invite the voices of children to announce themselves to the world.

The movie *Paperclips* (Fab, Johnson, & Pinchot, 2004), portrays a group of middle school children and teachers in Whitwell, Tennessee engaging in a letter writing project to collect six million paper clips in an effort to try and comprehend the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust. Their project was launched in an effort to teach the children about tolerance and diversity, after their reading of books about the Holocaust. As the children write letters to Hollywood stars and politicians, requesting their remembrances of the Holocaust and paperclips to add to their commemorative collection, they receive responses from people all over the world. The movie offers a powerful example of how teachers can work to break the silence, by inviting their students to speak. By breaking the silence, we see how these teachers guide their students along a literary path, ending at an oasis of empathy, compassion, caring, and love.

As I recently realized, one of the Whitwell students' correspondents, one of the people who sent them paperclips, is Paula herself. I now understand the sense of familiarity I experience walking into her Head Start classroom, as I had watched *Paperclips* (Fab, Johnson, & Pinchot, 2004), a few months previously, the movie in which Paula describes her parents' death marches, their suffering in Auschwitz, and the murder of their families. I watch *Paperclips* again, and am deeply touched by Paula's words. I am also struck by the innumerable lessons learned by the children in a small Tennessee town, guided by their dedicated principal and their caring teachers. I realize that they are not only learning about the Holocaust, and about the suffering of millions of innocent people, they are also learning about the power they hold as literate members of society, the power of collaboration, and their duty to be the

guardians of democracy, challenging oppression and violations of human rights that they may encounter in their generation.

By giving children authentic opportunities to engage with literacy, we also share in pedagogy that fosters democratic ideals. As Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) writes:

A democratic pedagogy supports freedom of expression, inclusion of multiple perspectives, opportunities to evaluate ideas and make choices, and opportunities to take on responsibility and contribute to the common good. Because democracy must be lived to be learned, democratic classrooms can be developed only in inclusive organizations that encourage broad participation of students, parents, teachers, and community members. (p. 144)

Through thoughtful literature and thoughtful discussion, voices rise above the deafening silence that threatens to alienate and subjugate. Learning becomes a social process, and teachers recognize all students as separate individuals and as members of non-mainstream societal groups whose views are threatened to be silenced (Nieto, 2002). Teachers learn to share the stage, to invite children's voices to rise above their own, and to create spaces for all children to prepare for participation in the society that we all share. But what if teachers find this process daunting? What if they feel discomfort in sharing their power? How can educational systems engage in transformative practices that reassure and support teachers through these changes?

By engaging in research and practice that embraces the identities of all children through literature and authentic literacy practices, I am, in fact, being political and engaging in social activism as I may have done had my family stayed in South Africa. Literacy instruction and research, therefore, dons a democratic cloak. While I work, I aim to forge ahead toward democratic ideals that refuse to become "sliding signifiers" (Apple, 2001). Like Foucault's (1995) pre-modern soldier, who

fought against threats, and not because he was being monitored, I fight the threat of hegemony, using my pen and my intellect as my weapons, joining with others who share the vision of true democratic education for all children. I realize that, by definition, standardization of curriculum and of pedagogy promotes the values of the White middle class policy makers and educators who create and implement them, thus, dismissing the cultural identities of so many of America's children. The words of the American constitution have not yet been fully realized. They are there like a beacon of light, toward which I work. How much can I do and how far can I go as I follow that light? How can I remain true to my beliefs while working within the confines of traditional institutions? Who will be my fellow sojourners?

Hearing Every Voice

I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility and privilege as I work with children, whose lives and thoughts, and feelings move me and stir me. While I teach them about reading strategies, they teach me about determination and patience and hope on their path to becoming literate. As I teach them poetry and writing and read them stories, I remember that choice and human interaction remain the threads that run through all I do. Teaching is fundamentally a human process, driven by human encounters and interactions. Teachers choose the tone of their voice, they choose which children to call upon, and they choose how to respond to a child's question or comment. What happens when a teacher allows herself to dislike a child? What can we learn from Mrs. Roth's treatment of Shawn?

Hansen (1991) writes about the fundamentally human, moral nature of teaching:

According to the literature, the intellectual and moral aspects of learning are thoroughly intertwined...teaching is more than mere instruction or training, aspects of which could in principle be left to computers or other technology. Teaching is undertaken by persons, each bringing to bear a particular understanding of what education, students, and learning are all about and each bringing into the classroom an individual character as a human being. (p. 841)

So I choose to devote my work and my skills to give realization to the concept that teaching is a human experience, both in the manner in which I interact with my students and by the curricular choices I offer my students. I ask questions: can you tell me more about that? What do you think about that? What does this remind you of? How does that make you feel? I create the space for their voices so that they can explore their thoughts and identities. In return, I experience close, human contact with children's minds and hearts.

Anton (2001) writes about communicative practices contributing to selfhood:

Given the underlying notion that the human self is sacred and must be treated with ceremonial care, this microtexture of communicative praxis provides the conditions and space for appropriate handling and treatment of such beings. In general, these communicative practices are the very fabric and texture in which character is meaningfully stitched... These subtle communicative practices operate as a concrete texture in which characteristics of selfhood are manifestly, though most often prereflectively, articulated and accomplished. That is, through this "body idiom," which inscripts various levels of respect for the occasion, for others, and for self, interactants meaningfully negotiate and experience various social dimensions of self hood. (p. 73-74)

Together we create our fabric, our bonds and relationships that embellish my role as a teacher and that enrich my life.

I read letters and cards written to me by students and their parents, which illustrate my approach. At the end of my year with second-grader Shawn, his father writes:

Thank you for being such a true inspiration in (Shawn's) life. Your support and your kindness are very much appreciated. You have had such a profound impact on (Shawn's) school activities and have really inspired him.

And seven year old Gabrielle writes:

Thanks with all my heart for teaching me. (You're the best teacher in the world but don't tell anyone that!!)

Gabrielle's words make me smile, but they also make me wonder. Is she afraid of allowing others to know her feelings? Does she take comfort in knowing that she can trust me with her feelings, and by trusting me, share her secrets?

Paula talks about the critical importance of trust. I ask what she tells new teachers who feel that they do not have the time to establish individual relationships with their students. She shares with me what she tells them:

For me that bonding at the beginning of the year, and that two minutes in the morning that I would high five or do a check in with my kids to see who might have had a horrible night...need me a little bit longer. That would pave the way for the rest of my day and I needed to do that in order to start my day. For teachers who say they don't have time you *have* to be able to make time. It's *just* like letting a child go to a bathroom.

As we uncover the essence of early literacy interactions between teachers and children, I pay tribute to Paula's recognition of her students as children. Before they are our students, they are children – sons and daughters, brothers and sisters – they are children.

Through Paula's words, we are closer to understanding the aspect of Morrow and Asbury's (1999) criteria of exemplary early literacy classrooms that emphasize cooperation and mutual respect. As Paula offers her compassion and empathy to the children, she teaches them about the fundamentals of respect and dignity. She demonstrates the notion that she has choice regarding her priorities and that she is in

charge of her teaching. Paula is in charge of her actions. She chooses how to respond to her students. First and foremost, she tends to their needs. Paula exemplifies many of the ideas formulated by the philosophers that I write about in Chapter Three.

Paula also offers insight about the intersection of an effective classroom environment and high expectations, two more of Morrow and Asbury's (1999) criteria for high quality literacy classrooms. She describes creating the physical space for a child to go when she feels like she may "explode" and hand signals as a private way to communicate with a child who needs reminders of one sort or another.

In my experience, effective instruction and positive attitudes and expectations toward children are closely aligned. Morrow, Casey, and Haworth (2003) point out that "When teachers can observe changes in student learning as a result of the modeled activities, changes in teacher beliefs and attitudes will follow" (p. 4).

Working as a classroom teacher, a writing specialist, and a doctoral student, I have seen the realization of this relationship. I have spent 10 years at a school where children fit the criteria to be labeled "at risk." Yet, as their teachers guide them along the path of literacy, using beautiful and powerful literature, using the writing process to publish children's books, incorporating music and theater, and embracing parents and families, I have seen these children flourish. I write:

Instead of viewing these children as "disadvantaged" and lowering our expectations, we should hold them up as examples of courage and resiliency and expect those qualities to lead them to academic success. Instead of defining immigrant children as "academically deficient," we can view them as world travelers and experts on their home cultures. We should also be awed by their budding bilingualism. Children from low-income homes and children of immigrants, who may also live in poverty, straddle at least two cultures every day. This feat is impressive for anyone, let alone a child. As teachers, we must be cultural ambassadors to these students and find ways to make

academic learning connect to their life experiences. As we do, they will learn not only how to write but the value of writing. (Landa, 2005, p. xii)

When Preconceptions Meet Pedagogy

In a more troubling vein many researchers claim that the cultural differences between predominantly white, female teachers and their Hispanic students, result in negative impacts on student learning, including teachers' low expectations for students, a disproportionate number of minority children in special education, harsh discipline, and teachers attributing academic difficulties to inadequate home environments (Irvine, 1990).

In their "Eastside Study," Pease-Alvarez and Vasquez (1994) investigated the connection between culture and language and teacher expectations among children in a Mexican community near San Francisco. Like Moll (1992), who demonstrates that poor Mexican children bring a wealth of world knowledge to school, Pease-Alvarez and Vasquez depict Mexican children living in homes that value language and dialogue. They explain that as children learn a language, they simultaneously learn the ways and beliefs of their cultural group. They describe "language socialization experiences" citing examples such as how cultural views of child rearing influence how parents speak to their children. The researchers propose that when teachers understand the language socialization experiences of their students, they can use them to inform their instruction.

The Eastside Study suggests, however, that teachers not only lack understanding of the language experiences of their students, and underestimate their Latino students' ability to use language, but that they actually employ poor teaching

techniques as a result of their lowered expectations. The attitudes of the teachers in both studies suggest their belief that their students are impoverished, intellectually as well as economically.

Cacophony

Intrigued by the Eastside study, in 2004 I conduct three interviews with a first grade teacher who works in a predominantly White, upper-middle class school. Her attitudes and beliefs alarm me. With conviction, she talks about the one Latino boy in her class, Irvin, acknowledging that she has never met his parents, and due to a language barrier, has never had a conversation with them. After analyzing my field notes and the transcript of my interview with her, I note several themes that emerge from her words. Tara Cunningham seems to believe that her efficacy as a teacher is compromised by her student's home life. She attributes Irvin's difficulties with literacy skills to her perception of a home that lacks literacy practice. Why has she come to believe this? She has never been to the home. Is she projecting her own sense of inadequacy and frustration at feeling unable to teach Irvin? Is it easier for her to attribute his difficulties to his parents than to herself?

I also notice that Tara describes how Irvin receives a fragmented program of instruction, as she shares his instruction with two other teachers with whom she does not plan nor collaborate. I remember the times when I, too, felt isolated as well as the times I thrived with supportive colleagues, and I now wonder if Irvin could have benefited from his teacher having more opportunities for collaboration and support. As I noted how this teacher focused her instruction on the repetitive practice of basic skills and how she maintained lowered academic expectations of Irvin, I thought

about Shawn and Mrs. Roth and about how children perceive their teachers' attitudes toward them. I wondered how Irvin felt day after day, as he saw his peers learning to read and write, as he struggled, and as he was expected to repeat lessons over and over again.

Why do we talk to teachers? Without the words of teachers, we are left asking what words and phrases such as “culturally relevant pedagogy,” “democratic teaching,” and “effective literacy practice” mean. Derrida’s (1996) theory of deconstruction explains the complexities of drawing meaning from words, which points toward the significance of phenomenology. His theory of deconstruction is a strategy of critical analysis that excavates assumptions in words and texts, challenging the notions of Western epistemology and metaphysics by proposing that meaning is endlessly created. Derrida believes that there is no final meaning in words and that, instead, every word contains layers of meanings that have developed through cultural and historical processes (Garrison & Leach, 2001). Derrida helps us to open up the meaning, or more appropriately, the meanings, of teaching early literacy. I explore his ideas further in Chapter Three. For now, I turn to examples of how the meaning we attribute to words impacts our views of children.

Let us examine, for example, a construct that has gained wide acceptance in the field of literary theory. Reading researchers have claimed that knowledge of the alphabetic principle is one of the primary predictors of reading achievement. Grounded in this theory, researchers and teachers like Irvin’s have sought to show the dearth of literary behavior in the homes of “at risk” and “disadvantaged” children, in an attempt to explain the low academic achievement of particular marginalized

groups of students. In turn, the research findings inform educational practitioners to focus their instruction on the repetition of basic skills and other narrow teaching strategies, in efforts to address the “deficits” these children bring to school.

In the above example, the hegemonies include the notion that homes in which written language is not emphasized are to be considered “intellectually impoverished” and “uncaring,” that children who come to school without knowledge of the alphabet are “at risk,” and that “basic skills” must be taught in isolation for children who have not yet mastered them. Given what we know about the relationship between teacher expectations and academic achievement, inequity emerges as the deficit perceptions of particular children result in lowered expectations and poor teaching techniques.

On the other hand, using Derrida’s lens, teachers and researchers might deconstruct the words “disadvantaged,” “at risk,” and “basic skills,” and emphasize their biased cultural meanings. We might also seek to focus on research that honors all children, all families, and effective teaching strategies. They are just words until we peel away the layers of their meanings and connotations.

When teachers evaluate their students’ homes as lacking in educational and intellectual stimulation, it is, in part, because their standards of what intellectual stimulation looks like both reflect and define the traditional American classroom, leaving no room for cultural variation. Not surprisingly, educational policy-makers, such as the United States Department of Education, reinforce the traditional standards that teachers maintain. For example, the 1993 *Final Report of the National Assessment of the Chapter 1 Program* states:

Parents whose children attend high-poverty schools do participate in learning activities with their children, but the types of activities are different from

those of parents whose children are enrolled in low-poverty schools. While parents of children in high-poverty schools spend more time with their children doing daily household chores, families in other schools are more likely to participate with their children in activities directly related to education, such as reading to their children daily and visiting a library, museum, or zoo. (p. 23)

While I do not question the notion that most parents in low-income homes do not take their children to museums and libraries as often as most middle-class parents, I challenge the statement that their daily activities are not “directly related to education.” Almost any activity can be related to academic learning, if the teacher values and respects such activities as part of a child’s experience, and if the teacher makes the learning connection for the child. Do children not learn math skills as they help their mothers cook? Do planting and gardening not offer lessons in botany and earth science? How can we even begin to measure the lessons learned by children as they watch the skills and mastery and hard work of their parents?

Luis Moll (1992) posits that economically disadvantaged Mexican American children **do**, in fact, experience intellectually rich learning at home, and that schools should attempt to tap into those experiences. Moll focused his work on anthropological studies of households in working-class Mexican communities in Tucson, Arizona, to portray a qualitative picture of the cultural and intellectual resources the households offer to children, and to identify opportunities for merging home and school experiences. Moll defines home resources as “funds of knowledge” or “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills” (p. 133). He explains:

Our claim is that by capitalizing on household and other community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools...To

accomplish this goal we...portray accurately the complex functions of households within their socio-historical contexts. (p. 132)

As Moll (1992) describes the home cultures in the Mexican community, he answers the questions asked above. He portrays them as rich and resourceful in an effort to combat a commonly held notion that because these homes are poor, they are devoid of intellectual experiences for children. He believes that if teachers and schools recognize and appreciate the richness of their students' homes, and seek to integrate aspects of the home culture into the classroom, they will recognize students as valuable members of the classroom community with experiences and knowledge to share.

Moll (1992) shares the comments of two teachers who visited children's homes. One teacher says, "Half the children in my classroom are international travelers and yet this experience is not recognized because they are Mexican children going to Mexico." Another teacher says, "These children have had the background experiences to explore in-depth issues that tie in with sixth grade curriculum, such as the study of other countries..." Finally, they comment, "Only a part of that child is present in the classroom. We had no idea of what Carlos's life was really like outside of the classroom, and what he knew about the world." The comments shared by the teachers in Moll's study provide a glaring example of how teachers' ignorance of their Latino students can lead to negative attitudes and low expectations of student academic performance.

Moll (1992) shares the example of one learning module developed by teachers, outlining one week's worth of classroom activities. After seeing one student selling Mexican candy to a neighbor, and interviewing a parent who makes candy, the

teachers chose candy as the theme of their teaching. Students were encouraged to research the topic of candy, and were permitted to turn to parents for their expertise. In addition, parents were invited into the classroom to teach the children about how to make Mexican candy.

Moll (1992) continues to portray the Mexican households as complex and sophisticated networks by describing the social relationships within them, and he continues to make a case that schools should incorporate their students' home experiences. He also notes the following, reiterating my earlier discussion about honoring the uniqueness of each child. He remarks that in their homes, children learn from many different family members, both in and out of the home. Thus, their home "teachers" know them in various settings and understand them as individual and unique children, creating long-term, trusting relationships with the children within a rich social network. How different, then, is the classroom in which children are judged only by test scores, where teachers do not spend time to establish personal bonds with their students, and where knowledge is imposed rather than discovered.

Voices That Sing Above the Noise

Just as I believe that the notion of choice is distorted by current political and societal forces in the United States, I am equally sure that the choices teachers make in their interactions with children can either reflect or transform the human indignities and marginalization suffered by poor children of color and their families in the larger society. Now, more than ever, as the political tides in America pull public education toward a nationalized, standardized, and sterilized prototype, educators need to

recognize the choices they have, and consciously exercise their choices for the benefit of their students.

The words of Paolo Freire (1998) again remain poignantly relevant: “One of the signs of the times that frightens me is this: the insistence in the name of democracy, freedom, and efficacy, on asphyxiating freedom itself and, by extension, creativity and a taste for the adventure of the spirit” (p. 101). And I wonder, given the current climate created by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy, in which standardization trumps democracy, what is the experience of teachers who manage to maintain both philosophies? What is the experience of early childhood literacy teachers who are able to maintain the language arts standards of NCLB and maintain the sanctity of children’s developmental literacy needs, of democratic teaching, and of culturally relevant pedagogy?

We cannot separate teachers’ choices and the beliefs that fuel their pedagogy from the teachers’ interactions with children. Pedagogical theory is just theory, until it is delivered and presented to children. The manner in which it is presented will resonate with children and set the stage for all their future learning, beyond the particular content of the material being presented. How, then, can we operate, being limited to any one pedagogical approach, and still meet the needs of every child?

Max van Manen (2003) explains why we cannot, and suggests an alternative way of interpreting pedagogy. He writes about his suspicion “of any theory, model, or system of action that only gives me a generalized methodology, sets of techniques or rules-for-acting in predictable or controllable circumstances” (p. 155). He continues:

Pedagogic situations are always unique. And so, what we need more of is theory not consisting of generalizations, which we then have difficulty

applying to concrete and ever-changing circumstances, but *theory of the unique*; that is, theory eminently suitable to deal with this particular pedagogic situation, this school, that child, or this class of youngsters. We can move toward theory of the unique by strengthening the intimacy of the relationship between research and life or between thoughtfulness and tact.” (p. 155)

Like my former students, Lilah, Shawn, Christopher, Lara, Irvin, and like myself as a child, every child presents a unique presence and identity. All children call upon us to create the space for their voices to be heard, so that we can determine how best to engage them in learning. It is our pedagogy – our individualized response to each of them – that allows us to do so.

As I proceed with my phenomenological investigation, I examine the experiences of teachers who, according to my deconstruction of the following words, teach with democratic principles, with a sense of caring and morality, and with a pedagogy of purposeful, authentic, culturally sensitive, balanced, and *individualized* approach to literacy. Through their words, I investigate what their classrooms look like, sound like, and feel like and what they experience as they interact with their students.

I know of no other way to better honor the memory of the one million five hundred thousand Jewish children who were “children condemned never to grow old,” (Weisel, 1982, p. 3), “children robbed of their future” (p. 65). I know of no better way to honor the suffering of South African children under the oppressive apartheid regime, children like 13 year old Hector Peterson, his sister, Antoinette, and the thousands of others who were shot and traumatized during the 1976 Soweto school uprising. I do not know of a better way to remember the horror endured by Emmett Till, the hatred thrown at Ruby Bridges, and to combat the relentless

stratification and marginalization of low income, minority children in America's public schools.

Having explored my "turning" to the phenomenon under examination and its underlying meanings, I now explore its philosophical ties. In the following chapter, I discuss my moral and intellectual struggle with Martin Heidegger, and turn to Levinas, Sartre, Levin, and Derridas, to illuminate the philosophical links to the phenomenon of White teachers who choose to teach literacy to low income children of color.

CHAPTER THREE

The Philosophical Roots

After 17 years of teaching young children how to read and write, I begin to write my doctoral dissertation. I choose the methodology of phenomenology, a “human science” for its attention to the individual, to lived experiences, and to the validity it gives to human existence, memory, interpretive understanding, and individuality.

In Chapter Three of my dissertation, a philosophical exploration leads me to travel further along the hermeneutic path, as I continue to read and write my way to understanding the phenomenon to which I have turned. In this chapter, I also articulate my methodological approach, seeking guidance on how to proceed by turning to Max van Manen (2003).

The Politics of Philosophy

Given my political and transformative view of teaching – believing that teaching is inherently a political and social act – I begin to read the work of phenomenological philosophers through a political lens, to determine whose work I want to apply to the context of teaching. I ask myself: is their writing infused with ideas that speak about power and privilege and democracy, concepts that are inherent in teaching? Do they recognize the importance of tying philosophy to social action? Do they offer insight for teachers to apply their conscience as well as their consciousness to interrupt their responses when those responses generate negative attitudes towards children?

Secondly, drawing out the experience of teaching as an intimate dance between teachers and their students, I seek the illumination of philosophers who explore human relationships. Through human bonds and interpersonal commitments, I work to create the space for young children to voice their ideas. I see that they, in turn, learn that they have important ideas to contribute to others. As I explore philosophy, I keep this connection in mind.

I soon find that many philosophers who write about human relationships also address issues of power, privilege, and politics. They understand that human relationships exist, not in our minds, but in a world wrought with injustice and exploitation. They understand the human potential for challenging those injustices, and they call upon us to make such efforts. In name, they are Jean Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, Jaques Derridas, David Michael Levin, and Elie Weisel, and I will explore their work within this chapter.

A Methodology Within a Methodology

As I read the work of philosophers, I begin to build a methodology within the methodology that van Manen (2003) articulates. That is, because – as van Manen explains – phenomenology requires that we turn to a phenomenon that stirs our concern, and that we examine the roots of that turning, I read the work of the philosophers with an eye to their own biographies – their own lived experiences.

Scott McLemee (2002) explains, “Situating a philosophical text in its political context is never a simple matter – even after a few hundred years have passed. When the ideas and ideologies are of more recent vintage, the level of passion intensifies.” My collision with this concept occurs soon into my studies, when, as I stated in

Chapter One, I confront the shocking and alarming fact that Martin Heidegger, the man considered to have written some of the foundational ideas of phenomenology was a Nazi. My passion intensifies further, when I learn that many of the other philosophers lived and wrote during and after the Holocaust, and because they were Jewish, suffered under the Nazis.

Choosing phenomenology, I did not know that I would experience a confrontation with one of the most painful aspects of my identity as a Jew and as an educator, who is committed to social equality. I did not expect nor anticipate such a challenge. In Chapter One, I shared that the Holocaust informs my existence, and my realization that nothing other than time and geography separates me from those who perished in the horrors of Auschwitz.

In an unexpected place, I find a literary passage that captures my sentiment. In *The Color of Water*, James McBride (2006) writes:

My view of the world is not merely that of a black man but that of a black man with something of a Jewish soul. I don't consider myself Jewish, but when I look at Holocaust photographs of Jewish women whose children have been wrenched from them by Nazi soldiers, the women look like my own mother and I think to myself, *There but for the grace of God goes my own mother – and by extension myself.* (p. 103)

Moran (2000) and others provide a synopsis and interpretation of Heidegger's documented Nazi activities. I include Moran and other scholars as secondary sources because Heidegger never acknowledged his Nazism, and, therefore, does not always offer primary sources.

As I learn about Heidegger's actions, I recognize each action was a choice that he made. I apply the method of framing actions as choices for Heidegger, to maintain uniformity between my overall methodology and the methodology within it. I explore

the notion of biography that is central to phenomenology. Just as I explored my own life experiences that led to my research, I wonder what aspects of Heidegger's life led him to choose to embrace the philosophy of Nazism. Throughout this exploration, I continue to investigate how the biographies of the philosophers – as well as their writings – offer implications for the phenomenon of this study. Philosophers are, after all, men and women who live in this world and who are of this world. Their writings remain meaningless in relation to human existence if we do not apply what they write to our lives. Furthermore, if we do not understand who they are and how they lived, we assign them an aura of deity and reverence, as if their words embody the words of God.

As stated in Chapter One, Heidegger joined the Nazi party on May 1, 1933. Heidegger made no defense when his professor, Edmund Husserl was stripped of his official title by Freiburg University, and signed the official letter requiring that non-Aryans be retired from the university. Heidegger also refused to direct the dissertations of Jewish students, a teacher's ultimate act of rejection of his students. He wore the Nazi insignia, and as Rektor of Freiburg University, he pledged the University's allegiance to Hitler and to the cause of National Socialism (Moran, 2000). On May 20, 1933, Heidegger sent Hitler a telegram announcing the "alignment" (*Gleichschaltung*) of the university with the Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) Party. Moran (2000) writes:

Heidegger was effectively endorsing the Nazi programme of *Gleichschaltung*, which was seeking to reorganize university studies to mirror Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) doctrine, with its burning of Jewish texts and organized witch hunts of left-wing lecturers and students. (p. 211)

Furthermore, according to Krell (1993):

There can be no doubt that he became instrumental in the “synchronization” (*Gleichschaltung*) of the German university with the party-state apparatus. During his tenure as rector he helped to force the university administration, faculty, and student body – not only in Freiburg but throughout Germany – into the Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) mold. (p. 27)

On November 3, 1933, Heidegger read a speech he had written for the students of Freiburg University:

You are obligated to know and act together in the creation of the future university of the German spirit. Every one of you must first prove and justify each talent and privilege. That will occur through the force of your aggressive involvement in the struggle of the entire Volk for itself. Let your loyalty and your will to follow be daily and hourly strengthened. Let your courage grow without ceasing so that you will be able to make the sacrifices necessary to save the essence of our Volk and to elevate its innermost strength in the State. Let not propositions and “ideas” be the rules of your Being (*Sein*). The Fuhrer alone is the present and future German reality and its law...Heil Hitler! (Heidegger, 1933, p. 46)

Through his choice, Heidegger reinterpreted academic freedom as the duty to further the spiritual mission of the German people exclusively, through labor service, armed service, and the service of knowledge. On January 23, 1934, Heidegger wrote:

The new path that is being followed by the education of our German young men leads through the Labor Service. Such service provides the basic experience of hardness, of closeness to the soil and to the implements of labor...Such service provides...an existence that is strictly ordered according to the requirements of the task that the group has undertaken. Such service provides the basic experience of having put daily to the test, and thus clarified and reinforced, one’s sense of social origin and of the responsibility that derives for the individual from the fact that all belong together in an ethnic-cultural unity. (Heidegger, 1934, p. 53)

As he turns to the nihilism he perceives in Europe, Heidegger claims that his efforts are aimed at helping the German people reconnect with their essence. As he calls for “...only *one single* German estate...being pre-formed in the Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) Workers’ Party movement,” and the “reward of sacrifice and service in the

innermost necessities of German Being,” (Heidegger, 1934, p. 54) Heidegger, through his own words, limits his philosophy of Being – of *Dasein* – to Germans only.

Even in 1946, when the world was reeling from shock of the Holocaust, and when philosophers were searching for words to understand the Holocaust, Heidegger chose to reaffirm his notion of Being with great passion, without any mention of the German genocide of the Jews.

Heidegger made these choices among others available to him. My 10 year old child offers one explanation. When my daughter finishes reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* for the third time, I ask her if it had been dangerous for Anne’s father’s friends to have hid them. She answered, “Yes it was dangerous, but they were good people.”

Two other German phenomenologists provide further insight into Heidegger’s choices. Neither Hans-Georg Gadamer nor Karl Jaspers joined the Nazi party. Gadamer (2004) explains, “If I were simply to begin recounting right now how I managed to become a full professor without ever joining the party, I could put it quite succinctly – I read Machiavelli. Machiavelli says, ‘The enemies of my enemy are my close friends’” (p. 107).

Thomas Mann (1945) provides another contrast to Heidegger. In 1945, Thomas Mann said that “There are not two Germanys, an evil and a good, but only one, which, through devil’s cunning, transformed its best into evil” (as cited in Wolin, 2003, p. 1). According to Wolin (2003), Mann then leaves Germany, seeking exile rather than living in the Third Reich. He knows that to stay in Germany is to endorse the Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) dictatorship, and for him, that is not an option. Mann

also rejects Gadamer's claim to "inner emigration" or inner peace and withdrawal. He questions how anyone can hide behind inner peace in the presence of such tyranny. He knows that compromising with hate and tyranny is to comply.

I suppose I cannot expect that everyone living under the Nazi regime should have shown courage and decency. But philosophers? Men who think about the human condition? Men who seek righteousness and the essence of humanity? Should they not have applied their words and theories to the horrors around them? I believe that like Hendrik F. Verwoerd, the psychology professor who laid the foundational laws of *apartheid* (Frankel, 1999, p. 53), their crimes are exacerbated by the humanity that they claim to espouse through their professional titles.

What, then, do we know about Heidegger's life that paved the way to his identification with Nazism? I believe that hatred towards any group of people stems from a deep, inner core, that is learned in childhood and that festers through years of indoctrination and fear. What in his life allowed his hatred to grow?

According to Victor Farias (1989), Heidegger's involvement with the Nazis was a natural outcome of his years of academic and cultural learning that were imbued with anti-Semitism and fascism. Farias (1989) writes:

By considering the historical context and the texts he wrote in his youth...we can see the progressive connections in a thought process nourished in traditions of authoritarianism, anti-semitism, and ultranationalism that sanctified the homeland...this development is linked to Heidegger's reflections in *Being and Time* – on historicity, "authentic" being-in – community, and his own links with the people, the hero, and the struggle – and his rejection of democratic forms of social life...Heidegger's decision to join the NSDAP was in no way the result of unexpected opportunism or tactical considerations, The decision was clearly linked with his having already acted in a way consonant with National Socialism prior to becoming rector of the University of Freiburg and with his actual political practices as rector and member of the party. (p. 4)

Farias describes Heidegger's fervent loyalty to his "Fatherland," explaining that, "A genuine understanding of Heidegger's thought is impossible if one ignores this fidelity: as in his radically discriminatory attitude regarding the intellectual superiority of the Germans, rooted in their language and their destiny" (p. 7). Farias also describes Heidegger's reverence for the Augustinian preacher, Abraham a Sancta Clara, whose teachings included the following beliefs: "The Jew is the mortal enemy of all that is Christian." "This damned diseased crew ought to be chased wherever they go." "Other than Satan, the worst enemy of mankind are the Jews... Their beliefs are such that they all ought to be hanged, even burnt" (as cited in Farias, 1989, p. 26). Heidegger's first writing from his youth praised Abraham and he later presented Abraham as an example for the youth of his hometown, Messkirch, to follow (Farias, 1989).

Emmanuel Levinas, the Lithuanian born Jewish phenomenologist, adds to the conversation about the roots of Heidegger's anti-Semitism by asking and pondering, "To what extent did he not also belong to that which in a certain Germanic culture and in certain circles is profoundly strange and hostile to us?" (Levinas, 2001, p. 94). Farias' and Levinas' words have relevance for me, both as I engage in my own phenomenological inquiry and as I analyze lessons to be learned from Heidegger that I can apply to that inquiry. What are the implications of biographical analyses for the work that early literacy teachers participate in with low income children of color? Do all teachers need to examine their own established beliefs and attitudes as part of their pre-service education, interrupting any attitude that may predispose that teacher to bias? How can we be sure to gear our work toward teaching about tolerance,

kindness, inclusion, and the beauty of diversity, so that children do not hear words that teach them to hate, or that when they do hear such words, they respond critically and thoughtfully?

Dasein and Nazism: Mutually Enabling?

Heidegger's book, *Being and Time*, was first published in 1927 (Krell, 1993, p. 41), and continues to trigger much controversy and criticism. Heidegger's (1927) philosophy of *Dasein* addresses our being-in-the-world, the nature of Being, and the question of human existence in a disembodied and isolating manner. Heidegger writes that the nature of human existence in the world cannot be studied as something that actually exists, because that existence cannot be separated from the individual whose existence is being examined. Heidegger writes:

Insofar as Being constitutes what is asked about, and insofar as Being means the Being of beings, beings themselves turn out to be what is *interrogated* in the question of Being...Being is found in thatness and whatness, reality, the being at hand of things (*Vorhandenheit*), subsistence, validity, existence (*Dasien*), and in the 'there is' (*es gibt*). (p. 47)

Heidegger also emphasizes that humans live in communities by patterning their lives after a hero of their choosing and by following the path of that hero. With images of Heidegger's reverence and adoration of Adolf Hitler, I read Moran's description of Heidegger's *Being and Time*:

...it does encourage people to 'choose a hero', to engage in 'struggle' (*Kampf*), and to commit themselves to loyal following (Heidegger's model here is a kind of secularized Christianity); and these could indeed serve as vehicles for a submission to following the German Führer as Heidegger himself advocated in his Rectoral Address of 1933. (p. 220)

Through their examination of the meaning of Being, for example, other scholars argue that Heidegger pontificates about the nature of man's relationship with

things in the world more than man's relationship to other men. Novak (1985)

explains:

This priority of thing-relations over person-relationships can be seen in Heidegger's use...of the key terms, *Verhaeltnis*, and *Beziehung*. *Beziehung*, what I term "relationship," is the connection immediately involving persons, namely, those who make "statements" regarding things. *Verhaeltnis*, on the other hand, what I term "relation" is the way the thing is a thing unto itself and is thus "uncovered" as a present phenomenon. This "uncovering" is (for Heidegger) the essence of truth. Relations to things and then relationships with persons determine the world into which persons are thrown. (p. 132)

Novak (1985) also claims that when Heidegger speaks about truth, he speaks about the uncovering of *things*, not the truthful uncoverings between people. Again, if Heidegger's, *Dasien* (Being in the world) emphasizes the world of objects more than of people, the philosophy explains and likely encouraged Heidegger's contribution to the dehumanization of his Jewish students and colleagues.

Hannah Arendt comments that Heidegger "rejects the ordinary world of the 'They'" and that he, therefore "abandons the ground of the human" (as cited in Safranski, p. 372). All that remains, according to Arendt, is "a flirtation with one's own 'nothingness,'" which, she suggests, had made Heidegger susceptible to barbarism. She asks, "Had not the philosophical negation of the concept of humanity eventually resulted in the practical negation of humanity?" (as cited in Safranski, p. 372). She criticizes Heidegger "for the isolation of his *Dasein* and for the inadequacy of his account of world, especially his neglect of cooperative human activity" (as cited in Moran, 2000, p. 288).

Moran writes:

...close inspection of the political implications of the account of human existence in *Being and Time* makes clear that its empty decisionism is totally open to being interpreted in the Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) cause. (p. 220)

Heidegger, himself, articulated and defined his philosophy when he aligned himself and his university with the Nazis, as I explored above. Through his own actions – his application of his philosophy to the Nazi movement – he puts racist and totalitarian parameters around his ideas. He, in fact, demanded that his students dismiss all ideas and replace them with the word of Hitler, his “hero,” as the embodiment of Germany’s law and existence. I, again, quote Heidegger’s words to his students:

Let your courage grow without ceasing so that you will be able to make the sacrifices necessary to save the essence of our *Volk* and to elevate its innermost strength in the State. Let not propositions and ‘ideas’ be the rules of your Being (*Sein*). The Führer alone is the present and future German reality and its law...Heil Hitler! (Heidegger, 1933, p. 46)

On November 11, 1933, Heidegger wrote, “The Nationalist Socialist revolution...is bringing about the *total transformation of our German existence (Dasein)*” (Heidegger, 1933, p. 52). Heidegger publicly announces that his philosophy of existence applies to Germans only, many years after Hitler has already declared that the Jewish “race” did not qualify as German:

Anti-Semitism based on purely emotional grounds will find its ultimate expression in the form of pogroms (which are capricious and thus not truly effective). Rational anti-Semitism, however, must pursue a systematic, legal campaign against the Jews, by the revocation of the special privileges they enjoy...But the final objective must be the complete removal of the Jew (die Entfernung der Juden ueberhaupt). (as cited in Medes-Flohr & Reinharz, 1980, p. 484)

During the Third *Reich*, Nazism was Germany’s stated national mandate, and the German people’s accepted philosophy of their existence. Given that Heidegger embraced the Nazi philosophy and that he worked toward the alignment of the university with Nazi doctrine, he, himself, reveals that Nazism is, in fact, imbedded in

his philosophy of *Dasein*, of Being in the world – his ontological examination of the Being of human beings.

Then, in his essay, “Letter on Humanism,” written one year after full discovery of the Holocaust, Heidegger writes, “With healing, evil appears all the more in the clearing of Being. The essence of evil does not consist in the mere baseness of human action, but rather in the malice of rage” (Heidegger, 1993/1946, p. 260). He does not mention the Holocaust as he philosophizes about evil. He refers to “the mere baseness of human action” after learning about gas chambers and the annihilation of an entire culture. As he argues against humanism, he emphatically declares, “Because we are speaking against “humanism” people fear a defense of the inhuman and a glorification of barbaric brutality” (p. 249). He then facetiously asks, “For what is more ‘logical’ than then, for somebody who negates humanism nothing remains but the affirmation of inhumanity?” (p. 249). The question is mocking and arrogant, and, in essence, reinforces the reality of Heidegger’s own inhumanity. He *was* a participant in “the inhuman” and in the “glorification of barbaric brutality.”

When I read Heidegger’s words, “...what is Being? It is It itself...Being is farther than all beings and is yet nearer to man than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or God” (Heidegger, p. 234), I perceive that he continues to emphasize the “priority of thing-relations over person-relationships.” For me, his words echo with an emotional hollowness, and allow for the dehumanization, which, in fact, he had already embodied.

I read Heidegger's work with the understanding that the choices people make determine the path they follow throughout their lives. And I read his work believing that our choices reflect our beliefs. As Farias explains:

A genuine understanding of Heidegger's thought is impossible if one ignores this fidelity: as in his radically discriminatory attitude regarding the intellectual superiority of the Germans, rooted in their language and their destiny; in his belief in the primacy of his own thought...(Farias, 1989, p. 7)

Another Choice

How do I now incorporate this knowledge of Heidegger's choices into my work? My life work is devoted to effecting positive change in the lives of children and to exploring how power and privilege play their roles. Is it irony? Is it fate? Is it a coincidence? Can I reconcile the work of a man who participated in the extermination of millions? Where is the honor in philosophizing about life and being when one's own actions contribute to the suffering of others? Do the words not just ring hollow, the theories echo with the dying gasps of innocent victims? What did he believe about the world and about people that allowed him to do what he did? How could Heidegger have conducted a thorough and universal examination of human existence when he chose to join and support a fascist, genocidal movement that regarded Jews, homosexuals, Roma, and others as subhuman?

On my difficult journey to determine how to respond to Heidegger, once again, *choice* has become my guide. As I reflect on his choices, my own choice about how to respond to Heidegger emerges. As I sit in my phenomenology class at the University of Maryland one night, articulating my concern, a student says, "All people make mistakes. We shouldn't dismiss the life work of a person just because he made a mistake." In agreement, another student suggests that we separate the man

from his work. I am immediately aware that these are options that I cannot adopt. I do not accept the argument that a philosopher's alignment with Hitler can be separated from his work. As Levinas (2001) states, "...it is unforgettable. One could have been anything except Hitlerian..." (Levinas, p. 94) Heidegger was a philosopher, writing about human beings and human existence. Unlike a chemist, for example, whose work may be confined to a laboratory, more removed from the world of human interactions, Heidegger's laboratory was in Germany, during the rise of anti-Semitism, fascism, and Nazism. His thoughts were fueled by events in the real world of people. His work and his life were inextricably linked. How could I measure the impact of his actions on the lives of the children he caused to suffer and on the generations that followed? How could I weigh the harm he inflicted against the contribution to academia that he is said to have made? How can we measure the impact of the years of oppression against Black South Africans and against African Americans? How can we determine the impact of their educational deprivation and how can we ever know how different our world would be if we could rewrite history? We will never know. What is certain is that we are all connected, both to each other and from our thoughts to our actions. Recalling Levinas' (2001) words about Heidegger, it is interesting and heartbreaking to note that Levinas' parents, brothers, and extended family members were killed in the Ukraine during the Nazi genocides (Moran, 2000) and that Levinas, who was a French army officer, was imprisoned in a German prison camp and "required, as a Jew, to do forced labour" (Moran, 2000, p. 325). If we maintain the phenomenological stance that seeks the roots of a person's turning to their abiding concern, will it come as a surprise when we later examine

Levinas' philosophy, to learn that he wrote about the ethical priority of interacting with the "other"?

A person's work and personhood are intertwined. As I work for equity in schools and social equality for marginalized children of color, I know that I cannot include the work of a man who signed and endorsed a decree that excluded Jews from German schools and universities. My commitment to equality in education prevents me from applying the intellectual prowess of anyone who uses that power to actively and directly oppress others. I borrow the words of Glenn Frankel (1999), who writes about a small group of White activists, including my father's colleague, Joe Slovo and his wife, Ruth First, who risked their lives to fight against *apartheid*. Speaking about their controversial identification with communism, he writes that, "In the end, I concluded that such people must ultimately be judged by their deeds rather than their ideology" (p. 4). My hermeneutic journey continues.

In response to another suggestion made in class that we move on from the events of the Holocaust and address more current issues, I also begin to fear that the Nazism of Martin Heidegger has aroused nothing more than a complacency that results as the Holocaust fades with the years. I fear that this complacency is the ally of oppression of any sort. In October, 2006, Courtland Milloy writes about a Ku Klux Klan rally that he observed, wanting "to see what a 21st century Ku Klux Klan rally was like." He writes:

A speaker who called himself Stonewall Jackson addressed the tourists and the townspeople outside the cordoned-off area. "You try to make our children think we are all the same. But we are not," he said. Swastikas and Confederate flags were on display around him. "I am not a negro, Mexican, or Jew. I am white, yes, a white supremacist and proud of it."

Who is the “you” that this Klansman addresses? It is I, and I must confront his message and respond to it. Who is this speaker who calls himself Stonewall Jackson? How would the academic and larger social community respond if they learned he was the Dean at a state university who wrote about social justice or legal history or philosophy? And so I remain vigilant, and I relentlessly return to the past, knowing that the lessons to be learned are too many for anyone or any lifetime. By repeatedly stating and exploring multiple and troubling historical perspectives, we can remain aware of inequities, vigilant of injustice and committed to equity for all children.

Thus, when I read the words of the Nazi regime, a decree based on Adolf Hitler’s monstrous obsession with the annihilation of Jews, I find an example of a sanitized, legalized nature of hate:

...German teachers no longer can be expected to give instruction to Jewish pupils. It is also self evident that German students find it unbearable to share classrooms with Jews...Reich Minister of Education [Bernard] Rust has decreed the following which goes into effect immediately: Jews are forbidden to attend German schools...all Jewish school boys and girls still attending German schools are to be dismissed immediately. (as cited in Mendes –Flohr & Reinharz, 1980, p. 500)

I remember that hatred can take many shapes, and that as literacy teachers of young children, we must constantly explore our own beliefs and attitudes as well as watch for signs of hate in the children that we teach. How do we react to a child who is an “illegal immigrant”? How do we interact with a mother who is a drug addict? What are our responses to a child whose father is in jail? Do our fading memories about past atrocities place us in the dangerous position of allowing ourselves to have hateful thoughts and to talk negatively about children?

A third option presented to me is to forgive, to reconcile, and to rationalize Heidegger's deeds by examining the pressures to conform to Nazism. But again, I cannot. As Abraham Joshua Heschel (1998) writes, "No one can forgive crimes committed against other people" (Heschel, p. 171). Should I have defended Mrs. Roth to Shawn as he shared how he felt hated by her? Should I have excused the boy who taunted Christopher? Do we then explain and forgive the daily scowls and insults on a teacher's face directed at a child she does not like? What gives me that right? Nelson Mandela could extend his forgiveness to his oppressors. He was the one who suffered under their cruelty, and he lived to extend that hand.

Who gives anyone the authority to speak for the murdered? Do I dare to have the arrogance to offer my forgiveness to the men who tortured and killed Emmett Till or Steve Biko? In the words of Elie Weisel (1965), "No one has the right to speak for the dead, no one has the power to make them speak" (p. 10). So I ask, who am I to forgive Martin Heidegger for what he inflicted upon others? If forgiveness is so easily granted, where is the motivation to do good? Why should teachers strive to make a contribution to the lives of poor young children if they can rather torment them and then ask for forgiveness? How can I or anyone even begin to think about reconciliation or forgiveness when Heidegger neither acknowledged nor apologized for his actions? Heidegger remained absolutely silent after the war, making no apology, offering no explanation for his actions, providing no remorseful reparations, and offering no philosophical insights about the human atrocities. Krell (1993) writes:

The fact that he remained silent after the war about the atrocities committed against Jews and other peoples in Europe, while at the same time bemoaning the fate of his divided fatherland, has understandably shocked and confused everyone, even those who freely affirm the greatness of his thought. That his

early engagement in the Nazi cause was a monstrous error all concede; that his silence is profoundly disturbing all agree; whether that error and the silence sprang from basic and pendant tendencies of his thought remains a matter of bitter debate. (p. 28)

Leaving Heidegger Behind; Moving Ahead

As I learn the philosophical and biographical details of Heidegger, I am reinvigorated to articulate the moral choices that teachers must make. Through my struggle, my hermeneutical journey takes on an even deeper meaning. As I struggle with Heidegger's Nazism, I find that I can learn as much from a philosopher who troubles me as I can from those that inspire me. I discuss Heidegger's Nazism not to point to his immorality; he has done that to himself. Rather, I explore Heidegger's work and life based on my belief that we can and must learn from evil doers as well as from those that enlighten us.

Determined to pursue the endless lessons to be learned from the rise of Nazism, I cannot choose to ignore Heidegger and dismiss his work. On the contrary, I need to read and begin to understand his work, identifying in its content the messages of dehumanizing people and sanitizing hatred and indifference. I believe that exploration of this evil is necessary and relevant, and will achieve more than brief mention or complete omission of the story. Thus, neither do I discuss Heidegger to honor his memory, but to add one more brick to the memorial that stands before us as an all-consuming, penetrating, and imposing wall that keeps us from crossing over to a place where humanity is relativized and freedom is defined by those who strip it from the lives of those that they oppress. I discuss Heidegger because – as an educator committed to human justice and transformative teaching – I feel a moral obligation to do so.

I believe that our existence in the world is determined by our actions, by our “Doings.” Jewish tradition uses the word “*mitzvot*,” Hebrew for “good deeds,” and it is those *mitzvot* that are said to determine our essence, our humanity, our existence. In the Hindu faith, the word is *karma*, referring to the sum of one’s deeds and actions in one’s present life, which determine the nature of the life to be experienced after reincarnation. Safranski (1998) writes, “In action, humans present themselves, they show who they are and what they wish to do and make of themselves...Only because they are free can men act” (p. 382).

Turning to action, I turn to Paolo Freire (1998), who condemns the indignities faced by any group of people, and who demands indignation as a direct challenge to oppression that occurs. Freire calls our attention to the inadequacies of philosophy that does not call for action:

I cannot be in favor merely of people, humanity, vague phrases far from the concrete nature of educative practice...My voice is in tune with a different language, another kind of music. It speaks of resistance, indignation, the just anger of those who are deceived and betrayed (p. 93).

In the words of Elie Weisel (1965), in *One Generation After*, “I find it easier to identify immorality than morality. I know that to do nothing, to remain silent, to participate in oppressive actions has the stench of immorality” (p. 27).

Action Speaks Louder Than Words: Sartre, Levinas, and Derrida

What is the nature of the relationship between theory and practice, between researchers and practitioners? How can I, as a researcher, remain committed to my identity as a teacher of young children by ensuring that my work is relevant, practical, and accessible to teachers who work with young children? Throughout this study, that sentiment is alive. As if to call out to educators and policy makers, I ask the question,

are we not responsible for tending to the hearts and minds of our students, beyond what any set of data can capture? Must we not remain vigilant toward discriminating against poor communities by not providing adequate funding and labeling them as “failing”? How are we ensuring that our future teachers are able to interrupt their own prejudicial attitudes so that they view all children with unlimited potential, dignity, and compassion?

My question about the relationship between theory and practice is addressed by van Manen (1997). He writes:

A distinguishing feature of a human science approach to pedagogy is how the notions of theory and research are to be related to the practice of living. In contrast to a more positivistic and behavioral empirical sciences, human science does not see theory as something that stands *before* practice in order to “inform” it. Rather theory enlightens practice. Practice (or life) always comes first and theory comes later as a result of reflection. (p. 15)

Thus, I begin to set the foundation for the goal of linking theory and practice by turning to philosophers who directly address the necessity of the application of their work to human participation in the world, who explicitly talk about ethics, morality, social responsibility, and choice.

I begin with some philosophers, who claim to have based their writings on humanism on their study of Edmund Husserl, after Husserl inaugurated the phenomenological movement in France through a series of lectures in Paris in 1929 (Moran, 2000). Levinas explains:

No one combated the dehumanization of the Real better than Husserl, the dehumanization which is produced when one extends the categories proper to mathematical matter to the totality of our experience, when one elevates scientism to absolute knowledge...Husserl’s phenomenology has furnished the principal intellectual means for substituting a human world for the world as physicomathematical science represents it. (as cited in Moran, 2000, p. 327)

Beginning with Sartre, I learn about an action-oriented model of philosophy.

But I begin with a glimpse at Sartre's biography, as I did with Heidegger. Moran (2000) explains that:

...his life was profoundly altered by the Second World War, which according to his own testimony, forced him to move "beyond traditional philosophical thinking to thinking in which philosophy and action are connected." (p. 354)

Sartre (1977) explains that as man's existence precedes his essence, the concept of an inherent human nature does not exist. "Man simply is" (Sartre, p. 28).

From here, however, Sartre proceeds, and poses a philosophy of action and responsibility and determination. He writes:

If, however, it is true that existence is prior to essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus, the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. (Sartre, p. 29)

Sartre (1977) extends the notion of responsibility to its application for all of humankind. He writes, "...one ought always to ask oneself what would happen of everyone did as one is doing..." (p. 31). He then overlays his notion of responsibility with choice. He explains:

If I regard a certain course of action as good, it is only I who choose to say that it is good and not bad...nevertheless I also am obliged at every instant to perform actions which are examples. (Sartre, p. 32)

He explains further:

What is not possible is not to choose. I can always choose, but I must know that if I do not choose, that is still a choice (Sartre, p. 48).

Each of us, then, is, according to Sartre, "condemned to be free...responsible for everything he does" (p. 34). Thus, as teachers engage with young children, teaching them how to read and write, they must take responsibility for their choices.

What they say, how they act, and how they choose to respond to children reflects choices for which they are accountable.

What happens when responsibility and accountability are only applied to test scores, grades, and to the framed panopticons that hang in the doorways of America's public schools? What happens to the children? Under the public scrutiny of data driven teaching, who is accountable for the ways teachers interact with their students? If our driving philosophy prioritizes test scores, can we still ensure that we are upholding our moral obligation to the children as human beings? As teachers of young children, we must, and must not relinquish our freedom to do so. We must always remain attentive and watchful of our children. Sartre's (1977) words apply: "We are dealing with a morality of freedom. So long as there is no contradiction between that morality and our philosophy, nothing more is required" (Sartre, p. 59).

Derrida (1996) offers insight into this conflict forced upon teachers, who may feel that standardization and centralization of curriculum and accountability diminishes their relationships with children, and their ability to individualize learning:

Conflicts of duty – and there is only duty in conflict – are interminable and even when I take my decision and do something, undecidability is not at an end. I know that I have not done enough and it is in this way that morality continues, that history and politics continue. (p. 86)

We cannot be content when our students pass their state mandated exams. We cannot work only to reach standards, if the effort to reach standards means forgetting some of the needs of our children. We must attend to our students learning beyond their mastery of our subject matter. We must remember that how they learn is as important as what they learn. A child who learns to write under constant criticisms and corrections may learn to write, but will remember the experience as being unpleasant,

and will probably not choose to write in the future. As teachers, we are participants in our students' futures as well as in their presents.

Emmanuel Levinas's (1972) voice teaches us about our responsibility for humanity, and about the importance of empathy. He teaches us about the humanism of the other and about our moral imperative to care for others and about ethics and the appearance of others in our subjective sphere. He explains that, "The humanity of man, subjectivity, is a responsibility for others, an extreme vulnerability." (Levinas, 1972, p. 67) It is the responsibility that Mrs. Roth has for Shawn and the vulnerability she must permit herself to feel as she reaches out to teach him. She cannot know if her attempts to teach Shawn will succeed or if they will fail. Or, perhaps, she has tried to teach Shawn the way she has taught for many years with many children from similar cultural backgrounds, and has failed. Perhaps it is her sense of failure that has led to her dismissive and angry stance.

Levinas' (1969) discussion of humanity and responsibility is also the responsibility that Mrs. Cunningham has to teach Irvin and the vulnerability she expresses by making assumptions that his parents offer him no support with literacy. Because, by casting blame on Irvin's parents, she excuses herself, and does not, therefore, need to experience the vulnerability that comes from feeling inadequate.

What happens when we cast blame on children and their families for being different and for violating our notions of the role that parents "should" play? Levinas (1969) regards such attitudes as violence:

...violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their

own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action. (p. 21)

We see the violence inflicted on children by teachers who seek to blame or who openly express their frustration toward children. But what about indifference? What happens when a teacher shows neither anger nor compassion? Levinas (1969) explains:

Prior to consciousness and choice, before the creature collects himself in present and representation to make himself essence, man approaches man. He is stitched of responsibilities. Through them, he lacerates essence. It is not a matter of subject assuming responsibilities or avoiding responsibilities, not a subject constituted, posed in itself and for itself like a free identity. It is a matter of the subjectivity of the subject, his non-indifference to others in limitless responsibility, limitless because it is not measured by commitments going back to assumption and refusal of responsibilities. It is about responsibility for others, where the movement of recurrence is diverted to others in the “moved entrails” of the subjectivity it tears apart. (p. 67)

Here, I am reminded of Sartre (1977), who tells us that not to choose, is, in fact, making a choice. To not act, to remain indifferent, is to choose. Is this not also an act of violence?

How are we to attend to the multiple and varied needs of our students? Why is it important to resist “standardizing” children and to embrace the uniqueness of each one? Levinas (1969) explains:

All things picturesque in history, all the different cultures, are no longer obstacles that separate us from the essential and the intelligible; they are the paths by which we can reach it. Furthermore, they are unique pathways, the only possible paths, irreplaceable, and consequently implicated in the intelligible itself! (p. 18)

Attending to school diversity is a moral imperative, but it is also a gift to be treasured. Each interaction with every unique child is a “path” to wholeness and to

the realization of our own humanity. Each child and each interaction is a universe of one, a single star. Together, they create a new constellation.

By interacting with children, by being with them, and by loving them as we persist in teaching them, we redefine ourselves. Levinas (1969) writes:

The relation with Others challenges me, empties me of myself and keeps on emptying me by showing me ever new resources. I did not know I was so rich...I find myself facing the Other. He is neither a cultural signification nor a simple given. He is, primordially, *sense*, because he lends it to expression itself, because only through him can a phenomenon such as signification introduce itself, of itself, into being. (p. 30)

Morality and Compassion: Levin and Derrida

As teachers working towards the ideals of democracy and equity through literacy, who cherish the diverse identities of their students, we must remember the centrality of compassion to our work. How do we teach children about compassion and caring and human decency? Do we only stand up and lecture them on the rules for the classroom, writing our rules and expectations on paper, which talks about no hitting, taking turns, and raising your hand when you want to talk? Levin (2003) warns against such imposed approaches to teaching moral behavior:

When precepts are imposed and not derived, it is not only that we betray our own principles by treating the child as a tool, but that, since we are giving him no understanding of moral evaluation as a process of articulating a body of implicitly moral feeling, we are actually encouraging and rewarding a tool-like nature, rigid, constant, reliable, fixed, docile, and essentially reactive, rather than thoughtful and responsive. (Levin, 2003, p. 230)

Instead, Levin (2003) suggests the notion of teaching compassionate behavior through embodiment. He writes:

...if we ponder what it *is* to teach 'by example,' we will soon realize that that kind of teaching works by virtue of an *exemplary embodiment* – an embodiment of virtue which *shows* it in its most visible *beauty*, *clarifies* it in

its articulation of the *truth*, and *directly communicates its goodness* through the tangible power of feeling. (Levin, 2003, p. 238)

I recall a poignant class meeting with my second grade students, a day when, as always, we gathered together on the rug in a circle to talk about topics of the children's choosing, to reignite our community feeling, and to listen and speak and sing. Yvonne, a Guatemalan-American child with gentle brown eyes and a smile that delightfully transformed her face and emanated with sweetness, began to talk about her puppy. On a previous day, she had excitedly told us about her puppy, but she now seemed subdued. She told us that her mother had given away the dog because he had chewed on the furniture. Yvonne then hung her head in silence. I responded by saying that she seemed very sad and by telling her about the puppy I had left back in South Africa, and how painful that had been. Yvonne abruptly stood up, ran over to me, and climbed into my lap sobbing. She hid her face against me and simply cried. As I held her, I said nothing. My arms that were around her and my lap that held her told her that her pain was valid and that her classroom was a place that welcomed and accepted her feelings. The rest of the children sat silently, and for those few minutes, Yvonne taught us all about sensitivity, compassion, and humanity. Together, as a classroom community, we shared and realized the words that Levin (2003) writes:

...a natural interdependency and kinship on the basis of which they can realize a powerful motivation – realize their need and longing – for the creating of relationships with others that would have, as their value, a mutually responsive, mutually communicative, and mutually concerned character (Levin, 2003, p. 240).

My encounter with Yvonne reminded me of the centrality of relationships between teachers and students to the human experience, of the centrality of all

relationships to our humanity. Her pain also resonated in me, and I wondered if my acknowledgment of her sadness invited her to release the tears she had kept hidden.

I remembered being eight years old, and having my mother leave home for six weeks to study in England. I remembered my mother's friend, Sheila, coming to see me after school, knowing that I was probably missing my mother and feeling lonely. As I lay on my parents' bed, saying nothing, Sheila sat and talked to me. My silence was my shield, which threatened to render me helpless and vulnerable if I spoke. But when Sheila asked me, "Are you feeling miserable?" my shield did, in fact, crumble. Like Yvonne, I lowered my protective stance, and like me, Sheila put her arms around me and comforted me.

The deeply personal, moral, and human nature of teaching threatens to render me inarticulate. How can I really convey the power of a moment such as the one I shared with Yvonne? Like Will, who described the moment when a child conveys the feeling of being understood as "It was like he saw God," I, too, turn to a spiritual context to articulate the connections between teachers and children that resonate with humanity. I am compelled to turn to religious and spiritual language because, as Walter Kaufman (1970) explains, in the prologue to Martin Buber's (1970) *I and Thou*:

...what other terms are there? We need a new language, and new poets to create it, and new ears to listen to it. Meanwhile, if we shut our ears to the old prophets...we shall have very little music. (p. 31)

As I explored in Chapter Two, it is the music of children's voices that is central to literacy learning that is authentic, personal, and democratic in nature. The human contact that facilitates genuine communication is, indeed, spiritual. We must

teach and learn through the body and with the body and mind in collaboration. It is through our lived and bodily actions that we are present in the world and actively engage with other people. Through our five senses and through language, we interact with those around us.

The bodily nature of our presence and of communication begins in infancy. My infant daughter first began to communicate with her hands as she nursed at my breast. She held her hand up, fingers stretched out like a small starfish, indicating her serious and focused efforts at obtaining her milk. While my body provided Shari's milk, she had to feed herself, through her own efforts. Nursing her was, thus, like a conversation between our two bodies, a dance of sustenance. For as long as Shari held up her hand, I nursed and nourished her. When her hand relaxed, I felt her satisfaction. Through her hand, Shari demonstrated Abram's (1999) notion that "communicative meaning is always, in its depths, affective; it remains rooted in the sensual dimensions of experience, born of the body's native capacity to resonate with other bodies" (Abram, p. 74).

As Moran presents the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, he explains the "inseparability of self and world." Moran then adds, "Our insertion into the world is through the body with its motor and perceptual acts. The incarnate domain of relations between body and world is an 'interworld.' The world confronts our bodies as flesh meeting with flesh." (p. 403). Indeed, before either of my two babies could see through their unfocused eyes and before they could speak, they relied on their perceptual ability to turn to the breast and on their motor ability to suckle. Their

“interworld” was created through their symbiotic relationship with me, their mother, where their physical and emotional bonding occurred.

From nursing, my babies then began to make sounds with their mouths. From crying to communicate pain, hunger, loneliness, or boredom; to airy and light pleasurable cooing; to producing the music and rhythm of “babababa”; and eventually attempting the words and phrases that conveyed their inner thoughts, the miraculous evolution of my children’s’ language illustrated Abram’s (1999) view, that:

At the heart of any language, then, is the poetic productivity of expressive speech. A living language is continually being made and remade, woven out of the silence by those who speak...And this silence is that of our wordless participations, of our perceptual immersion in the depths of an animate expressive world. (p. 84)

When I turn to my precious journals, in which I recorded the enchanting poetry created by my two children as they learned to talk, I remember that the endearing quality of their developing language was a result of their unique pronunciations as well as their creative blends of words. By being immersed in a world of spoken language, Shari and Adam absorbed the sounds around them and announced themselves with their own sounds and signals. While linguists would code their utterances in relation to the rules of the English language, Abram would explain their communication as their relating to the sensuous, bodily world of nature, as “playfully mimicking the surrounding soundscape...” (Abram, 1999, p. 75).

Indeed, the playfulness was evident. When the wind blew, my two year old son Adam would say, “It’s winding.” The wind was, to him, alive, active, and real, able to do, to act, to create movement. When he touched something sharp, he described it as “Pokey,” the word itself arousing sharpness. When he spilled his drink,

he would assure us that “The floor drink it” asserting the floor’s lived presence and need for sustenance. In Shari’s two year old world, an avocado was an “avapatahto” smooth in the mouth, and sharing the roundness of a potato. Her promise to her grandma was to “det the moon for you and you tan dance wit it,” believing in the moon’s accessibility, our connectedness to it, and recognizing the joy it offers. Not just learning the syntactical structure of English, but learning about their world, with their world, and in their world, Shari and Adam’s human language arose, embracing the world as well as the words or, as Abram (1999) notes, “from the perceptual interplay between the body and the world” (p. 82).

Should teachers, then, not listen carefully to the thoughts of their students? Are their words not attempts at understanding the complexities of our world, as well as beginning mastery of the structure of language itself? Are these topics not of particular relevance for teachers of very young children, English Language Learners, and children who speak non-standard American English? Teachers have to learn to think and react in a deeply interpersonal manner. Humans are social, interactive beings. They are not insular. We must understand the centrality of language and communication to our relationships and to the emerging identity of children.

As noted in Chapter Two, Derrida (1996) offers a powerful illustration of another way in which language is significant – the salience of word meanings and their personal and political connotations. Derrida’s theory of deconstruction encourages respect for what is different. The theory urges a positive response to the “Other” and an ethics of acknowledgment for their marginalized and disenfranchised voices. Derrida (1996) challenges all norms, raising the question as to why certain

practices become valued while others become denigrated. He also points to the political nature of his theory. He writes:

Deconstruction is hyperpoliticizing in following paths and codes which are clearly not traditional, and I believe it awakens politicization...that is, it permits us to think the political and think the democratic by granting us the space necessary in order not to be enclosed in the latter. (Derrida, 1996, p. 85)

Deconstruction, then, can and should be used to examine oppressive social, political, and institutional constructions, such as educational philosophies that degrade or simply disregard cultures that do not reflect the mainstream. Derrida's (1996) theory of deconstruction has an important influence on educational research and practice. His theory serves to inform researchers to examine the words and codes they use and to pay careful attention to their moral, political, and scientific messages imbedded in their work. Derrida's philosophy reminds researchers that they have the moral obligation to deconstruct hegemonies that serve as tools of domination and to examine the way that they are imbedded as "norms" into research questions. Based on the theory of deconstruction, there are no neutral approaches to teaching.

Jacques Derrida (1996) also remarks on the constant and continuous ethical and moral responsibility each of us must assume toward others, framing his discussion within the parameters of politics. As I am grounded in the political awareness from my childhood and my transformative approach to teaching, which is in itself political, I am drawn into Derrida's words. I am struck by his interpretation of responsibility and duty. Derrida (1996) writes:

If you give up the infinitude of responsibility, there is no responsibility. It is because we act and we live in infinitude that the responsibility with regard to the other (*autrui*) is irreducible. If responsibility were not infinite, if every time that I have to take an ethical or political decision with regard to the other (*autrui*)...then I would not be able to engage myself in an infinite debt with

regard to each singularity. I owe myself infinitely to each and every singularity. (Derrida, 1996, p. 86)

My own pedagogical stance, which, like Paula, keeps my ears attuned to the words of individual children and my eyes open to their expressions of needs, resonates with Derridas' words. Each child, "each and every singularity," warrants my attention and calls on my sense of responsibility.

Derrida (1996) also offers powerful words that help us frame the underlying social and political influences of literacy practice and instruction. In Chapter Two, I asked, "Whose voices do we hear?" We heard stories of cacophonous language, of courageous singing, and about hearing the voices of every child. Inherent in each of these discussions is the way in which language is an expression that reveals power and privilege, which Derrida (1996) addresses. He provides an account of the democratic nature of literature, both historically, and in its intent. He writes:

Literature is a public institution of recent invention, with a comparatively short history, governed by all sorts of conventions connected to the evolution of law, which allows, in principle, anything to be said. Thus, what defines literature as such, within a certain European history, is profoundly connected with a revolution in law and politics: the principled authorization that anything can be said publicly. In other words, I am not able to separate the invention of literature, the history of literature, from the history of democracy. Under the pretext of fiction, literature must be able to say anything; in other words, it is inseparable from the human rights, from the freedom of expression. (Derrida, 1996, p. 80)

Derrida (1996) reminds us that literacy is intertwined with political ideals. Societies can withhold literacy education from disenfranchised groups, thus, further ensuring their marginalization. Alternatively, educators can contribute to the literacy learning of minority children, sharing great literature with them, and teaching them to create

literature of their own, illustrating for them their human right of freedom of expression.

I choose to ground my work in the philosophy of those who believe in hope, and in the ethical responsibilities we have toward a human world that appears before us in the here and now. I live and work with guidance from Rabbi Hillel, whose philosophy teaches us to actively care for ourselves so that we may care for others, and who teaches us that the only time we have is the present as he writes:

If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?
But if I am for myself alone, then what good am I?
And if not now, then when?

The Methodology of Phenomenology

As outlined in Chapter One, van Manen (2003) offers guidelines for phenomenological research. They are not linear; they are intertwined and continually present. They include:

1. Turning to a phenomenon
2. Investigating lived experience rather than conceptualizing
3. Reflecting on the essential themes characterizing the phenomenon
4. Describing the phenomenon by writing and rewriting
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon
6. Balancing the structure of the research by attending to parts as well as the whole.

I have already addressed each component in the first three chapters, and continue to address each one in the following three chapters. Now, however, I invite my co-participants to join me.

A Duet

In the nature of literacy practice, phenomenology requires that we engage in conversations with our participants, that we engage in listening and speaking, and listening again. Through open and intimate exchanges of ideas, memories, and

thoughts, we as co-participants create new, collaborative meaning as we talk. There are no prepared questions. It is not an interview, but rather a duet. Our voices – my participants’ and mine – share the stage. At times, I assume the solo. At others, I remain quiet and listen. I ask questions, searching for their memories that are alive with the sights and sounds and feelings of life and experiences that are lived, concretely and bodily. Only as I listen, and only as I hear the words of my talking partner, do I become aware of what I want to ask next. Just as I write my way through my research, and write my way to understand the meaning of my phenomenon, I speak and listen my way through our conversations. As I listen, my own lived experiences emerge, and cue me to ask the next question. As we talk, the music of our experiences plays.

Gadamer (2002) offers helpful insight that illuminates the distinction between an interview and a conversation. He writes, “No one knows in advance what will come out of a conversation” (p. 383). Indeed, during my first preliminary conversation with Paula, I did not know in advance what we would converse about. As I listened to Paula, questions came to mind, questions which I could not have thought of before she spoke. Indeed, the questions themselves represent the result of my hermeneutical encounter with Paula. It was her words that led me. As Gadamer (2002) explains:

The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. (p. 383)

How different is this encounter, then, from an interview? During an interview, there is an inherent authority structure. The interviewer asks a question and the

participant answers. The interviewer then asks the next question, and the interview proceeds.

Gadamer (2002) illuminates another interesting aspect of the conversation, focusing on understanding. He distinguishes between understanding “the particular individual” and “what he says” (p. 385). Through the exchange of words, we establish understanding of the individual through the words being spoken.

My Fellow Composers

My phenomenological exercise is not simply a theoretical task. It is, as Levin (2003) articulates, “a practical social task” (p. 32). It is a way for me to illustrate the human experience of teachers unfolding, and being brought to consciousness through our conversations. Phenomenology is my vehicle, whereby I “gather like minded people into an ancient collective dream, whose task, since time immemorial, has been a new ‘incarnation’ here on earth, together with the founding of a new, and more essentially human community of self-fulfilled individuals” (Levin, p. 32).

I choose phenomenology because it is the methodology most closely aligned with my view of teaching. It magnifies the uniqueness of each individual, focuses on collaborative construction of meaning, and represents a “Critical philosophy of action” (van Manen, 2003, p. 154).

As van Manen (2003) articulates:

First, human science is concerned with action in that hermeneutic phenomenological reflection deepens thought and therefore radicalizes thinking and acting that flows from it. All serious and original thinking is ultimately revolutionary – revolutionary in a broader political sense. And so to become more thoughtfully or attentively aware of aspects of human life which hitherto were merely glossed over or taken-for-granted will more likely bring us to the edge of speaking up, speaking out, or decisively acting in social situations that ask for such action. (van Manen, 2003, p. 154)

Who, then, are my co-participants, my fellow sojourners? Who are the teachers who engage with children thoughtfully and attentively? Who are these teachers who speak up, who speak out, and who regard teaching as social action? Who are these teachers who teach democratically, who value children's individuality, and who masterfully and effectively teach literacy with balanced attention to discrete skills and to powerful literature?

After 17 years of public school teaching, writing a book on early literacy, and supervising student teachers, I have met many wonderful teachers. As I reflect on those meetings, a few teachers emerge in my mind as fellow travelers and voices of inspiration and hope. They are teachers who believe that working with young children is both a privilege and their calling. They have chosen to work in Title I schools for many different reasons, but always because they believe that they can guide their students well on their path to literacy and on their path to full participation in society. In the following chapters, we hear the voices of five of these teachers, whom I select based on their willingness to participate in my study. I have introduced Will, who has worked in Title I schools for 18 years, as an ELL teacher, a staff development teacher, and an assistant principal. I have also introduced Paula, who has worked as a Head Start teacher for over 20 years. Chris is my third participant. She teaches second grade at Hampstead Heights, where she has taught for seven years. Rachel is a second grade teacher at another Title I school in the same school district, and she is someone I have known for many years. Finally, Suzanne is the remarkable former principal of Hampstead Heights, who now works in Title I schools in Delaware.

By talking to veteran early literacy teachers who have chosen to teach in Title I schools, I am, thus, emphasizing the choice they have already made to educate children who live in economically and socially disadvantaged homes. I, again, turn to Levin (2003) who writes, “At birth, we are given a gift of nature and sent on our way. What we do with that gift, how we experience the potential-for-being inherent in that skill, is the question which defines our individual being” (p. 53). The children we teach are also born with gifts of nature, but many of them have those gifts smothered by poverty and powerlessness. How, then, do these teachers work to share their gifts with their students, so that they may rediscover their own? How do these teachers facilitate their students’ ability to reclaim what was theirs to begin with?

We have met Will and Paula during informal preliminary conversations. The conversations we heard occurred prior to the formal initiation of this study and, therefore, stand apart from the formal, scheduled conversations and other exchanges I have with them in the following months. Before those interactions occur, and before I engage in any conversations with my three other participants, I request that each of them sign a consent form. The consent form I use appears in Appendix B of this document.

Thus, with their consent, and as phenomenology urges, I engage in several encounters with each participant, uncovering their experiences with teaching in low income early childhood classrooms. Our interactions occur throughout the months of January through April, 2007. They begin and end with individual conversations, and also include written communication, a group conversation, and visits to their schools.

Again, I begin with conversations. Given the confidentiality of their identities and my desire to increase their level of comfort, I suggest that I come to their homes, and each of them agrees. Meeting each of my participants in their homes, at an agreed upon time, we sit together and talk. With their permission, I audio tape our words. Having the conversations recorded allows me to transcribe them and reflect on them at a later date. Recording the conversations also allows me to focus on their words and expressions, and create an intimacy uninterrupted by writing.

While the paths of the conversations take unexpected turns – given the joint contributions of my co-participants and myself – I begin with the same introductory questions with each of them. I ask them to describe the experiences in their lives that led them to teaching, as well as to their current Title I school. It is important for my exploration to hear about their biographical experiences, particularly experiences that they feel contributed to their commitment to working with low-income minority children. I ask, “What keeps you working in a Title I school?” and “What are some salient memories that you have that contributed to your desire to teach?” Beyond these initial inquiries, I refrain from using a prescribed list of questions. I ask them to elaborate on their descriptions using the language of their senses, so that, together, we can recreate their lived experiences.

Taping the conversations, and then transcribing them within three days of the conversation, I read for meaning and discover new curiosities. Themes emerge immediately, and I add notes to my transcripts to indicate the themes I have detected.

My second approach, remaining true to literary behavior and to hermeneutical research is to send written questions to my participants and ask for their written

responses. These questions seek deeper meaning around two themes that I detect in my transcripts. As I talked with each participant, the ideas of race and of crossing racial boundaries emerged. Reading our conversations about being White and about working in low-income neighborhoods with children of color, I am intrigued. I send my participants the questions, “What does being White mean to you?” and “Describe the ways in which you cross boundaries as you work?” I send the questions via electronic mail, and I ask my participants to bring their thoughts to our next meeting. I encourage them to write without concern for the conventions of written English, but, rather, with attention to articulating their experiences through their emotional responses, and through their bodily sense. I encourage them to speak freely and openly, without concern about offering me the “right” answer.

My third avenue for exploring my phenomenon with my participants is to observe them in their schools, where they interact with children. I visit the schools as a private citizen, given that I am unable to secure permission from the school district to formally enter the classrooms as a researcher. I drive through the schools’ neighborhoods, noting the homes and the people I see on the streets. I walk through the schools, accompanied by my participants, and I observe the educational artifacts on the walls and respond to children who initiate conversations with me. I take notes as I walk, which I expand upon immediately after returning to my car.

Finally, as my fourth effort to understand my phenomenon, I invite my participants to my home for a group conversation. We gather around the dining room table, where food and drinks await. We begin by reading our written responses to the questions, “What does being White mean to you?” and “What are some of the ways

you cross boundaries as you work?” We look for commonalities and differences in our experiences, and work together to uncover the meanings behind our individual experiences.

Given the nature of hermeneutical phenomenology, I did not know in advance what my verbal or written questions were going to be. I first listened to the words of the teachers. As van Manen (2003) explains, “A certain openness is required in human science research that allows for choosing directions and exploring techniques, procedures, and sources that are not always foreseeable at the outset of a research project” (van Manen, 2003, p. 162).

Our conversations and written communication proceed with a focus on their recollections and memories. Through these memories and accounts, my participants bring to the surface their awareness of the meaning they find in their work. Levin (2003) writes:

Recollection is much more than a process of contacting and retrieving. It is also a process of developing our bodily awareness and cultivating its capacities...the response must consist in going down still more deeply into the bodily felt sense of our visionary being, so that we make contact with its more open dimension. (p. 53)

As I recall my childhood, I see my willow tree and I feel the African sun.

When I think about Madame Williams, I feel the urge to laugh, as well as the urge to put forth great effort. These are my bodily senses and these offer a flavor of the recollections I ask my participants to share. Thus, our conversations attempt to help teachers explore their lives at work as I ask them to describe their bodily and sensory experiences as they teach literacy to their students.

Throughout our conversations and within the questions I pose for their written responses, I remain grounded to my guiding theme and I remain pedagogically oriented. I examine the notion of choice, and how individual teachers interpret choice in their pedagogy, as they respond to their students. Wherever our conversations lead, they do not simply wander. The openness they reflect does not compromise my continued attention to the phenomenon of my study. Through my questioning, I continue to follow the path – the overall theme – of the experience of White teachers who teach literacy to low-income young children of color. Thus, all parts of my exploration remain aligned with the whole.

As I turn to my abiding concern and to my role as a researcher, I am both an insider and an outsider. Having been a classroom teacher, I understand the daily logistical and organizational challenges of running a classroom. I know that in order to apply the theoretical work of researchers, I must first create a classroom community in which children work cooperatively, follow rules, and in which materials and schedules exist in an organized system. I know the tremendous amount of thought, skill, and work this entails. Bringing this knowledge and experience to my research, I am able to understand the challenges faced by teachers and appreciate their skill with a broad lens. As an outside researcher, not affiliated with any school system's administration, I offer a more nuanced position for my participants to share their thoughts. I present them with an opportunity to share their experiences in a safe and intimate interaction, where they are not judged, and where they can feel free to articulate their own abiding concerns.

Reading and Writing the Music: Finding Common Themes

From April to June, 2007, I continue to write my way to understanding. As I read the transcribed words communicated during our conversations, and the written words of my participants, I continue to look for themes, melodies that we hear in different keys, but with a common theme. The themes systematically guide the organization of my writing, illustrating that, “Human science is a *systematic* study of human experience” (van Manen, 2003, p. 168). Throughout, the phenomenon I have chosen remains my guide. I thus continue to defer to van Manen’s (2003) suggestion that I maintain a balance in my research between the whole, overarching theme, and the parts that comprise it.

As I read and write my way to understanding this phenomenon, I take pleasure in the realization that my methodology and my topic are inextricably connected. As I explore the work of literacy teachers, I engage in phenomenological methodology, which is literary in nature. It demands that we write about our memories and remembrances, that we describe defining moments in our lives that helped move us toward our phenomenon of exploration. Phenomenology also requires us to open up the meaning of our phenomenon, by referring to literary works, etymologies, research, and other writing. As the first section of the current chapter demonstrates, the methodology also demands that we study philosophy, as a means to ground our work in philosophical terms. Our requirements to read and write are substantial. Max van Manen (2003) explains:

The human science researcher is a scholar-author who must be able to maintain an almost unreasonable faith in the power of language to make intelligible and understandable what always seems to lie beyond language. (p. xvii)

Through an interpretive stance toward pedagogy, I reflect on my text, which, in turn, reflects my ideas back to me, and I write my way to understanding my phenomenon. I read and I write, and I continually search for additional meaning.

Where Will the Music Lead?

Unlike other methods of educational research, phenomenology offers no way to sever the results “from the means by which the results are obtained” (van Manen, 2003, p. 13). There are, in fact, no “results.” Van Manen (2003) explains:

As in poetry, it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result. The poem is the thing. So phenomenology, not unlike poetry, is a poetizing project; it tries an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling...(p. 13)

My ultimate goal, however, and the purpose of phenomenological research, is to offer pedagogical implications for teacher education. What can we learn from the experiences of these five expert teachers? What are their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that accompany their work as they engage with their young students? How do they articulate democratic teaching, cultural sensitivity, a balanced approach to literacy, and attention to the individual needs of each child?

As I explore this phenomenon, I am doing so with an eye to critical and transformative theories and actions, which emphasize the societal impact that teachers can have by contributing to the educational development of disenfranchised and marginalized populations. Levin (2003) writes, “Since history is not only in the past, but is also in the making, our sensibility is an unfinished social task, a current social responsibility” (p. 31). Can we not say the same about teaching? Is teaching also a social responsibility?

Levin (2003) also explains the collective task of phenomenological research as “the humanization of our sensibility and the culture of our capacities for perception” (p. 31). Thus, through the words of teachers, I reveal their perceptions and their sensibilities pertaining to their work with their students, which, in turn, uncover the humanness of their experiences, and create the possibility for humanizing pedagogy.

As Levin (2003) explains, “Understanding ourselves is a process of bringing forth new possibilities for living” (p. 33). I seek to understand the human experience of teaching young children, in order to uncover its sensibilities as well to offer new possibilities for pedagogical practice. I have already stepped through the gate and begun to hear the music. In the following chapters, the music will continue to play and to be heard.

CHAPTER FOUR

WEAVING A TAPESTRY OF HUMAN IDENTITY

Connecting the Strands

Just as a tapestry joins separate strands together, and results in the creation of a new image, teachers come together with their students each year to create a unique community in the classroom. All members of a class bring an identity of their own, a sense of who they are, where they are from, and where they are going. But are teachers and students invited to present those identities themselves, so that their identities are accepted and honored? Are their self-perceptions mirrored by the way they are seen in the eyes of others, or are they defined in new terms by the other members of the class?

In this chapter, I introduce my participants and share their words to explain their choices to teach low-income, minority children. Given that each of my participants is White, I continue my investigation of their identities by addressing the tension that exists from using racial demarcations, and by unpacking the widely-accepted language and dialogue surrounding White teachers and effective teaching (Howard, 1999; Paley, 2002). I continue by inviting my participants to discuss their conflicts and struggles as they sense that others perceive them differently from the way they perceive themselves, and to discuss the meaning that they draw from these conflicts. I conclude the chapter by returning to the notion of choice, and placing choice as a central feature in the fluid construct known as identity, particularly as it relates to teaching and learning. Following this examination of my participants' identities, in Chapter Five I address how they draw upon the salient aspects of their

identities as they cross boundaries and barriers to teach their low-income, minority students.

A Seamless Gathering

Early childhood teachers who choose to teach literacy to low-income, minority children are special individuals. Some of the most wonderful and special among this group are the teachers who have become my participants, whose lives and whose words I now share.

On a warm afternoon in March, I go to a reunion to see people with whom I spent several years at school. I look forward to seeing some of them, and am somewhat anxious about others. I think about what to wear and how I will look, and I begin to feel excited. This reunion is not for high school, nor is it for college. It is a reunion unlike any other I have attended. The gathering brings together a community of educators, who worked side by side under the inspirational guidance of a visionary principal, at a primary level Title I elementary school, the second neediest school in the school district. The principal is Suzanne Banello, and the reunion is in honor of all those who worked during her years as instructional leader: an era we nostalgically refer to as The “B” Years.

As the afternoon proceeds, the house fills with people. I see teachers, instructional assistants, secretaries, ESOL teachers, instructional specialists, building service workers, school nurses, and counselors. We are Black, White, and Latina, men and women, young and old. We greet each other with hugs, pictures of children and babies, and the question, “So where are you now?” A few have traveled from far away places, such as California, New Jersey, Delaware, and Georgia, but most of us

remain in the area. Many of us left the school we loved when Suzanne retired, when the only thing remaining the same was the physical structure of the school building.

What was it that Suzanne brought to our work? What ties did we form that brought so many of us together six years after her retirement? How did she foster a community in which we all devoted ourselves to the children, so that our common devotion surpassed our job titles? Why did so many of us choose to bring our own children to the school, knowing that they would thrive, in spite of the fact that statistics, standardized test scores, and poverty levels in the community created a profile of a school that many would consider undesirable?

I recall a colleague at the school I left before coming to Hampstead Heights, telling me, “You *don’t* want to go there. That neighborhood is full of drugs!” Yet, I go and experience a decade of unsurpassed professional and personal fulfillment. When my own two children are ready for school, I take them with me, so that many of the former colleagues I see at the party are also my children’s former teachers.

I know that I am not alone in my sentiments, because I see a house full of people, and I hear their comments. As I drive with Elaine, a dear friend of 14 years whom I met at Hampstead Heights, she muses that everything she knows, she learned from Suzanne. When I talk to Marcela, an ELL teacher, we recall how she often said, “I know I will never work for anyone as inspirational as Suzanne,” and how that has proven to be true. As I talk to Lilah, the former art teacher, she looks around the room and laughs, saying, “I don’t have this at my school now. What was it that made us all so close?”

Suzanne tells me that she is working in an elementary school in Delaware, helping children with their writing. She tells me that she brings the children homemade cookies to entice them when their behavior is not conducive for learning. She tells me about a little boy who writes a letter to the school librarian asking, “Can Ms. Suzanne come back and read to us again?” and I realize that Suzanne is continuing to touch the lives of children, in spite of her “retirement.”

Suzanne and I have remained very close over the years, and I ask her if I may have a conversation with her about her years as a teacher and a principal. There is simply no one better to offer me insights into how to reach children and families. In her usual spirit of generosity, she suggests that I come to visit her later that week, and I make a plan to drive to Delaware to visit her a few days later. As I walk out of the party, I look at the photographs of the “B Years.” I see Suzanne dressed up as Mother Goose, reading to the kindergartners. I see Suzanne sitting on the roof of the school building reading to the entire school. I see smiling teachers, smiling children, and it is easy to remember what made us close and what made those years so special. Everything we did, we did for the children.

Now, **Suzanne**, an inspirational educator, joins **Will and Paula**, whom I introduced in Chapter Two, as she agrees to participate in my exploration. Will and Paula continue to participate in their conversations with me that we began in my earlier exploration of the phenomenon. I eagerly await our continued conversations so that I may answer some of my questions about Suzanne’s remarkable contributions to the lives of so many educators, children, and families.

Suzanne nurtured me during my early years of teaching, encouraged me to broaden my professional experiences, welcomed my own children into her school, and ignited my passion for my work. Suzanne is now in her mid-sixties, and officially retired after 30 years of working as a teacher, a reading specialist, and a principal. She continues to work in schools, however, touching the lives of minority children. **Will** was my colleague during those same years, teaching me about second language acquisition, and about having a boundless caring nature. During the 15 years I have known Will, he and his partner, Carlo, have adopted two African American boys from the foster care system, have welcomed relatives into their home for extended periods of time, and have traveled to Central America on a church mission to volunteer in a small rural village. Will is now forty-six, and is about to begin his career as an elementary school principal after almost 20 years as an ELL teacher and an elementary school staff development teacher.

Paula, a newer presence in my life, first entered my home on my television screen, in the movie *Paperclips* (Fab et al., 2004), the documentary film about middle-school students in rural Tennessee, who are learning about the Holocaust. She, then, invited me into her classroom, after having read my book and wanting to share her work with me. Paula impressed me and touched me with her skill, dedication, creativity, and love for her Head Start children. She is now in her late-fifties, and has retired from the Head Start system after 30 years. She works on grant projects, providing support and model lessons to teachers of pre-school children.

Chris is the fourth participant in my exploration, a diligent, conscientious, and compassionate teacher. As my daughter's second grade teacher, I observed her

remarkable gift for knowing her students as individuals and her ability to meet the needs of a vastly diverse group of children. Chris is 30 years old and has taught second grade for seven years. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in educational supervision, although she wishes to remain in the classroom.

Lastly, **Rachel** joins the study, someone I have known for 14 years as a young woman with a level of social concern and generosity that surpasses anyone else I have known. Rachel is the youngest participant in my study, but at age twenty-six, she has already taught pre-school children, worked in an after-school program with middle school children, volunteered with terminally ill children at the National Institutes of Health Children's Inn, and volunteered at a camp for children with AIDS.

In the following section, I capture the voices of my five participants, as they share the roots of their desire to teach. As their stories unfold, they articulate their particular choice of wanting to work in Title I schools.

The Call to Teach: The Threads of Passion

In Chapter One, I discuss the events in my life that helped shape my desire to work with low-income minority children. Feeling the enforced divisions on people as a child in *apartheid* South Africa, I knew that I was being kept within parameters established by a cruel government, and that Black children were being oppressed and mistreated. Learning to feel *compassion* and indignation from my parents, I also observed how they modeled the power of individual action in the name of justice, and I wanted to follow their lead. At a young age, I began to learn the essence of existentialism, which states that "Man is responsible for what he is" (Sartre, 1977, p. 29). I began to learn that I was responsible for my actions and that I could choose

when and how to act. I began to realize that the choices I made rested “squarely upon (my) own shoulders” (Sartre, 1977, p. 29).

The concepts of responsibility and justice were my first guides, calling me to find my way to teaching. As I continue to explore the lives of my participants, I also discover and share more about the powerful convictions and transformative events that guide their choice of working in Title I schools. I explore the question, “What calls teachers to choose these schools when they know the challenges exacted of them?” As I have seen in wealthier neighborhoods, such as the one in which I worked for three years, teachers do not face the same daily challenges. While the academic expectations remain high in every school, the teachers in my non-Title I school were more likely to receive \$100 gifts from the PTA at the start of each year and \$200 gift cards for Christmas, than they were to receive a child without her homework. What, then, motivates teachers to choose to work in Title I schools?

First, however, it is necessary to articulate the particular challenges that teachers in Title I schools confront, as a way to distinguish them from schools in wealthier neighborhoods. I turn to the experiences shared by Chris and Suzanne to illuminate some of the challenges.

Compassionate responses. Chris frames the challenges within the construct of choice. She believes that her students are going to face difficult life choices and she wants to help them learn how to make those choices productive and positive:

I want them to know that...they're gonna be faced with a lot of things in their life that you and I probably weren't faced with or probably on a much less severe level in terms of peer pressure, crime, and poverty... gangs, drugs, teen pregnancy. I mean a lot of teenagers are faced with that kind of stuff but I think that with these kids because a lot of them are living in poverty and they are living in neighborhoods where they are seeing a lot of violence and a lot of

gangs and drugs and arrests, you know, things like that. It would be easier for them to be swept up in that sort of thing. I want them to know that they have a choice of where they wanna go in their life. Basically I just want them to be able to stop and think about things that they do and to know that everything they do is going to affect other people as well as affect themselves and that they have the power to...if they make a mistake to think about that you have the power to change it and learn from it.

Chris's words resonate with the idea of *in loco parentis*, the Latin phrase which means "in the place of a parent." Rather than framing the needs of her students as burdens or hindrances to learning, Chris embraces them as invitations to participate in their overall health, well-being, and school success.

Van Manen (1991) describes the "full and intimate knowledge of a child's life" (p. 95) as "formative understanding" (p. 95). His words point to Chris's exceptional level of dedication to her students. He writes:

Anyone who stands in an *in loco parentis* relation to a child would have the child's growing maturity in view. But few educators maintain close enough relations to many individual children over time that they gain a full understanding of each child's evolving life history...Nevertheless, formative pedagogical understanding is what children need from significant adults in their lives if they are to receive good guidance and support...(p. 95)

When Suzanne talks about attending to the needs of children and families, her words resonate with empathy and compassion. She, too, illustrates the meaning of *in loco parentis* as she talks about a little boy named, Jose:

I remember when Jose came in and he was ready to just cut the world apart, you know? He was tired of seeing his mother with a different man every night in the house. He was tired that his younger brother would break all of his things. He was tired of being left alone in the house all the time and just having crackers...for supper. Kids learn their behavior. His teacher sent him to me once and he was so angry. He came in and I said, "Jose, I have a lot to do. I have an awful lot to do. So I'm gonna work here and when you're ready to talk you tell me. OK?" And I said it just like that. I was doing my stuff and working on the computer and getting stuff ready. And at that time I had that dumb fishbowl with the glass fish. And he came over and he started looking at it. And he said, "My brother killed my goldfish." And then he just opened up.

Now if a teacher can understand that baggage, would you have yelled and screamed at that kid when he came in that morning and was so upset? No! If you're a good teacher you wouldn't do that. Right? They have to get the baggage out. They have to get it out of the way. If they have something to tell you, they've got to get it out. Then that's it.

Suzanne illustrates that while all children bring individual needs to the classroom, some children in low income schools arrive at school with basic physical necessities unattended. I, too, have seen children come to school without socks or a coat in the middle of winter, and with tooth decay, illnesses or allergies that need medical attention. Some of my children have arrived wearing shoes that are too big or too small, impacting their ability to walk and run. Frequently, children arrive to school hungry, relying on the school's free breakfast and lunch for their primary source of nourishment. Occasionally, children show signs of physical abuse and neglect, requiring the attention of the County Protective Services Department. For a teacher in a Title I school, these issues require immediate attention and collaboration with other school and government representatives, demanding action that surpasses the traditional responsibilities of a teacher. And, yet, while responding to these needs, I have felt a response in my heart and a connection to my students as I show my love and concern for them, and embrace them as children, not students. For Chris, Suzanne, me, and for my other participants, these challenges are viewed as moments for expressing human responses. They are also examples of the "baggage" that children bring to us that we simply need to unpack and set aside before academic teaching and learning can begin.

I do not attempt to romanticize these needs, examples of the unjust social policies of our government and the statistics on poverty. Over 9.2 million children in

the United States lack health insurance and 90% of them live in working families (Children's Defense Fund, 2003, p. 2). When a child without health coverage is ill and the parents can neither afford medical services nor hours without pay at work, that child will very likely be sent to school. In addition, 11.7 million children, one in six, live in poverty, and 13 million children live in families without enough food to eat (Children's Defense Fund, 2003, p. 31), heartbreaking and understandable explanations for seeing hungry children without coats, socks, proper shoes, and uncompleted homework arriving at school in the morning.

In addition, the academic challenges remain steep, teaching children who did not attend pre-school, are learning English as a second or third language, while communicating with parents who speak languages other than English, and who may not be in a position where they are able to help their children with academic support at home. According to Lee and Burkam (2002), race and socio-economic status (SES) are intertwined, and Black and Hispanic children are, in general, from lower SES families. Many of these children enter kindergarten more than half a standard deviation lower than the national average in math and reading, and only one third of Black and Hispanic children attend center based preschool (Lee & Burkam, 2002).

With daunting numbers and statistics whirling around schools and classrooms, teachers can easily lower their expectations. My participants, however, take a different view. For them, their students walk through the doors as individual children, leaving their statistics outside the schoolyard.

Levin (1989) writes:

In listening to others, we are gathered into compassion...If the reach and range of our compassion is dependent on the reach and range of our hearing, can we extend the compass of our listening? (p. 89)

For each one of my participants, their passion for teaching children, which stems from their own life experiences, guides them around the numbers and toward the hearts and minds of their students. Their *compassion* allows them to “extend the compass” of their listening, so that they can hear beyond the statistics.

Paths of passion. My initial conversations with my participants allow me to become familiar with aspects of their personal history that have relevance to their lives as educators, and to their passion for their work. I begin by asking each of them to tell me about the paths they followed as they chose to become teachers. As they talk, they open up their “temporal landscapes” (van Manen, 2003, p. 105). Max van Manen explains further:

When we want to get to know a person we ask about his or her personal life history and where they feel they are going – what their project is in life. The temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person’s temporal landscape. Whatever I have encountered in my past now sticks to me as memories or as (near) forgotten experiences that somehow leave their traces on my being – the way I carry myself...the gestures I have adopted and made my own...(p. 104)

With van Manen (2003) as my methodological guide, I ask my participants to tell me about their interest in teaching, to uncover the roots of their passion that led them to and keeps them in teaching.

Will is intrigued by language and that is what leads him into teaching English Language Learners:

...language was always my thing. I had been to France, I had learned French. I spoke a little bit of Spanish and I knew enough about languages to know that

one should really teach one's own native language. That's really the way to go. So I thought well there's probably a job out there where you teach English to people who don't speak English. So that's probably the right job for me.

Will chooses to engage in the world of education by using language as his point of entry. By teaching English Language Learners, he participates in identity work, teaching children to speak a new language, and, therefore, to add a new dimension to their personal identities. As Ibrahim (1999) explains:

Identity...governs what ESL learners acquire and how they acquire it. What is learned linguistically is not and should not be dissociable from the political, the social, and the cultural. Hence, to learn is to invest in something...that has a personal or a particular significance to who one is or what one has become. Because language is never neutral, learning it cannot and should not be either. (p. 366)

Chris enters teaching on her way to becoming a counselor, and decides that she can reach more children in the classroom, using the same strategies and attention to social and emotional concerns as a counselor. She remembers:

I didn't want to be a teacher until after I had done my student teaching and worked as a substitute. I always wanted to be a counselor. I always wanted to work with children because of wanting to help them with their self esteem and any kind of issues they were having at home. So I never wanted to be a teacher until I actually taught and realized that I can still do what I wanna do through teaching.

As Chris speaks, she illuminates the ideas that teaching involves far more than a technical delivery of instructional material, and that students are children with rich and complex lives. Indeed, teaching requires careful and caring attention to children's emotional well-being and, therefore, to a teacher's ability to instill an open and trusting atmosphere in the classroom. While it may be simpler to study teaching behaviors than to examine the interactions between teachers and students that result in learning, Nel Noddings (2001) writes that the interactive connection between

teaching and learning “cannot be dissolved so easily” (p. 100). Noddings also explains that “When we use *caring* to refer to a relation, our attention is drawn to both parties and also to the situation in which they find themselves” (p. 100). She writes about a concept that Chris discovers in the classroom and incorporates into her work, as she is drawn to the emotional needs of her students and to the home situations in which they live.

Rachel draws upon her nurturing nature and explains:

I always had this kinda nurturing, care-giving feel. I always liked to baby sit and take care of children. And as I got older I did a lot of volunteering in schools... The feeling of wanting to take care of people of wanting to help people. If they're having problems I wanted to be there to assist them. Nurturing, like wanting to make sure that children had what they needed...their essential needs and also helping them academically. I've always been volunteering, helping in places with kids. I got involved at 16 helping at the Children's Inn at NIH and I was there endlessly during the weeks. I was there for hours, 'til like 1 in the morning talking to people, listening to peoples' problems, hearing what they had to do, you know, what was going on in their lives. A lot of them were adoptive parents and foster parents and it taught me so much. And there was one man in particular, Ronnie. He was taking care of his son with HIV and he taught me so much. It was definitely a life altering experience. So I've continued working with kids with HIV at the camp.

She also experiences being a teacher as an extension of who she is as a person:

It's part of my life. It's who I am as a person. It doesn't begin at 8:35 and end at 3:30...Because what I do as a teacher is the way I am outside of the classroom. I am respectful, I interact with children...I try to be helpful. I do the same things in my everyday life with other human beings, not only with my students or the parents of my students or my co-workers.

Rachel talks about “listening to people’s problems,” and about how being a teacher is who she is “as a person.” Her words illustrate the importance of listening, as Levin (1989) describes. He writes, “In listening to others, accepting them in their irreducible difference, we help them to listen to themselves, to heed the speech of their own body

of experience, and to become, each one, the human being he or she most deeply wants to be” (p. 88). By talking and listening, by helping and interacting, Rachel embraces her identity as a teacher as a central component of her identity as a human being.

For Paula, teaching is an extension of her identity:

Teaching is just in my blood and I think it was there when I was a little girl. There was nothing else I wanted to do but teach. There was nowhere else I would go but early childhood. Head Start was just the place I wanted to be.

Paula conceptualizes Head Start as “the place” she wanted to be. She talks about the Head Start program as one might talk about a home, a place that offers comfort and a sense of belonging. As Casey (1993) explains, Paula “Accord(s) to place a position of renewed respect by specifying its power to direct and stabilize us, to memorialize and identify us, to tell us who and what we are in terms of *where we are...*” (p. xv). By being in the Head Start program, Paula felt a sense of identity and a sense of direction.

Sitting in her comfortable reclining chair in her home in Delaware, in a room displaying her library of thousands of children’s books, Suzanne passionately recalls her years as a principal as years filled with love. She grounds her decision to work in a Title I school in a vision of love, and as her “calling” in life:

It was just in me, Melissa. It was what I loved. And so I put my whole heart and soul into it. It was important for me as a person and as a principal of a school that these kids had to know that they were loved and cared for because that was gonna carry them. If their teacher loved them and I loved them that was gonna sustain them. It had to. My vision was that everybody who taught there...first they had to love kids. They had to like them. That we had a school that was, because it was so diverse... where everybody got along...that there was good teaching going on...that the kids loved to learn...that the parents were involved... But it was also a natural fit because that’s...that’s a Christian thing with me. You help the poor, you help the needy, and you do what you can. So what is my calling? That’s it.

Suzanne talks about her vision and her calling as simultaneous forces in her life. As she works, she blends present and future, focusing her present energies on working toward a vision of a better future for her students. Her words resonate with Hansen's (1995) analysis of the "call" to teach. He explains, "One can see that teaching is an act that, when done well, fully occupies the present moment, but also always with an eye to the future" (p. 161). Suzanne passionately devotes her life in the present to the students in her school, with the hope that she is helping to pave a path for them to follow into their futures.

By working with low-income children, my participants choose to assume some responsibility for helping marginalized and disenfranchised communities. They choose to engage, on a very human level, with people who are struggling for daily survival in American society, marginalized from mainstream America which claims the lion's share of its resources. They transcend political and social movements that claim to offer solutions, demonstrating the power of individual action. As Levinas states:

Movements reinvented ceaselessly and which, at the same time, can never leave the order of solutions and general formulas. They never fulfill that which compassion, the concern for the individual, alone can give. Beyond justice and law, this remains a call to individuals in their singularity that they always remain citizens trusting in justice...and the obligation to have regard for the face of the other. (as cited in Robbins, 2001, p. 52)

Because they choose to teach literacy to young children, they also are participating in restructuring the power dynamics in America. As Paula says, "If a child can read, she can do anything."

As my participants move from their homes and lives into the homes and lives of their students, their identities and the identities of their students come together.

Which aspects of their identities emerge and how are tensions surrounding their identities manifested? I seek to address these questions in the section that follows.

Identities: Single Threads or Embroidered Designs?

Each of the teachers in my study is White. Each of the Title I schools where they work serves children belonging to minority racial groups. But what does it mean to be White? What does it mean to belong to a racial minority? The labels are both implicitly and explicitly stamped, and van Manen's (2003) warning about "categorical essentialism" (p. xvi) emerges again. Fisher, Jackson, and Villarruel (1998) concur:

(In) the current fractionalized racial system, each person is supposedly either European American or African American, non-Hispanic White or Latino/Latina. This fractionalization misses the opportunity to examine the conjoint influence of societal labels, familial attitudes, and social experiences underlying ascribed or chosen racial/ethnic identifications. (p. 1154)

They continue:

There is a lack of attention to within group variation – including social class, income, immigration experience, age, and place of origin, to name a few. Thus, we need to consider the meaning of race and ethnicity at the individual level. (p. 1158)

While clearly some researchers view strict racial identification as problematic, others believe that race permeates all aspects of American life and defines our existence. Gary Howard (1999) talks about Whiteness as a defining marker. He discusses White people in categorical terms – as those with power and privilege – paying little attention to variation in experience or personal sense of identity. He writes:

It is still possible for Whites to exercise the privilege of choice regarding whether or not they will attend to their own identity as racial beings. The

dynamics of dominance and the politics of difference...continue to allow Whites in Western nations to exist in the ironic and contradictory state of being blind to our own racial identity, on the one hand, while asserting the inherent superiority of Whiteness, on the other. (p. 85)

Howard (1999) proceeds to outline stages of “White Racial Identity Development” (p. 87) where he speaks in generalities about how White teachers feel and how White teachers think. According to Howard, when White educators speak about wanting to “help” low-income communities, they are functioning according to a “missionary mentality,” and are, therefore, perpetuating the unequal power dynamic between rich and poor, Black and White. Howard argues that many forms of helping people from other racial groups preclude efforts “to systematically change the dynamics of dominance” (p. 92). How, then, do we place value on different forms of helping? As I listen to my participants, I hear their voices giving lived meaning to the social construct of helping, and their words inspire me.

As Will teaches children to speak English, he is both helping them learn and shifting a societal power dynamic. By helping children learn English, he is preparing them for full participation in America’s educated, literate society. As Chris prepares children to make positive and productive choices, she is, perhaps, encouraging values that some may call middle-class. She is also teaching her students about confidence, cooperation, and other behaviors that will serve them well as they face life’s complexities that await them. Helping and working for human justice are not mutually exclusive efforts.

During our group conversation, we discuss the notion of helping in the context of the White privilege we recognize that we have. “One of the things that I try to use it for is I try to be a connection to the power structures,” explains Will. For Will, the

effort is couched within the parameters of language. He works toward being “a connection” from children and families who do not speak English, to “the power structures” which operate in English and often dismiss individuals who do not speak the language.

For Paula, the effort is to advocate. She uses her knowledge and power on behalf of children and families who are learning about their rights within the public schools. She explains:

I fight for things they don't know they should be fighting for. I show parents that they have rights. I show them what is out there and how you play this game that needs to be played. Either they don't have the language or they're drowning to try to keep alive, taking public transportation and living on minimum wage. You don't know how many times I said, “You never heard this from my mouth, but...” For me teaching was being a teacher but also being a social worker. That's really how I envisioned it. I wouldn't have given it up for the world.

Rachel frames her role position within the confines of an unjust society, recognizing that while she cannot change the power structures in society, she can work to help individuals on a personal level. She asks, “What can we do? We can't change our skin color. We can't change how society is. Helping is what we can do.” Her sentiments remind me of the words of my father, when, as I child, I asked him why we had a nanny. As I share in Chapter One, my father's words conveyed his internal struggle with the fact that he could not eradicate the *apartheid* system, and that while he lived in South Africa, he had to do what he felt he had the power to do.

Will, Rachel, and Paula articulate Giroux's (1992) concept of teachers working as border-crossers, facilitating the expression of marginalized groups. Giroux (1992) writes about a concept that he calls “border pedagogy,” in an effort to

link public schools to societal issues of justice, echoing the sentiments of my participants:

Border pedagogy is attentive to developing a democratic public philosophy that respects the notion of difference as part of a common struggle to extend the quality of public life...It also links the notions of schooling and the broader category of education to a more substantive struggle for a radical democratic society. (p. 28)

My participants are passionate about their ability to offer help and the necessity to do so. They talk about directly helping children and families as an avenue toward facilitating changes on a broader societal level. They also discuss efforts at educating themselves to improve their ability to be helpful and effective in their work. As Will recalls his years at Hampstead Heights when Suzanne was the principal, he describes the way she facilitated conversations about perceptions and attitudes:

A lot of people said the parents don't care about education and they're not interested in their kids' education. And Suzanne was always saying, "You're assuming that. But they bring their kids to the door and they want *you* to teach them. They don't presume to tell you how to teach their kids. They think you're the expert and they're going to stay out of the way! They're supposed to love them and feed them and take care of them, and then they bring them to you! It's not that they're not involved. It's that they don't think that's their place." So she really helped us. She helped to elevate the understanding of the different cultures.

Will remembers, as does Suzanne. She, too, recalls her efforts to expose teachers to the multiplicity of identities and roles brought by children and their families. Aware that teachers would potentially judge parents, she believed it was important to invite parents to speak on their own behalf:

We had two faculty meetings and we brought in two parents, one Hispanic parent and one Vietnamese parent. She talked about what her life was like in Vietnam and why she came to this country and they both talked about some of the things that are hard for them. That would get at the teachers' awareness level. It has to be done, Melissa. There are too many kids coming in from

different countries with various backgrounds and teachers have to know how to balance it all.

Suzanne offers a poignant example of how teachers can learn about the individual experiences of families in their school community. By learning about the experiences of families, teachers raise their “awareness level.” She emphasizes the importance of examining the multiple threads of experiences within the lives of individuals and communities, and of inviting those individuals to speak for themselves.

Should Color be Primary?

As I participate in the movement toward educational equity, both as a teacher and now as a researcher, I wonder: Is my voice and the voices of these White teachers devalued because the deliverers are considered to have all the privilege that being White entails, and are, therefore, disqualified from understanding oppression? Are firm beliefs about how race plays out in the success or failure of minority children preventing allies with differing view points from joining the conversation? Are we making assumptions about White teachers because they are White? Are we viewing White teachers through a deficit lens, and if so, are we viewing our pre-service teachers as having deficits before we know them – before we know what their own funds of knowledge include?

Perhaps, in addition to focusing on race as one aspect of identity, we should also focus our questions on how we are viewing teachers as *individuals*, preparing them to learn about children *as individuals*, families as individual localized cultural units, and neighborhoods as conglomerates of those families. Is this not the only way

to avoid making generalizations about both White teachers and minority children in our current dialogue?

Hidden historical shades. In the field of education, I continue to perceive a forceful effort to place race in a central position. Sitting at the bar in the Chicago hotel where I am attending the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, I chat with Sharon, a fellow doctoral student, about my perceptions of the conference. My sensitivity to racial divisions is alerted, and I express my concern about the racial dichotomy I am detecting in the academy.

Sharon asks me a profound question that ignites an epiphany in my mind. “Do you consider yourself White, Melissa?” she asks. While I do not know her intention behind the question, I immediately recognize its power and relevance to my life. Her question resonates with me personally, as I have always sensed a dichotomy between my Jewish identity and my Whiteness, as well as a tension between the way I identify myself and the way I am viewed by others. While American census categories identify me as White, my history and my cultural practices are not the same as European Americans. And, as I discussed in Chapter One, I am often reminded by others that my Jewishness marks me as different.

The conflict about my identity is reflected the day before, in fact, as I listen to Gloria Ladson-Billings talk about her childhood in New York. She states, “My Jewish neighbors knew they weren’t White, and we knew they weren’t White, because if they had been White, they wouldn’t have been living so close to us.” I realize from this comment, that in the eyes of others, I do not neatly fit into the White category either.

Thus, not only is Sharon's question difficult for me to answer, but I recognize that her question holds significant implications for my study. What does it mean to be White? Who is defining the term and its criteria? When the academy talks about White teachers, to whom are they referring?

As stated in Chapter One, Beverly Tatum (2000) addresses issues of identity as she helps to illuminate its complexity. She relays the notion of multiple identities as she writes:

The parts of our identity that do capture our attention are those that other people notice, and that reflect back to us. The aspect of identity that is the target of others' attention, and subsequently of our own, often is that which sets us apart as exceptional or "other" in their eyes. In my life I have been perceived as both. A precocious child who began to read at age three, I stood out among my peers because of my reading ability. This "gifted" dimension of my identity was regularly commented upon by teachers and classmates alike, and quickly became part of my self-definition. But I was also distinguished by being the only Black student in the class, an "other," a fact I grew increasingly aware of as I got older. (p. 11)

Tatum reveals that our identities include race, but are not limited to the parameters of racial appearance. Indeed, our identities include our behavior, our strengths, and our weaknesses.

Tatum's words are reminiscent of my encounter with Miss Friedman on my visit to Fairmount with John and Sheila. There I stood, reflected in her eyes as the precocious third grader who loved to read, and the unpatriotic South African who deserted the land of her birth to live in America – to attend school with Black children. Simultaneously, I was within myself the child of the teacher, and a teacher herself, a humiliated twelve year old and a woman searching for understanding and reconciliation. In this moment, I embodied a "plurality of selves" (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 99).

Further addressing the racial aspects of identity, Tatum writes:

If I am impatient with a White woman for not recognizing her White privilege, it may be useful for me to remember how much of my life I spent oblivious to the fact of the daily advantages I receive simply because I am heterosexual, or the ways in which I may take my class privilege for granted. (p. 11)

Tatum recognizes the way that each of us can draw upon multiple aspects of our identity and on our life experiences that intersect with those identities. She also acknowledges that race and privilege occur in numerous permutations, and that they do not necessarily share an inflexible one-to-one correspondence. Tatum suggests that we acknowledge our multiple identities in order to recognize the suffering of others, recognizing that there are facets to each of us that grant us life's privileges. She reminds us that by virtue of our participation in academic discourse, we are among a small, elite minority, regardless of our race. Here lies a significant point as we talk about preparing teachers to work with low-income, minority children. She writes:

To the extent that one can draw on one's own experience of subordination - as a young person, as a person with a disability, as someone who grew up poor, as a woman - may be easier to make meaning of another targeted group's experience. ...The task of resisting our own oppression does not relieve us of the responsibility of acknowledging our complicity in the oppression of others. Our ongoing examination of who we are in our full humanity, embracing all of our identities, creates the possibility of building alliances that may ultimately free us all. (p. 14)

I wonder, however, whether some of the dominant language we hear in the current dialogue about effective pedagogy for low-income minority children, may, in fact, be impeding the efforts that Tatum is calling for. Is it possible that we are preventing "building alliances that may ultimately free us all" when we categorically talk about White teachers and their inadequate life experiences?

Overshadowing others. Boylorn (2006) writes, “The ‘Other’ is always a mysterious person we associate in complete opposition to ourselves, whether White or Black” (p. 676). Is it possible that White teachers may feel that they are being defined by others, “othered” themselves, and dismissed as ineffective teachers? Does some of the current language neglect the fact that we all have a multitude of identities, that we may be White and so many other things? Do we forget that while ninety percent of the American work force is comprised of middle-class White women, they are *women* who live with the prevalence of gender inequity and sexism, and who, therefore, may be familiar with an oppression of their own? When does the analysis stop? Do we need to ask if a Black man can ever really know the challenges faced by female students? Can a heterosexual teacher ever fully understand the experiences of a gay student? Can any individual ever really feel what it means to be another person? If these answers are no, can we as educators learn to draw upon our particular and individual challenges as a means of experiencing empathy and compassion for others so that the labels associated with our particular identities fade into the tapestry of humanity?

Giroux (1992) discusses the importance of an inclusive, collaborative approach to the efforts at working for social justice within schools:

Of course, as teachers we can never speak inclusively *as* the Other, though we may be the Other with respect to issues of race, class, or gender; but we can certainly work *with* diverse Others to deepen both our own and their understanding of the complexity of the traditions, histories, knowledges, and politics that they bring to the schools. (p. 35)

Giroux's (1992) words highlight the fact that each of us may experience what it is to be the Other in one form or another. He also emphasizes our ability to work together to challenge human oppression.

As I begin to reflect on the initial conversations with my participants, I realize that while each of them is categorized by society as White, they each share moments in their own lives and in the lives of their parents, when they, too, felt "othered," alienated, and humiliated. I learn that the impact of structural racism and discrimination against members of minority groups, and the inequalities that confront minority *groups* do not preclude Whites as *individuals* of the majority from experiencing different kinds of hurts and struggles themselves. Their words convey their sentiments. Suzanne begins:

One of the influences I had in my life was that my mother and father were both immigrants. My mother came (from Italy) when she was seven years old and she always talked about school and how hard it was...Being an immigrant. And not knowing the language. My father owned a fish shop, which he sold after being threatened by the mafia.

Being conscious and aware of their own struggles, do they feel empathy for others? Do these teachers couch their identities as educators and the skills they bring to teaching in their ability to empathize with the struggles of others? Suzanne explains, "What you bring to teaching, what you as a person bring to teaching has to be a love of kids first. And it has to be what you've experienced in your lifetime that's going to effect how you treat these kids. And how you treat the kids is to me paramount." Suzanne's childhood experiences helped shape her world view, and her world view guides her work with children. "You don't judge anybody unless you walk in their shoes," Suzanne insists.

Paula's childhood story is different. She is the daughter of Holocaust survivors, survivors of Auschwitz and of death marches. As refugees to the United States, Paula's parents experienced poverty and the struggles that accompany it, which Paula witnessed throughout her life. She explains:

My parents were on Medicaid and we had to go through the welfare system and I saw how degrading that was to my parents who worked their whole lives and then needed help with medicine and medical care and how horrendous an experience it was for us. I saw how people in the Medicaid office degraded my father who had worked his entire life and who now needed money because my mother had cancer and they had no health insurance and they used up all their money. I saw that.

Like Suzanne, Paula learns from her parents and takes lessons away from her childhood. She talks about suffering and about remembering that there are always others who are suffering more than herself. She talks about survival, giving meaning to why we have survived. She also addresses what we do with these meanings.

I guess my mom felt she survived for a reason. You know, in the Jewish religion you're supposed to do 600 odd good deeds a day. And do you do it 'cause you feel obligated? No, I do it 'cause it's the right thing to do...to reach out to those less fortunate than you. Like somebody helping my mom when she didn't know English. My mother always said, "Always look down. Never look up. Always look at people who have less than you."

Not only does Paula share lived experiences with her low-income students, she also translates those experiences into action. Paula embodies Sartre's philosophy that responsibility for our existence, and what we do in our lives, rests upon our own shoulders.

Rachel, who is almost 40 years younger than Suzanne and Paula, has her own stories from childhood and powerful lessons that she carries with her.

My mom was a single parent and so we didn't have a lot and so I started babysitting at 11. My mom struggled...and she worked 3 jobs at one point when she was laid off. ..I'd be receiving hand me downs, even hand me down

underwear. And yet, we were always going to the battered women's shelter, always giving away to other people. My mom would always give away furniture and clothing and treat them very well and *respect them*.

Rachel speaks passionately about respect, a concept she regards as basic human decency. The word respect comes from the Latin, *respectus*, and means "to treat with deferential regard or esteem." Rachel describes what respect means to her:

Equality. Treating people as equals, treating them as I would want to be treated. We're all human beings. We might have different colored skin, we might come from different backgrounds but we're all people. We should all be treated with dignity.

Rachel's words echo Giroux's (1992) notion that border pedagogy represents a "democratic public philosophy that respects the notion of difference" (p. 28). Her memories speak of a childhood that was rich with experiences of respecting all people, experiences that translate into her work as a Title I teacher.

Whereas Suzanne, Paula, and Rachel address experiences from their homes, Chris talks about a painful memory from school. She describes a transformative moment and reflects on how her experience impacts her teaching:

I'll never forget Mrs. Jasper. She was a nightmare. We had to cut out cardboard heads and then rip up tiny pieces of paper and glue it on the head. She says to me, "Your pieces aren't small enough. Why aren't your pieces smaller like Christie's?" So she had me take off all the pieces I had already glued on and made me stay in from recess for a week to finish it. I felt shame, an overwhelming feeling of "How can you do this to me? My pieces of paper *are* small. They're as small as I could make them. And I'm doing my best."

As Chris describes her shame, she captures the essence of humiliation. Ricoeur (1992) equates humiliation with evil as he writes, "What is called humiliation – a horrible caricature of humility – is nothing else than the destruction of self-respect, beyond the destruction of the power to act. Here we seem to have reached the depths of evil" (p. 220). Chris shares yet another example of feeling shame:

In third grade, I was called up to the board to solve the equation $10+6$. I froze and she started getting frustrated with me and was saying, "Come on! You know this! What's $10+6$? What's $10+6$? It's so easy!" And the kids at that point started seeing me struggle and seeing her getting frustrated and they started laughing and drawing pictures of me and things like that... One of my best friends drew a picture of me with the word "dummy" on it. All I could think of was the kids laughing and her screaming at me.

The visceral, bodily feeling of humiliation returns to Chris when she describes her third grade trauma. With time, space, and the maturity of adulthood, her perspective now includes anger, and a purpose fueled by that anger. Her keen self awareness contributes to her sensitive teaching. She explains:

You don't put them up there to humiliate them as they're struggling and floundering. You prompt them and scaffold and give them support, and make that a safe environment. So if I call on a child who gets stuck, I give lots of "wait time" or say, "You know, sometimes it's OK to ask for help if we get stuck. You can ask for help if you need help." And they know it's a safe place even if they don't have the answer.

Will, my fifth participant, adds another dimension to the repertoire of life's challenges:

I was scared of all the teasing and abuse that I had had in middle school. I'm gay and I'm feminine. In middle school, basically kids would call me fag and make fun of me in the halls. For some reason I was worried that they'd beat me up, but I don't remember any real threats.

Will's memories are poignant. They are wrought with fear and alienation and humiliation. They are also useful as Will works with children today. Will uses his experience to guide his practice. "It informs how I deal with kids who are being teased or bullied," he explains. "A lot of what I read talks about the importance of adults taking a stand, even if it doesn't stop the teasing."

In the context of their stories, and in terms of human struggle, does the "Whiteness" of these teachers mitigate their own life struggles in the eyes of some,

their lives as the child of poor Holocaust refugees, the daughter of working class Italian immigrants, a humiliated, struggling student, a gay man, and a child growing up with a single mother? Is the multiplicity of their identities erased by the White on their face? Does the White on their faces prevent them from feeling empathy, compassion, and the desire to act for social justice?

Individual hues. Each of my participants possesses a White identity. Yet, their experiences and perceptions challenge Howard's (1999) view that all Whites share a common history of privilege and dominance, and that their common history ties them together in a shared reality. Each one of these teachers brings struggles and pain from their particular pasts, and from aspects of their own identities, which they transform into multiple entry points for their expression of compassion toward children and families and motivation for their work. Each one represents what Donna LeCourt (2004) calls a "hybrid" (p. 110) identity. She explains:

It offers us a way to historicize the categories of identity we have inherited – Black, Latino, White, Asian, Native, Man, Woman, Gay, Straight – as deliberate markings designed to separate groups in order to oppress one in favor of the other. We have...moved to a more diversified set of power relations wherein...all identities have become hybrid: both colonized and colonizer include the Other within themselves. (p. 110)

LeCourt, thus, suggests that through our complex identities, we can be, at once, oppressed and oppressor, dominant and dominated. I can be, at once, White and Jewish, South African and American, native and immigrant, teacher and student. I can be all of these pieces at once, or I can select among them depending on where I am and whom I am with. As such, my identity is resistant to the simple labeling or sorting by anyone other than myself.

Sen (2006) describes the multiplicity of identity by categorizing some of the ways in which individuals are labeled:

In our normal lives, we see ourselves as members of a variety of groups – we belong to all of them. A person’s citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports interests, taste in music, social commitments, etc., make us members of a variety of groups. Each of these collectivities, to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person’s only identity or singular membership category. (p. 4)

Sen (2006) reminds us to ask important questions. What are the “in-betweens” in which we stand? What are the different “collectivities” to which we belong? When we see a Black child enter the classroom, what besides skin color does that child present, either visibly or hidden beneath the surface of his skin? When we see a White child enter the same door, is her skin the first thing we notice?

Just as Chris describes her work with children as a responsibility that she embraces, teachers must also assume the responsibility for inviting children to share the collective aspects of their identities. It is also incumbent upon them to self-regulate their own responses so that they are equally open to each child’s multiplicities of identity.

As she participates in a group conversation with the other participants and me, Rachel talks about her own hybrid identity, both as she defines herself and as others define her:

I don’t consider myself the typical White American because I am Jewish. I feel that I’m an ethnic minority. You hear derogatory names about Jews and you hear these jokes about being cheap. It’s caught me off guard, with educated people saying I don’t look Jewish because of my nose.

Rachel shares a poignant reminder that the hidden aspects of our identities are easy targets for violent and hurtful words. Her painful recollection about hearing “Jewish

jokes” and about comments regarding her facial features are also echoed by Paula.

She remembers:

My husband was in the airforce and we were on a military base in 1970. And the kid next door in his trailer was putting TV wire up and he said, “Damn! I’ve been Jewed!” Growing up in Brooklyn... I never heard that. And I just stood there. Joe just grabbed my arm and he whispered, “Let it go. He’s just dumb. He didn’t mean anything by it.” That was just a real eye opener for me.

Rachel continues to explore her identity as she acknowledges that while her skin color places her in the category called “White,” her history is not the same history of Anglo-Saxon Christians.

So I’m White, but I think of White more as Anglo-Saxon, Christian. My own family was persecuted and murdered in the concentration camps. And that’s part of who I am. So I guess sometimes I can relate to some of my students. If not with skin color, it’s with life experiences or hearing stories.

Similarly, Paula also refers to her family background, including her Jewishness, and her family’s immigrant status and language barriers, as the source of her attention to children’s needs.

I just don’t think about being White. I’ve thought about being Jewish because as a child, the whole fact that my parents were Holocaust survivors was a huge part of my life. Did that make me more sensitive to other cultures? I don’t know? Did the fact that I had aunts who had been in America for years and still didn’t have a good handle on English? I don’t know.

Are the multiplicities of identity, then, complex within each individual, as well as among different people? Are Rachel’s and Paula’s identities complicated by the fact that one of the primary components of who they are – Jews – is hidden beneath their Whiteness, as well as by the fact that their history separates them from others who may look like them, but whose ancestors lived very different lives?

As Suzanne talks about her White identity, she also indicates its sublimation beneath aspects of her identity that she finds more salient. She explains:

I forgot about being White. I related to the immigrants because my parents were immigrants. My mother often spoke of how hard it was for her in school – adjusting. She was seven when she came. There were eight in her family and she came just at the start of World War I. My father when he first came lived with his cousins and their families. My race didn't matter as much as my ethnicity.

What about the languages we speak, also hidden from view? Rachel turns to language as another aspect of her identity.

And then the thing that changes me the most is being bilingual now. I can connect with parents and they see me differently now. They don't just see me as a White girl who's the teacher because now I can talk to them every morning.

As Rachel comments, now that she is bilingual, “They don't just see me as a White girl.” Language, thus, becomes another expression of one's identity, which can be altered and manipulated. Abby Figueroa (2004) writes about her own movement among different ways of speaking, which she describes as a tool. She explains:

Language is a tool. Without a firm grasp of it you drown in your inability to express yourself well. Dining rooms, locker rooms and classrooms all have their specific language that must be spoken for entrance and acceptance. *Conociendo el lenguaje particular de un grupo* (Knowing the language specific to a group) opens doors and allows you in to places that would exclude you otherwise. (p. 285)

Rachel's experience with becoming bilingual emphasizes the barriers that exist between teachers and parents when a common language is not shared. From being seen as “just...a White girl” to having doors open with the force of language, Rachel indicates that when teachers want to form relationships with parents, they have their own hurdles to overcome. Like Rachel, when teachers feel compelled to overcome those barriers, they find a way, adding another dimension to their identities in the process.

Like Rachel and Paula, Suzanne discusses her White identity as one aspect of who she is. She is aware of privileges she has been granted as a result of being White, but her story does not begin or end there. She expresses how being the daughter of poor, Italian immigrants defines her identity and serves as a platform for the way she interacts with children and families:

At Hampstead Heights I didn't look at color but rather ethnicity, backgrounds, situations of poverty each group had and how they affected the kids and their learning. I could relate to these and have empathy because of my parents. I never forgot what they said or how much they loved this country.

Paula shares Suzanne's attention to individual children and their learning needs, deemphasizing attention to racial identities.

I don't think about color. I do think about groups and being sensitive to their culture. When I'm in the classroom, I really don't think about color. If you ask me about racial makeup of my class, I would have to go through my class one by one and think about each child's race. It's, "What are your needs?" It's not, "What is your color?"

Paula's words resonate with the writing of Vivian Paley (2000) who says:

The black child is Every Child. There is no activity useful only for the black child. There is no manner of speaking or unique approach or special environment required only for black children... The challenge in teaching is to find a way of communicating to each child the idea that his or her special quality is understood, is valued, and can be talked about. (p. xx)

How do I reconcile the words of my participants – which resonate with the honor that they attribute to each child – with the problematic notion of

“colorblindness?” Gary Howard (1999) explains:

...The declaration of colorblindness assumes that we can erase our racial categories. Ignore differences, and thereby achieve an illusory state of sameness or equality...The proponents of colorblindness assume that the mere perception of difference is a problem. (p. 53)

Does viewing a person's many attributes, without making race a pivotal, defining marker, necessitate ignoring differences? While race remains one important part of a person's identity, is it possible that the continued emphasis on race might prevent teachers from seeing children's unique identities and also impede researchers and teacher educators from acknowledging White teachers' identity complexities? Should we be asking, "What are your needs?" as Paula does, instead of "What is your color?" While race may be an initial, central feature between teachers and parents and teachers and children, is it productive for race to remain in the forefront of their interactions?

Donna LeCourt (2004) explains the potential pitfalls of viewing each other in racialized terms and "categorical identities." She explains that by continuing to name and mark differences, we risk "laying the groundwork for the execution of power based in categorical identities presumed to be authentically related to cultural experience" (p. 119). What happens when the categorical identities that we view as intractable are not, in fact, related to cultural experiences, contrary to our assumptions? LeCourt (2004) notes the danger:

By marking difference, we also come to essentialize it, and essentialize it in such a way that self/Other relations remain inviolate. We are orchestrating unequal power relations, even as we seek to ameliorate the same. (p. 119)

Shoshana Magnet (2006) writes about "the ways in which individuals come simultaneously to occupy spaces of marginalization as well as spaces of privilege" (p. 736). However, she argues that when a White person acknowledges aspects of her identity that have been subject to oppression, she necessarily denies her contribution to a racist society. She argues that to be White is to be culpable.

I do not challenge Magnet's (2006) perspective in theory, and I concur that the United States is both currently and historically a society built on racist practices, in which White people have benefited. What I challenge, however, is the necessity of joining the chorus, in which Magnet sings, "I am a racist." To my eyes and to my ears, the chant is, yet, another demonstration of White privilege and White self-importance. I do not feel the need to pronounce myself a sinner or one worthy of praise for my enlightened confession. As Rachel states, "I cannot change the color of my skin." Nor do I celebrate it or deny it. Like my participants, I work to de-emphasize its force within the walls of my classroom and the divisions in American education. I strive to make my classroom into a place where the injustices of society are transformed, not reflected. I work to celebrate each child and each teacher in his or her uniqueness.

I suggest that the perpetuation of a racialized society partially resides in the refusal to acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of identity. When we ascribe categorical belonging to those around us, we stamp, mark, and name them. We assume who they are and prevent them from expressing themselves, while denying ourselves the privilege of learning about difference. By not heeding the words of LeCourt (2004), Suzanne, Will, Chris, Rachel, and Paula, remain White teachers, with none of the richness or nuance that they have shared about themselves and continue to share throughout this study. As the next section will show, without nuance, conflict emerges, both between and within individuals.

When Colors Clash

The relationships among identity, oppression, and dominance are complex. In addition to possessing multiple identities, we are able, to some extent, to either insulate ourselves or to reach across identity lines to create a human identity of inclusiveness. One response to oppression is for historically persecuted and marginalized groups to instill a sense of pride among their ranks and to collaborate for group solidarity. Nobel Prize winner, Amartya Sen (2006) writes, “A sense of identity can be a source of pride and joy, but also of strength and confidence. It is not surprising that the idea of identity receives such widespread admiration, from popular advocacy of loving your neighbor to high theories of social capital and of communitarian self-definition” (p. 1).

I have experienced that sense of pride and the feeling of belonging to a people and a place. I remember standing with my father in synagogue, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the State of Israel. The blue and white Israeli flag hung on the wall as we sang the Israeli national anthem, *Hatikvah*. The year was 1973, one year before my family immigrated to the United States. It was also one year before my first trip to Israel. I also remember the pride I felt when, at age sixteen, I became an American citizen, standing in a court room and vowing allegiance to my new country. I recall my heightened emotions as I voted for Nelson Mandela in the first South African democratic election.

If a strong sense of identity can be a source of comfort and pride, can it also be divisive? What happens when fierce loyalty to one identity alienates and excludes those who are not perceived as members of the group? Amartya Sen (2006) addresses the dilemma:

A strong – and exclusive – sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups. Within-group solidarity can help to feed between-group discord. (p. 2)

Sen's (2006) words arouse thoughts of gang violence, civil wars, terrorist attacks, and battles between nations. The issue of identity and violence is complex; rhetoric has no place. Each social phenomenon is unique and generalizations do not help. What I am choosing to examine is the current dialogue about the relationship between White teachers and minority children. In that context, is it possible that aspects of the dialogue are creating "between-group discord?" Is it possible that the dialogue about "White teachers," and "Black children," is creating a level of discomfort for teachers, which is impeding progress? Is it important to look at the multiple and complex facets of each person's identity, rather than to label anyone in a defining category? Does a hybrid approach to identity potentially reduce discord between groups?

As Rachel articulates, the perception that she is simply White leaves her feeling misunderstood and alienated:

Sometimes I don't think people understand me. Most of my family isn't here. I grew up going to Rio de Janeiro Brazil to visit my grandparents. I feel different than just being the typical White Christian American. We as people judge. You assume you know what a person is just by looking at them and then you make assumptions. So people think, I'm White, so I have it easier, I never had any problems in my life.

While Black Americans may experience the visceral reaction of others to the color of their skin, feeling that they are seen as black before being seen in any other dimension, Rachel expresses a similar perception. For Rachel, her powerful and poignant identity as a Jew is hidden by the color of her skin, which does not elicit strong reactions in American society according to racial category, but which covers up the identity that is most important to her. Rachel's skin color masks much of who

she is. While she is not conspicuously noted for being White in the way that she says her boyfriend, James, is noted as a *Black* man wherever he goes, her face masks the identity she wants others to recognize.

Will shares his own discomfort with feeling that he, too, wears a mask. He expresses his own discomfort about interracial interactions in terms of his fear and anxiety surrounding being exposed and revealed in an undesirable way. Being the parent of two African American teenage boys and having a life partner from Latin America do not suffice to alleviate Will's concerns about his sensitivity toward racial minorities. His words convey his awareness of the subject of racial identity, which, in his mind, seems to overshadow the value of his own life choices and experiences. He talks about "the Black perspective" and being "stupid and White" as he articulates his fear about causing "between-group discord." He seems highly invested in fitting the mold created by the language of academics rather than having confidence in his love of people and his own interracial family.

I really want to be seen as a good guy. I have a lot invested in being seen as understanding of the Black perspective, as cool, as not prejudiced, as really enlightened. I have this whole image of what's important to me to present. God forbid I should be stupid and White in some ignorant way and biased and racist. That would be absolutely devastating to me and all that I've tried to portray in my life. And that's kind of a big burden to carry around. I want to be right. I don't wanna be biased.

As Will talks about what he has tried to "portray" in his life, he indicates his awareness that he is being watched and that he is being judged. He distinguishes the perceptions that others may have of him with his beliefs about himself. Yet, he immediately returns to his fear that he may someday "hurt a Black person:"

I believe I am this new fabulous unbiased totally self aware, aware of my privilege, aware of the differences, not pretending that everybody's the same.

The very reality of what I know to be true, which is that I do not know what it's like, and really can't even get there, contradicts what I try to portray, which is that I'm so enlightened and so cool and so in touch with all that's out there. I have *so much* invested in this image. I have a lot invested in being seen as "with it," liberal, understanding and all of that stuff, with the full knowledge that at any moment I could say or do something stupid. And maybe it would just be misinterpreted. But maybe I would actually say something that I mean that would be, that would *hurt* a Black person and would make them see me as something I desperately don't want to be, but maybe I am. It's very complicated.

Fear exists for Rachel, too, who says, "We have a lot of pressure on us. I want to work with this population, but there's a lot of pressure. What if I say something wrong?" The conflicts that emerge as colors clash are poignant. With the continued emphasis on race, a level of anxiety continues between individuals and within their consciences.

Just as I have experienced discomfort with comments about Jews and about Israel, so have I felt pain on issues of my race. As a college student at Oberlin, I was an active participant in the anti-*apartheid* movement. I made public speeches, wrote newspaper articles, and spent a great deal of time with other South African students. When a new African American student-leader emerged, however, he decided that it was improper for a White South African to play a public role in the organization, and I was told to step aside. My close friendships with Black South African students continued, but the anger and insult I felt from my fellow American students continues to sting me today.

While I believe that their decision was arrogant and misguided, I continue to feel concern that I will, again, be told that my voice is not welcome in conversations about racial oppression. I continue to feel anxiety that I will be stamped as "White,"

with all the assumptions that accompany the marker. How can the anxiety be alleviated? How can fear be replaced with the creation of genuine relationships, so that when inevitable hurtful words are spoken, they may be followed by reconciliation and understanding rather than with anger and divisiveness?

Weaving a New Cloth

There is not an easy answer to the question of how to respond to and discuss race. There are many factors and many answers to consider. As phenomenology proposes, we must look at the theory of the unique. Acknowledging the continued forces of racism and White privilege and dominance are pieces of the puzzle. But they do not complete the picture. They have played, and continue to play, an important role in educational research, emerging when it became time to say, “Enough!” Enough blame being cast on poor families, enough discussion about “cultural deprivation,” and enough talk about other myths that point to imposed inadequacies of poor, minority children who are not ready for school. Schools need to be ready for children and teachers need to honor the various cultures of the children that they serve.

Can we now begin to focus on children’s uniqueness? Can we continue to work to undo the forces of racism while refusing to make generalizations about children based on the color of their skin? Can we teach our children about the evils of racism without making assumptions about their experiences and their individual histories? Can we move toward the idea that identity is fluid, as well as possessing multiplicities? Can we move toward a society where each person is free to choose which aspects of his or her identity to present?

Sen (2006) explains:

We are all constantly making choices, if only implicitly, about the priorities to be loyalties and priorities between the different groups to all of which we may belong is a peculiarly important liberty which we have reason to recognize, value, and defend. (p. 5)

Sen continues to emphasize that each choice exists within particular constraints, based on “individual characteristics and circumstances” (p. 5). For me, the choices are many.

I am able to choose whether or not to wear a Star of David around my neck, to speak Hebrew in public, and how to dress. As a child, I chose to abandon my South African accent in response to being teased and to adopt an American way of speaking. I learned that tackies were sneakers, that rubbers were erasers, that a robot was a traffic light, that advertisements were commercials, and that nappies were diapers. I struggled to learn American idiomatic expressions, which I must negotiate in my mind even now. I recall my first painful exposure to the expression, “you stink,” when a new American “friend” hurled the accusation at me during a game of pool. I was humiliated, believing that he was referring to an unpleasant smell, which had no place in my family and upbringing.

Today, I am still able to speak like a South African, which I often do to elicit laughs in my family, or which I adopt unconsciously when I am very tired. I also have the tendency to adopt the accents of people to whom I am speaking. As Gadamer (2002) notes, “Our experience of the world is bound to language” (p. 448). Without being conscious of it, I begin to acquire their ways of articulating, until I realize what I am doing and stop from fear of seeming to be mocking them. The power of language is with me always.

During our group conversation, Will and Rachel discuss the relationship between choosing identities and language. Rachel and Will engage in a dialogue about language during our group conversation. They discuss the notion of code switching, as Will describes how he facilitates children's language skills and as Rachel describes the way her boyfriend, James, who is African American, changes his language based on circumstances.

Will describes how language enables children to function within different arenas of their lives. As he speaks, he references societal power structures:

A big part of what I see about being a White teacher is about code switching. As a teacher, I'm gonna be available to help those kids survive, to learn how to talk, how to be, how to act, in that culture of power so they can go in and out if it when they need to. That's the goal, for kids and parents.

Rachel responds with a different perspective, sensing the power dynamic and objecting to its force. As if arguing with herself, having earlier stated, "We can't change society, Helping is what we can do," she demonstrates the complexity and struggle between working for human justice on a societal level and working with individual lives. Rachel states:

But that's sad. I think of my boyfriend. When he's with his family, he speaks differently, when he's with me, he speaks a little differently, and when he's at work at Lockheed Martin, he speaks extremely differently. Why can't we just accept people for the way they speak and not have to correct them?

As the conversation proceeds, Will articulates the notion of code switching and of being able to choose different ways of expressing oneself. He provides examples of how each of us chooses different modes of language production, reflecting the idea as a reality in each of our lives.

But that's called registers. It's not sad. It's good. But what we need to say is, "That's not how we talk *here at school* to your teacher." Don't you speak

differently to your friend and to your doctor? Different cultures have to make more of a shift because the White structure is the power. And one of our jobs is to help the kids learn how to do that. We need to take ownership of that. I don't know what we're gonna call it. They're gonna learn how speak like a professional? They're gonna learn how to speak like an educated person?

As Will describes, language is one aspect of identity, and, like other aspects of identity, language is fluid and flexible. Using language, can teachers find ways to model how to reach out to each other, find commonalities, and establish cooperation? Can they show children that by mastering various forms of language, they will be able to expand their repertoire of interactions?

Echoing Will's perspective on language registers, Figueroa (2004) suggests that language serves as a figurative ticket for entry into particular social situations, and Basil Bernstein (2000) views language as an extension of the power dynamics in society. Bernstein analyzes how schools either reflect and perpetuate unequal power distributions by dismissing minority children's non-standard ways of speaking, or invite all children to join the conversation. He writes that language "is a carrier of power relations external to the school. A carrier of patterns of dominance with respect to class, patriarchy, race" (p. 3).

Bernstein (2000) explains that some children remain silent and voiceless because their way of communicating is denied acceptance and is not reflected, while others hear their ways of communicating all around them. He describes a "recognition rule" (p. 17), whereby mainstream children are able to understand the context they are in, and the power relations that they perceive. Then, in order to produce spoken words – to communicate – he explains that children must follow the "realization rule" (p. 17) whereby they must be able to "speak the expected legitimate text" (p. 17). As he

notes, however, “Certain distributions of power give rise to different social distributions of recognition rules...It may well be, at the more concrete level, that some children from the marginal classes are silent in school because of the unequal distribution of recognition rules...” (p. 17).

Bernstein’s (2000) concept about inviting all children to join the conversation is reminiscent of classroom experiences I have seen and created. In Chapter Two, I spoke about my class meetings and about the opportunities they gave for children to share stories from their lives. During class meetings, all children spoke and all children listened. As a classroom community, we heard accents and dialects from around the world and around the block, which we neither judged, nor silenced, nor denied acceptance. There was no one legitimate text for children to “realize” and no rigid power structure for children to “recognize.” Rather, all voices chimed in, “reaching an understanding...uniting all who talk to one another” (Gadamer, 2002, p. 446).

I recall sitting on the carpet with my second grade class, welcoming a new friend, Ramma. Ramma was Egyptian and spoke Arabic as well as English. With several politically savvy Israeli children in the class, I wanted to establish a sense of camaraderie as quickly as possible, and I realized that language would be my vehicle. I asked Ramma if she would count to ten in Arabic for us, so that we could hear how her language sounded. I then told the Israeli children to listen very carefully. Not surprisingly, their faces soon displayed enormous, partially toothless grins, as they heard the remarkable similarities between Hebrew and Arabic. Without any coaxing needed, they counted in Hebrew, and the message was clear.

My orientation to the world is largely through sound. I connect to the world musically, as I described in Chapter One, and through the sounds of language. Speaking some of several languages, and able to mimic many accents, my ear is finely attuned to language. Gadamer (2002) writes, “Language maintains a kind of independent life vis-à-vis the individual member of a linguistic community; and as he grows into it, it introduces him to a particular orientation and relationship to the world as well” (p. 443).

Language binds human beings together, as I showed my second-grade students who come from countries and traditions with a history of adversity. Through language, I hoped to give them their own “orientation and relationship to the world,” in a way that challenged the adversity into which they were born. As Merleau-Ponty (2004) explains:

There is one particular cultural object which is destined to play a crucial role in the perception of other people: language. In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thoughts and his are interwoven into a single fabric...of which neither of us is the creator. (p. 153)

Embracing the power of language as “common ground,” Rachel and Paula offer their own examples. After spending a year teaching English in Costa Rica, Rachel is now bilingual, as I described previously, and begins by talking about how speaking Spanish impacts her work:

I can connect with parents and they see me differently now. Now I can talk to them every morning. I can ask them questions, I can translate when they need to ask questions. And they feel comfortable coming to me as opposed to some other teachers who feel nervous. And when they’re nervous, then the parents become nervous!

Even when teachers do not share a common language with children and families, communication is possible. When teachers are determined to form relationships with the members of the school community, they find a way. Paula explains:

Now I'm not bilingual but I had incredible relationships with bilingual parents. I think it's how you accept them. If someone is coming into my room, I respect you and I welcome you and it doesn't matter what language you speak. I think it's your body language and the way you treat people and the respect you give people. (Paula)

Paula embodies the philosophy of language that Gadamer (2002) espouses. He explains that "For man language is variable not only in the sense that there are foreign languages that one can learn but also variable in itself, for it contains various possibilities for saying the same thing...a substitution of an articulated use of gesture that represents articulated vocalized languages" (p. 445).

Studying the multiple and fluid dimensions of identity, Fisher, Jackson, and Villarruel (1998) describe how identity development changes and occurs as children interact with family, peers, and members of various social groups. They write, "Ethnic identity is best conceptualized as an ongoing process related to developmental changes in experience and the meaning of group membership across the life course" (p. 1160). Whether a child feels pride or shame, confidence or timidity, for example, might impact his/her self-perception as it relates to being part of an ethnic minority. They explain:

The salience of these different aspects of ethnicity to the individual may change at different points in development and across different contexts. Thus, we need to consider the meaning of race and ethnicity at the individual level. Consideration of the meaning of ethnicity to individuals...can challenge the utility of defining race simply in terms of physical characteristics; the validity

of equating race and ethnicity, and the assumption that ethnicity contributes to individual development in the same manner for all...(p. 1158)

Yet, if children can feel pride in their identities, learn that identity is a fluid and complex construct, and simultaneously understand the benefits they can gain from incorporating certain aspects of mainstream culture into their identity kits, can they acquire a level of biculturalism that will serve them well in school? Can teachers help to ensure that all children feel comfortable with their ethnic identities as well as serve as a bridge to other cultures? How do teachers, who have found entry points across racial and social divides, open the doors for their students to move back and forth in ways that feel inviting and purposeful, so that they successfully increase their own “plurality of selves” (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 99)? How do they create a classroom culture that they “actively weave” (George et al., 2003, p. 323) into a tapestry of human identity together with their students? As I investigate the experiences of my five participants in the next chapter, I seek to explore answers to these questions.

My participants are inspiring and remarkable individuals. And they are inspiring and remarkable teachers. Throughout this chapter, they have shared their lived experiences with forming their own identities, a process which remains prominent as they interact with their students and families in their school communities. In Chapter Five, they continue to discuss those experiences in their classrooms and the meaning they uncover as they work with children. As they do, they link their identities to teaching, as they articulate their “inner urge to serve,” and their “hope of having a positive influence on students” (Hansen, 1995, p. 158).

CHAPTER FIVE
STEPPING OVER BOUNDARIES
Teachers Crossing Borders

In this chapter, I continue my journey, exploring how the choices we make can add new dimensions to our identities and carry us across literal and figurative borders. I share my participants' lived experiences as boundary-crossers, and I examine the pedagogical practices in which they engage with their students. As I describe their teaching practices, I identify unifying themes common among them, which I translate into implications for teacher education in Chapter Six.

As my middle-class White participants leave their neighborhoods and go to work each day at Title I schools, they cross the literal borders of neighborhoods and school districts, the borders that separate rich from poor, and Black from White. Through their expertise and dedication to their work, they also cross the figurative borders of social and political activism.

Henry Giroux (1992) explains:

By being able to listen critically to the voices of their students, teachers become border-crossers through their ability to not only make different narratives available to themselves and other students but also by legitimizing difference as a basic condition for understanding the limits of one's own voice. By viewing schooling as a form of cultural politics, radical educators can bring the concepts of culture, voice, and difference together to create a borderland where multiple subjectivities and identities exist as part of a pedagogical practice that provides the potential to expand the politics of democratic community and solidarity. (p. 170)

How do these teachers legitimize difference? What does the "borderland" that they create look like, feel like, and sound like?

My participants are witnesses to America's continued racial and social stratification – the residue of laws past - as they pass from one social and economic domain to another each day that they go to work. Americans are no longer forbidden by law to live in particular areas and ordered to live in others, but social and economic restrictions remain firmly in place. As such, with continued segregation and the persistence of racist perceptions in American society, crossing boundaries involves personal fortitude. Leder (1990) explains:

I most easily forget my body when it looks and acts just like everyone else's. However, walk into a party inappropriately attired, and self-consciousness returns. To take a more radical example, face-to-face with a New Guinea tribesman I should be much more aware of my appearance and dress than when wandering through my home town. Sometimes these physical/cultural divergences can be exaggerated by ideological agendas. In a racist society, a difference in skin color, trivial but highly noticeable, may lead to the assumption of the impossibility of communion. Hence, the black often feels self-conscious wandering the white neighborhood, and vice versa. (p. 97)

Devoting themselves to educating low-income children of color, these teachers participate in an effort to break down racial barriers and share their power and privileged knowledge with marginalized children and families, as they bring themselves and their talents into their neighborhoods and schools. They refuse to accept the “impossibility of communion.”

The concept of border-crossing became a visceral reality for me during my childhood, and emerged as a central theme in my turning to the phenomenon of this study. Referring back to Chapter One, where I explore my turning, I discuss how, as a child immigrant, I was required to cross both literal and figurative boundaries. Here I wonder if the work that my participants do, entering lives so different from their own, and becoming part of a community far removed from the one in which they live, adds

a dimension to their identities that is reminiscent of being a foreigner. How is crossing the border into a new land similar to the way they step through racial and social divides? Which aspects of immigrating illuminate the lived experiences of my participants?

As a child, I learned to guard and cherish my “alien registration card” and my South African passport. Traveling to Scotland on a student exchange program when I was thirteen, I remember my parents’ severe warnings that I not lose my alien registration card, and I recall the special attention I received as I passed through customs on my return “home.” I heard the sound of my own voice begin to represent an identity I hated, choosing to adapt rather than continue to be teased and marked as a foreigner with questions such as, “Are you from England?” “Do you know my friend who lives in Uganda?” and “Were there lions where you lived?”

For years and years, and to some extent even today, I feel a cultural and emotional divide from Americans-without-hyphens, choosing to form my most intimate relationships with other non-mainstream people. Believing that they empathize with my complex identity, I choose to seek trust, affection, solace and love from them, and am surprised and somewhat skeptical when I feel the same effortless ease with anyone I consider a more “typical American.”

In *The Namesake*, a moving story about immigration by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003), the author captures the endless longing that comes with immigration:

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. (p. 49)

The story of my immigration from South Africa also offers powerful examples of people working with a sense of “ongoing responsibility” toward “something...complicated and demanding.” There, people worked together for a common cause – dismantling a racist government – while overlooking the differences among them. In Chapter One, I described my parents’ “illegal” parties, where I saw my home filled with people of all colors, knowing that they shared my parents’ struggles against the government.

When, years later in our American home, I meet the columnist and author, Glenn Frankel, I hear another telling of a story from my childhood. In *Rivonia’s Children*, Glenn Frankel (1999) describes how a group of Black, Indian, Christian White, and Jewish White South Africans secretly met on a farm near Johannesburg, planning attacks against the government. Like the American Civil Rights movement, the anti-apartheid struggle was a collaborative struggle of like-minded people. Participation was based on commitment, values, and beliefs, not race.

As Frankel (1999) explains in his book, however, he chooses to emphasize the White activists, “not because their sacrifices were greater, but because they *chose* to make those sacrifices” (p. 5). He continues to explain the unique contribution made by the White activists, who sacrificed the “comforts and privileges of middle-class life in South Africa” (p. 5). Frankel contrasts the participation of White activists with the activism of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and other Black South Africans, whose participation in the liberation of their people was, for him, easier to understand.

Frankel (1999) writes:

Nelson Mandela has frequently cited their participation in the antiapartheid movement as justification for the spirit of reconciliation he has preached. The fact that even a small group of whites was willing to put aside their privileged status and fight alongside blacks for racial justice meant to Mandela that people could not be judged solely by their skin color; all whites should be given the chance to participate in the new society. (p. 5)

The activists who fought against the *apartheid* regime were a community. Small in numbers, they relied on each other and felt a kinship based on values and convictions.

The word “boundary,” comes from “bound,” which in Middle English meant “landmark and “borderland.” In the early 17th century, the word “boundary” emerged, meaning “limit” or “landmark” (Chantrell, 2002, p. 64). The White activists of Rivonia crossed several boundaries, both physical and ideological, as they struggled to free South Africa. Driving through the night to enter their secret meeting place, they crossed the boundaries of legally acceptable behavior, becoming active outlaws committing treason. They also crossed racial and economic divides, collaborating with black, Indian, and “colored” allies.

What does the Rivonia story offer to my examination of finding relationships in a “new land?” How does the feeling of having an “ongoing responsibility” toward “something more complicated and demanding” resonate with the experiences of my participants? How do they confront their challenges? How do they use relationships to ease their burdens and to find trust and support? How do they find allies for their cause?

Collaborating with Allies Beyond Classroom Boundaries

Given the needs and challenges of children in Title I schools, the teachers in my study discover that collaboration lends itself well to effective teaching. They seek

out the help and support of colleagues, administrators, community members, school representatives, and families, not resting until they have fulfilled the needs of their students. Chris explains:

I'm *constantly* talking with the counselor. I've had a lot of issues in my class this year. My teammates and I are always talking about kids, student work or behaviors, and kind of supporting each other and trying to figure out, you know, "What would you have done in this situation?" Or, "What do you think I should do?" That kind of thing.

Chris embodies the concepts of self-reflection and making choices. She does not simply act and then move on to the next activity. As van Manen (1991) explains, "To reflect is to think. But reflection in the field of education carries the connotation of deliberation, of making choices, of coming to decisions about alternative courses of action" (p. 98).

Paula views her Head Start program in the context of the funding it receives from government programs, and, therefore, works to collaborate with politicians. For her, reaching out to politicians is something she regards as her personal responsibility. She explains:

I went to many different dinners with politicians to talk about my program. When Doug Duncan was the mayor of the City of Rockville, I invited him to come visit. He had breakfast with us...I wanted him to be aware of the children and what their needs are.

Paula knows the policies associated with Head Start; she assumes responsibility for that knowledge. She knows that under the supervision of the Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start is held to national performance standards and receives comprehensive services for children and families (Children's Defense Fund, 2003). She and I both know that as Head Start teachers, we are responsible for teaching dental hygiene, offering opportunities for parents to become actively

involved in their child's school experience, recommending parents for job opportunities, and many other comprehensive services. We both know that while Head Start successfully reaches 20 million children, only three in five financially eligible children are served by the program (Children's Defense Fund, 2003).

Paula continues to describe her political perspective, including advocating for individual families as well as for the program as a whole. She describes her meeting with a county council member and her efforts to expose new principals to issues in the community:

I went to a dinner with Ike Leggett a couple nights ago and said, "Where do you stand on Head Start?" and he was telling me, you know, he definitely supported it...I take brand new principals out into the community.... taking them out to Anston House and introducing them to staff and letting them see the physical set up of where their students are coming from....going to Helping Hands shelter and letting them see the physical set up of a mother and three children in one bedroom, going out to an appointment with a mother who wants to tell the principal what needs she feels are not being met for her children.

Paula's account illustrates the tension between systemic institutional injustices and the individual actions of a person fighting for social justice. Paula seeks to challenge the *status quo* by lobbying for institutional support as well as for particular families. She cannot restructure society or persuade marginalized families that they have enough power and presence, but she can offer them her support and her help, which, over time, may lead to more substantial societal changes.

Rachel is persistent and adamant as she speaks about collaborating. Her words capture the meaning of the word, "collaborate," derived from the Latin, *collaborare*, "to work together" (Chantrell, 2002, p. 104). She explains:

Any questions...I go ask people. I don't try to reinvent the wheel, I don't try to guess. It's very important to me to be collaborative, hear others' opinions

and have them listen to mine, getting advice from other people, getting activities, input, *anything*. I'm always wanting extra help to be better or just to feel happier at work.

Their concern for students and desire for excellence motivate these teachers to transcend the limits of their own individual capacities. By reaching out for help, they also challenge the traditional teaching culture, in which teachers work in isolation. As Hawley and Valli (1999) write, "Although collaborative cultures facilitate school improvement and teacher learning, most schools still isolate teachers from one another most of the time, providing little opportunity for purposeful social interaction" (p. 130).

As they break down the barriers of a socially isolating profession, how do my participants also strive to create a sense of community in their classrooms? How do they teach children to work collaboratively among themselves, becoming each others' allies and friends? I seek to answer this question in the section below.

Community Gatherings Within Classroom Boundaries

The word community is derived from the Old French word, *comunete*, and from the Latin word, *communis*, meaning "common" or "general" (Chantrell, 2002, p. 107). As I described in Chapter Two, I began each day with my students sitting on the carpet, sharing our thoughts in a class meeting. We spoke about life at home, feelings, ideas, and questions. The children learned to listen to each other, to trust each other, and to care about each other. They learned to hear and respect ideas and perspectives different from their own. The children learned that they can learn from each other.

Hill-Collins (2000) articulates the distinct place that classrooms hold in larger society. She writes about "the power of the classroom to minimize...differences so

that people of different levels of power can use race, class, and gender as categories of analysis in order to generate meaningful dialogue” (p. 459). As Hill-Collins explains:

Sharing a common cause assists individuals and groups in maintaining relationships that transcend their differences. Building effective coalitions involves struggling to hear one another and developing empathy for each other’s points of view. (p. 460)

Community is one aspect of classroom life, as my participants describe their own classrooms. What do those communities look like, sound like, and feel like?

Suzanne describes her classroom from her early years of teaching, with various anecdotes that illustrate its communal nature:

We made decisions together. When they came in, in the morning, I was always at the door to greet them. There was a little boy in the class, David, who had an awful lot of needy problems. And the other kids kinda took care of him. We just did things together. I would go out to recess with them. Sometimes they would come and bring their lunches to the room and we’d sit and have lunch together. I got to really know those kids and I got really close to their families. When you think of a community and you think of people getting along and helping each other...that’s...that’s what we did.

Another one of my little ones, Steven B., God love him, wanted to write a play. And I said, “Go ahead.” They did it all themselves. I mean I helped them, of course, but this was their stuff. And...that class and that whole project...We were not teacher and students. We were really a family when I think about it.

Suzanne’s words offer a textured rendition of Linda Darling-Hammond’s (1997) “democratic pedagogy,” including:

freedom of expression, inclusion of multiple perspectives, opportunities to evaluate ideas and make choices, and opportunities to take on responsibility and contribute to the common good. (p. 144)

Suzanne also paints a vivid portrait of Au’s (2000) “balance between teacher-directed and child-selected literacy learning opportunities” (p. 54). Steven wanted to write a

play and so Suzanne helped him and the rest of the class do just that. But it was “their stuff.”

Chris shares her own enactment of building community and of democratic ideals:

In social studies we were talking about voting. And there was just a little snippet in the textbook about kids in a class voting on a class mascot. So I thought, well here’s a great way to build more community if we had a mascot. So I just took that little idea that I saw that wasn’t even part of the lesson and we talked about what a mascot was and so it became *their* project. They picked what they thought...we incorporated character traits...you know, I said, “We wanna pick a mascot that’s gonna represent *us*. So when we think about *us* as a team, what do we want people, when they think about Ms. Edward’s kids, what do we want them to know about us?”

Chris not only teaches her students about democracy, she enacts and embodies the concept. Both the focus of her impromptu lesson – creating a mascot – and the manner in which she conducts it, represent democratic values. When Chris asks, “What do we want *them* to know about *us*?” she also is emphasizing that her class is a community, with beliefs and an evolving identity of its own. Given that the children in the class are Black, Hispanic, Asian, and White, Chris shows them that while each individual may be different, they together create a collective identity. Like each individual’s identity having multiple dimensions, the children in a class join together to create a shared identity of their own.

Nieto (2002) writes about the importance of building a classroom community as she describes the essence of socio-cultural theory. She explains, “In socio-cultural theory, learning and achievement are not merely cognitive processes, but complex issues that need to be understood in the development of community” (p. 18). As they speak, Suzanne and Chris demonstrate “that learning is above all a social practice”

(Nieto, 2002, p. 16), which occurs as children help their teachers make decisions, see their ideas being embraced, and create symbols to represent their group identity.

In their classrooms, these educators draw upon their life experiences as a means of empathizing and connecting with their students and serving as allies to the Black and Brown communities in which they work. They recognize the power of individual enterprise, the force that a few dedicated people can assert, the meaning behind trusting relationships. They do not lose sight of the power of individual goodness. In their pedagogy, they teach their students how to create a community that embraces differences.

Given that my participants bring their own differences to their classroom communities, coming from middle-class homes, what do they say about the differences? How do they view the contrasts that they perceive from one neighborhood to another? In the next section, I describe those poignant differences, and the human ways in which my participants embrace them.

Neighborhood Divisions

Rachel lives in a warm, comfortable apartment with her boyfriend, James. As I approach their apartment complex, the guard who monitors the entrance to the parking lot waves me through. Their home is furnished with plush furniture, wall-to-wall carpeting, and is decorated with photos of them on vacation by the sea. Their photographs capture Rachel's exuberant, loving green eyes, her flowing brown hair, and her engaging smile.

The following day, I drive through the neighborhood where Rachel teaches. I pass rows of three-story brick buildings, starkly standing side by side like military or

prison barracks. I pass day laborers sitting outside a convenient store, and bus stops crowded with men, women, and small children. As I approach the school, the bright colors that adorn the entrance to the building offer a cheerful countenance within the monochromatic neighborhood, like a green oasis in a sea of desert sand. The only other bright colors I see are the crosswalk signs and a sign declaring, “Drug Free School.” When I enter the school, however, colors are plentiful, bursting out from children’s paintings that adorn the hallways. Hope and optimism permeate the corridors, offering the children a view beyond the relentlessly uniform rows of buildings.

I meet Rachel, who is walking down the hall with her class. She inconspicuously whispers to me that the one White child in the school has just passed me by. She then introduces me to her class, telling them that I am a teacher visiting the school. As a small boy proudly announces to me, “I want to be a teacher,” I believe that in this school, surrounded by beautiful paintings and the attention of a teacher such as Rachel, a child’s view can be limitless.

What do I learn about the school building itself, apart from the decor? Rachel tells me that “only half the school was redone (renovated). She continues, “We are the only school in all of Montgomery County that’s only been half redone like that. The building is about 55 years old and falling apart, rusty and gross.” I am reminded of the even more devastating descriptions of inner-city schools in Jonathan Kozol’s book *Savage Inequalities* (1991). He writes about a school in Washington, D.C., not far from Rachel’s school. “...The basement cafeteria was flooded. Rain poured into the school and rats appeared. Someone telephoned the mayor: ‘You’ve got dead rats

here in the cafeteria” (p. 182). As I listen to Rachel and read the words of Kozol, I wonder what else the school walls, both real and invisible, hide from our view.

Hidden Pockets of Poverty Beyond the Boundaries

Driving and walking through each school neighborhood, I am struck by the pockets of poverty, as Paula describes them, existing within the same school district in which I live. I observe how these poor neighborhoods are hidden from the view of middle-class residences, and I remember words my mother spoke shortly after immigrating to the United States. Perhaps expecting a more equitable society, my mother expressed shock at the poverty in Washington, D.C. and the fact that children living in our new American neighborhood had no idea that it was there, “just twelve miles down the road.” While she detested human suffering, she believed that the hidden nature of poverty in America threatened to foster ignorance and complacency in her children, unlike the constant images of poverty and suffering that we were taught to observe in South Africa.

Paula echoes that sentiment:

If you look at Sully Park, it’s hidden. It’s off on the side, all commercial around it so if you had no reason to go into Sully Park you wouldn’t know it’s there. Jefferson Park, the whole Monroe Drive area...How do people in....(nearby wealthy neighborhoods) not know that (they are) right there...? Do they not know, or do they wanna not know?

Listening to Paula describe the poverty hidden in her school’s neighborhood does not properly prepare me for what to expect. I am curious to see the neighborhood for myself, and so I ask Paula for directions. I drive down the same street from which I arrived, but in the opposite direction. Within one block, I find myself in a dilapidated business district, with old shops and garages on the sides of

the road. Then I see the “town homes.” They are old, their pale blue paint is worn and faded, the screen doors are misaligned, and the house numbers are hand painted in large black numerals above each door. They look, perhaps, pre-fabricated; they certainly are poorly constructed. Broken furniture, toys, and soiled carpets lie on the curbs, and washing lines are strung behind each home. The parking lots contain a few old cars, many with chipped paint and other noticeable damage. Later, when I research these homes, I read that they are subsidized by the county government. They have no washers or dryers, no swimming pool, and no access to public transportation. When I call the government office in charge of rent, I am told that there is a waiting list and the waiting list is closed. I wonder about the people on that waiting list, and imagine that some may be living in the homeless shelter around the corner. Leaving the neighborhood, I realize that I am five minutes from the home of a close friend, who has just completed a sixty thousand dollar renovation on her kitchen and I wonder if she has ever heard of Sully Park.

As Rachel talks about the poverty in her school, she articulates the enormous economic divide between one area and another:

...it opens your eyes and it makes you appreciate and realize the gap between rich and poor in the United States. There's such a huge thing. I mean, within the county you go five minutes and you're in a different world.

I, again, recall my mother's words about America's hidden poverty as I remember the dire poverty that surrounded me as a child in South Africa. Walking home from Fairmount Primary School each day, I would pass “the shops.” I would sometimes stop in at the cafe, using money I had received from my parents so that I could buy them a small present. Those were the shops my older brother, Joshua, and I

stole from when we were young children, stuffing our pockets with “sweets,” which we admired back at home until a quarrel over who had more led to a forced confession. They were the same shops my father walked us back to, to return the sweets, where I apologized through my tears, worrying that I would be sent to jail. Those were the same shops around which homeless, parentless, painfully thin Black children played, slept, and begged during those years of my childhood, a childhood filled with presents and sweets and loving parents. The children stood, day after day, the smallest victims of *apartheid*, the innocent prisoners of a monstrous regime, whose suffering was not, however, persuasive enough to break the chains of their oppressors. They stood, in torn, colorless clothing, a far cry from the proud school uniform I wore as I passed them each day. The rampant poverty of South Africa burst through the pockets of the “Whites Only” neighborhoods that enclosed its victims, a bitter contrast to the sweet-filled pockets of my proud uniform jacket.

I am aware that as a teacher in a Title I school for 10 years, I, like my participants, am able to enter and exit the pockets of American poverty as I choose. I am aware that we each return to our homes at the end of the day, leaving children behind in their poor and segregated neighborhoods. I remind myself that while I cannot enforce a structural shift to create a more just society, I can and do impact lives on an individual human level. I remember that to do nothing, has the “stench of immorality” (Weisel, 1965, p. 27) and that I am doing what I believe I do best.

Paolo Freire (1998) describes his comings and goings to the world of his students:

...as a teacher, I must open myself up to the world of these students with whom I share my pedagogical adventure. I must become acquainted with their

way of being in the world, if not to become intimately acquainted then at least become less of a stranger to it. And the diminution of the distance between the hostile reality in which my students live and my own strangeness to it is not just a simple question of geography. My openness to a world that is life-denying as far as my students are concerned becomes a challenge for me to place myself on their side in support of their right to be. (p. 122)

Rachel and the other teachers with whom I converse do not only cross the economic divide by entering the neighborhoods and doors of Title I schools every morning, they also cross the divide spiritually and personally. They embody the words of Safranski (1998) as they “In action...show who they are and what they wish to do and make of themselves” (p. 382). They live according to their own personal politics as they step into the neighborhoods, homes, and lives of poor America. Along their journeys, they do not see hopelessness; they do not give up. They see human potential and hope for the future in the lives of their students. As van Manen (1991) writes, “Having hope for a child is much more a way of being present to the child than it is a kind of doing. Hope felt by the...teacher is a mode of being” (p. 67). Feeling hope, my participants do whatever they see needs to be done and they cross whatever boundaries they need to cross to get there.

At our reunion, as Suzanne tells me that she is mentoring children at a Title I elementary school in Delaware, she adds that twice a year, she buys and wraps a book for every one of the 500 children in the school, which she delivers with a ribbon and each child’s name written on the wrapping. She casually says, “Well, you know, if we want to improve literacy, we have to get books into kids’ hands.” There is no hint of hopelessness to detect. As she recalls her years as a teacher and a principal, she shares memories that I find profoundly poignant and moving:

I had Willie. And Willie came from a very poor White family. I went on a home visit because I was concerned because he was dirty...and he wasn't learning. There was a dirt floor and the heat was from a fire place.. There were animals just running around in the house and food lying around...He would come to school hungry and I thought this is just terrible. I got...I think it was 8 or 10 kids that we knew...and I brought them in and I brought the food and at 7 o'clock in the morning I was making scrambled eggs so the kids could have a good breakfast.

Suzanne's response to the dire poverty she observes in Willy's home captures

Ricoeur's (1992) words, "Morality replies to violence" (p. 221). Is a hungry child not the innocent victim of one of society's worst forms of violence – poverty? Is

Suzanne's 7:00 a.m. breakfast preparation not a demonstration of a moral reply?

For Rachel, the goal is to make herself available to help in whatever ways she believes she can:

I want the children to be able to come to me with anything. I try to do as much as I can. I'm not gonna be able to do everything but knowing what's going on, being able to get the resources...going to the counselor...we have "Linkages to Learning" you know for getting help if they need help with bills or groceries or clothing. There's a lot of resources out there and I can be the go-between or I can be the initiator and pass it on to the people who can really do what they need to do...

Paula echoes a similar sentiment as she describes her endeavors to support families:

In my school when I saw hungry families I started a food pantry so that when a family came in I opened the food pantry and I gave them bags and they could just take what they needed. It was a shoe drive so the families who needed shoes could get them without any questions being asked.

When teachers reflect on their purpose, they become conscious of their actions, and the power that their actions hold. Through their actions, they connect with their students and families intimately and spiritually. They are not afraid to cross the boundaries of humanity to show that they care. They live the words of Sonia Nieto (2002), who writes:

In order to change academic failure to success, appropriate social and instructional interventions need to occur. For teachers, this means that they need to first acknowledge students' differences and then act as a bridge between their students' differences and the culture of the dominant society. (p. 18)

By addressing the social needs of their students, including hunger and other physical needs, these teachers participate in bridging some of the divides that have the potential of leading to school failure.

Will talks about offering emotional support to a child in the hospital, which he regards as his role as the school administrator. He shares the story here:

I was just at the hospital tonight. A little second grader at our school has appendicitis. Misdiagnosed. They burst. Now she's gonna be on intravenous for...it's just a frikkin' nightmare. So I go to the hospital with her teacher at 5 o'clock tonight. She sobs when she sees us. She misses school so much. She has to stay here. She doesn't want to be here... You know how when you're sick and you see your mother and you just start crying? It was just that kind of thing. She was crying and the grandmother was saying, "Don't cry, don't cry," in Spanish and I said, "It's OK. Let her cry." I just let her have her feelings and she kept talking about it...My role tonight was...I was sent to that hospital tonight to let her actually talk about what she was scared about and talk about what she was so sad about.

Will's visit to the hospital, where he allowed a little girl to sob and to talk, while he listened, gives life to the words of Levinas (1969). He writes, "Speaking, rather than 'letting be,' solicits the Other" (p. 195). As Will "let her have her feelings" and as she "kept talking about it," the child learned how to "solicit the Other." Through Will's sensitivity, she had an opportunity to connect and communicate, using language to give voice to her feelings and to soothe her pain.

Will's compassion is an integral part of who he is. The etymology of the word "compassion" comes from Latin *compati*, meaning "to suffer with," and from archaic French, *compassione*, meaning "feeling pity" (Chantrell, 2002, p. 108). Will's actions

reveal the pity that he feels. He feels kindness and compassion and he acts. I recall my own profound experience with Will, when I first encountered his humanness and his willingness to reach out. The year was 1996 and I was returning to work four months after giving birth to my first child. Leaving my infant daughter that morning had been heart-wrenching. Although she was at my parents' home, with my own childhood surrogate mother, Sa, I was devastated to leave her. My emotions were high. Walking into my classroom, I felt overwhelmed and frightened. I felt that I had made a grievous mistake leaving Shari, and I stood at my desk frozen, unable to begin my work. Had I left enough breast milk for her? Would she cry? Was I a bad mother for leaving her? Will walked in and asked me how I was feeling. Like the little girl in the hospital, like a child who sees her mother when she is sick, I crumbled. Will offered his comfort and talked to me until I felt ready to begin my day and to embrace my new identity as a working mother.

Will understands the power of his actions. He knows that he has the ability to offer comfort. He uses that ability to reach out to other people and to offer reassurance and love when he feels that he is needed. He articulates his purpose:

I just feel like, as somebody who works with kids and thinks I have a rapport with them, I can get them to talk. People have to hold on to their feelings until they've actually expressed them. Feelings can eat them up inside and make them more tense and more nervous and more upset until they actually own them, verbalize them, and be validated.

Like Suzanne and Paula and Rachel and Chris, Will is not hindered or intimidated by boundaries. All of these teachers focus on their students and their needs. The boundaries they must cross to attend to those needs are not barriers that

keep them out. They are paths along their journeys, which they follow in order to reach their destinations.

While my participants cross over into the neighborhoods of their students, do they offer opportunities for their students to visit their homes in return? How can they legitimize their efforts to break down barriers by finding ways to make boundary-crossing reciprocal?

Invitations From Across the Border

At the end of my first year teaching at Hampstead Heights, I got married. My first-grade students, who had heard about my engagement six months prior, were excited about the upcoming celebration and I wanted them to be there with me. With the help of a few parents, my entire class attended my wedding. As they walked into the synagogue, their faces showed excitement, wonder, and nervousness; I felt pride. Shiva and Arahadnya were dressed in purple saris decorated with gold thread and they were adorned with gold bracelets. Some of the other girls wore white lace, dressed like small brides themselves. The boys proudly wore white shirts and ties, casting their jeans and T-shirts aside for the special celebration. I wonder if today, the children, now 20 years old, remember that day. For me, their presence was heartwarming. They filled my days at school with wonder and delight, and I wanted them there to do the same on the day of my wedding.

A few years later, when my daughter, Shari, is four years old, I bring her to the Head Start/Pre-kindergarten class at my beloved school. She thrives at Hampstead Heights and she remains there through second grade, the highest grade offered at the school. She is one of seven or eight White children in her grade, and she establishes

friendships with a diverse group of boys and girls. I work hard to cultivate some of the relationships, working around language barriers and parents without cars. Shari becomes especially close to a little girl named Karla, and the two little girls visit each others' homes often. Karla shares a room and a bed with her mother, which Shari asks me to explain. At age five, she begins to learn that not all children live as she does.

On one occasion, when Karla comes to our home after school, I ask the girls if they would like to lie in the hammock. "What is a hammock?" she asks, and I am reminded that children without yards do not have hammocks. I then ask the girls if they would like to bake. As we make cookies, I find myself explaining words to Karla, words that she only knows in Spanish. "What is a spatula?" she asks. "What is melt?" It becomes clear to me that these are words that are not used in school, and I am struck by the linguistic and cultural divides that remain firmly in place for low-income children who speak other languages at home, and who do not socialize beyond their immediate worlds at home.

I do what I can. I cannot rewrite history. I cannot prevent slave ships from penetrating the continent of my birth, fulfilling their barbaric missions as they pursue an era in which Africans are dehumanized, oppressed, and slaughtered. I cannot undo the terror cast upon the ancestors of my students. Nor can I stop the cattle cars filled with wretched souls from entering Auschwitz or the gas chambers from sucking the life out of 1.5 million Jewish children. I live with the pain of being taken away from the land of my birth, away from aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends, some of whom I will see only a handful of times throughout my life after we scatter to various continents throughout the world.

This is a part of my immigrant experience, a story born of *apartheid*. I know that there are other Americans who live with the stinging reminder of their painful histories, too. No matter our histories, either personal or based on our collective identities, what we do with our pain, how much we confront it, and how we channel it to help others, perhaps, matters more.

Leder (1990) writes about physical pain, but his words also resonate in their application to emotional hurt. The mind and the body share one being, and either nurture or detract from one another. Leder's words, thus, have relevance here. "Pain...is ultimately a manner of being-in-the-world. As such, pain reorganizes our lived space and time, our relations with others and with ourselves" (p. 73). How, then, do we live with our pain, and use it to "reorganize" our lives and our interactions so that we join hands rather than shake our fists?

At a recent seminar at the University of Maryland. I listen to Professor Jonathan Jansen, a South African scholar who lived as a "Colored" man throughout the *apartheid* regime, and who was a Dean at the University of Pretoria. I am struck by his strident insistence that we look ahead. "We must stop this intergenerational transfer of crap!" He demands. "We must interrupt this bitterness!" He continues:

The power of our own behavior must be a model for our students...Students won't change if you don't offer personal examples. Values are things that you live, not write about in mission statements...Where is the genuine sense of integration in our own actions? We must exchange spiritually and personally...We must convey a sense of hope and optimism...We can't give up!

I am profoundly affected by Dr. Jansen and after he speaks, I tell him that I, too, am a child of South Africa and I ask if I may hug him. His warm, human response and his embrace remind me once again that I am deeply connected to the

land and the people of South Africa, where I learned not only about injustice, but also about humanity in its finest forms, and the movement toward “the genuine sense of integration.”

In the spirit of Dr. Jansen’s words, I think about how friends and colleagues come together at the “B Years” reunion, exchanging hugs and stories, exchanging “spiritually and personally.” Race, culture, language, and class are woven throughout our community, not as seams that divide us, but as a colorful tapestry of humanity. We are brought together by the ties that forever bind us, by our “genuine sense of integration,” by our shared, common love of children and adherence to Suzanne’s mantra, “Children first.” Our histories are different, but our being-in-the-here-and-now share a common goal. As Gadamer (2002) explains, what we remember from our pasts is not concrete or absolute. He writes, “Memory must be formed...One has a memory for some things, and not for others” (p. 16). Why, then, should we allow our distinguishing histories to divide us, rather than encouraging our common goals to unite us?

We turn toward acting in the here and now, devoting our lives to educating ourselves and our students. We offer our help and our talents, because we are privileged to be in a position to do so. We cross the racial divides in America because we can. And I hope that one day, the children we teach, will have the choice to do the same.

Crossing the Boundary of Traditional Curriculum

As my participants enter the lives and minds of their students, how do they approach curriculum? With a dominant force of standardized practices imposed on

teachers by state and federal departments of education, what do these teachers do to maintain a sense of respect for each individual child and to provide opportunities for engaging and authentic lessons in literacy?

Henderson and Hawthorne (2000) provide a framework for answering this question, as they distinguish between “mainstream curriculum philosophy” and “transformative curriculum philosophy” (p. 5). The authors describe mainstream philosophy as including:

Predetermined skill-based and content-based subject learning; Use of standardized instructional outcomes; Reliance on standardized tests; Learning obedience to authority; and Learning cooperative and compliant behaviors in the context of a competitive educational meritocracy. (p. 5)

They contrast mainstream curriculum with transformative curriculum, which includes:

Thinking-centered subject learning using constructivist activities; Use of multi-literate expressive outcomes; Reliance on personally tailored performance-based outcomes; Learning diversified, lifelong, inquiry responsibilities; Learning informed, democratic citizenship related to equity, civility, and diversity. (p. 5)

Suzanne is a force of benevolence, optimism, and devotion, and shares powerful examples of teaching literacy according to a transformative model. Teaching in her school, her “crown,” her “bowl of cherries,” is one of my life’s greatest achievements, a privilege I hold sacred, as we all work to teach children how to read and write in an atmosphere of “equity, civility, and diversity.”

Seeking Ways to Celebrate

As Suzanne recalls, we celebrate at every moment that we can. Her words resonate with the original meaning of the word, celebrate, from the Latin word,

celebrare, meaning “perform publicly” or “honored” (Chantrell, 2002, p. 89). She remembers with fondness:

Oh...that was a joy. We had Young Authors’ Celebrations; we had Guest Readers and Guest Listeners. The concerts were very important. We just did special things. It was important that we celebrated. You know? If someone gets a promotion, you celebrate. If somebody retires, you celebrate. And it was important for those kids to know that when they accomplished something that it was celebrated, that this is really great. You know, it’s just like when a little baby goes, “Da da da” and you clap and go, ‘Yay!’ it’s the same thing.

I nostalgically recall making book covers for every child in the school in preparation for our Young Authors’ Conference each year. We would buy colorful fabric, cut rectangular shapes out of cardboard, and glue the fabric on top. We would tape the cover together with book tape, and bind each child’s proud piece of writing. The materials sat on tables in the teacher resource room, and we would cut, glue, and bind whenever our teaching schedules allowed. On the day of the grand event, parents and teachers eagerly awaited the children’s entry, sitting around colorful quilts and Suzanne’s home baked cookies laid on the floor, each quilt marked by the name of a children’s author. Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* played as the children walked in holding their books, and the reading began. And I remember “Guest Listener Day,” the day on which county superintendents, newspaper columnists, retired teachers, and other community representatives sat and listened to our young children read to them, presenting them with a hand signed certificate when they finished.

Another weekly celebration that I treasured was the Monday morning School Wide Meeting. For thirty minutes each day, the entire school, children and adults alike, gathered in the gymnasium to sing, read, dance, and honor achievements. One of my fondest memories was standing in front of the audience with my second grade

student, Jose, as he proudly read his piece about the tragic earthquake in El Salvador. Jose described the tragedy, talked about his family there and spoke about what he wanted to do to help.

There was an earthquake in El Salvador. Hundreds of people died. All the people cried. Some people died and people were sad because they missed their families and their babies too. I want to go to El Salvador to see what's wrong. I will help all the people in El Salvador and help them a lot. And I will help my family. I will bring them food and drink. I will bring them good things. (as cited in Landa, 2005, p. 7)

Jose's mother joined us on that morning, looking tired and worn, but proud. With the school's help, his mother had recently escaped the physical abuse of Jose's father, and was raising four children on her own. I wondered if, perhaps, for those few minutes, she was able to feel some joy, and if the framed photographs of the occasion – my gift to Jose – offered her a sense of pride in the weeks and months that followed.

So that she may also celebrate with her students, Paula reaches out to the community for support, offering another model of Henderson and Hawthorne's (2000) transformative curriculum philosophy. She recounts a politician's visit to her classroom:

Larry Giammo came in and visited the classroom. He came in and observed...He turned around and he gave me a \$500 speakers' fee he had been given so that I could do something special with my kids. I sit at parties with people and I talk about what Head Start is and a reality check for people who have no idea of the poverty in Montgomery County and at the end of the party someone will turn to me and ask, "OK how much would it cost to send a class to the theater?" And I told them and for the next seven years he sent me a check every August to cover a theatrical production for my children...

From the generosity of someone with social capital and political influence, for whom money comes more easily, Paula provides an annual celebration of the performing

arts for children living in poverty. Paula continues to describe her celebrations, not all as dramatic, but just as important:

In my classroom we celebrated every single little increment. We applauded each other, we high fived. It was just a very positive warm family atmosphere in our classroom... In March this little boy and I sat together. He was very on task and I looked at him and I said, "Baby, you knocked my socks off! My feet are freezing!" And he just smiled this huge smile. And then in April it was a very windy day. So I took a book about a windy day and I asked them to think about what the wind could blow. I said we would write some words together. And this child had so many initial sounds and I was so proud of him. And he looked at me and he said, "Miss Paula, did I knock your socks off?!" I was just pleased as punch.

In the school district where Rachel works, teachers are required to attend two evening events in their school. The mandate is created to bring teacher presence to the community, a mandate that Rachel does not need. She understands the power of her presence in the eyes of her students. She recognizes that by being there, she is celebrating their achievements and showing them that they are important:

I stay after school and go to the math nights and the reading nights and the chorus concerts and kids knowing that I'll be at their activities or whatever they're involved in I think is a big thing or that I'm coming to this math night so they should come.

When Will describes his recognition of his students, he is emphatic. Known for his verbal enthusiasm and his numerous mantras about life, the staff of Hampstead Heights presents him with a book of "Will-isms" when he leaves. He talks to me about that book:

I still have that. It's right next to my computer. It means so much to me. It means the world to me. One of them in there, and I'm so proud of it, one of the pages says, 'That child is *brilliant*.' Well, I truly believe that. If I just see a spark of something even in a kid that's not verbal, I do believe in that brilliance from that spark that I see.

Max van Manen (2003) writes about the “lived time experiences of the special days and times of the year when significant events are celebrated in the family and in the school or the community” (p. 105). As we see from these educators, such significant events can be elaborate school-wide celebrations, trips to the theater, a “high-five” or an exuberant exclamation, “That child is brilliant!”

Inherent in each celebration is validation of children and of childhood. With each celebration, my participants show their students that they are loved and valued, not only for who they are becoming, but for who they are at present.

Imagination as their Guide

The possibility of creating a world that is different from the world as taken-for-granted-as-normal is the work of the imagination. The possibility that things might be otherwise than they seem can be apprehended only in the imagination, and the strategies for resistance...reshaping, and renaming the world come only from the imagination as well. (Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2003, p. 44)

In the current climate of high-stakes testing and movement toward a nationalized curriculum, teachers are being told what to teach, when to teach, and how to teach. They are receiving curriculum guides with scripted lessons. They are being asked to teach in a lock-step fashion with their colleagues, and they are relying more and more heavily on textbooks and worksheets to prepare their students for standardized tests. Creativity? Imagination? Ingenuity? These concepts seem to be forgotten. Yet, having been a classroom teacher for 18 years, I know that the only way to address the individual developmental, linguistic, and cultural needs of children is to rely heavily on a creative and imaginative mind. When I think about teaching, and literacy teaching in particular, I remember the importance of allowing children’s

interests, thoughts, and preoccupations, and *their* imaginations, to guide my teaching as well.

During a recent visit to the day-care center where Paula demonstrates literacy lessons, a small and highly engaging four year old girl looks up at me and asks, “What’s your name?” “My name is Melissa,” I tell her. “Alissa?” she asks. “Me-li-ssa!” I respond. “It’s a long name, isn’t it?” “I like it! My Daddy’s name is Daddy. He’s my favorite. He’s big and tall!” she tells me.

As soon as I have exited the enchanting moment, the eye-to-eye contact and smiles without any pretense, the spontaneous exchange that reminds me of how much I miss working with small children, I reflect on the teachable moment that is before me. If Emily had been in my class, I might have grabbed a piece of paper, some crayons, and a pencil, and said, “Let’s go draw and write that! I’m sure your daddy would love to see a picture and some writing about him.” I could then imagine other children showing interest in Emily’s project, and my suggesting we gather on the rug to talk about Emily’s idea. I would probably, with Emily’s permission, as well as her help, write her sentence on chart paper for all children to see. After a short discussion about the words that Emily uses to describe her daddy, and about how many other words we use to describe things, I would probably tell the children that anyone interested in drawing a picture of one of their favorite people, along with some describing words, is welcome to do so. I could then imagine turning their pages into a book and allowing each child to take it home for the night. From there, I would go to the curriculum “indicators” in my guide, check off that I had covered adjectives, and go back to the children. Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen (2003) frame my story:

We continually ask ourselves: How much of the life that is lived completely outside school is welcomed into the classroom as knowledge and experience that can enrich all those who inhabit a particular classroom? How much of each child gets to come to school? When a child says, “This is me, and I am ready for you to know it,” we must try to honor this offering, not shut it out, control it, or hurry to get on with the curriculum. (p. 20)

As I converse with my participants, I begin to hear that they, too, negotiate how to pay attention to all the needs of their students, given the curricular demands that confront them. But what is it that they do? How do they uphold their moral obligation to their students as human beings under the scrutiny of data driven instruction? How do they negotiate the fact that, as Shannon (2004) explains, “Their choice of instructional materials is limited to a few official alternatives” (p. 23)? Perhaps they share Jonathan Jansen’s insight that, “Curriculum is not given by God...curriculum is only fifty percent of learning...” Perhaps they believe that the other fifty percent comes from the children.

If the curriculum calls for children to learn letter writing skills, why, for example, can’t we seize authentic purposes for writing letters? Chris describes how she does just that. She shows that while she deals with a child’s behavioral difficulties, she uses her creativity, her imagination, and her dedication to his learning, to seize a moment to engage the boy in literacy.

...one time I had to call the crisis intervention team down to the room. He was screaming and crying hysterically in my classroom and we couldn’t work. He wouldn’t calm down, he wouldn’t, you know....so I had to call for help and I had to pick up my whole class ‘cause they weren’t allowed to remove him from the room because he wasn’t a danger to himself or others. So I had to take all of my children and all of my materials and things that I was gonna need for however long, and move to an empty classroom and teach. So I ended up teaching for about an hour and a half in just an empty room with just a couple of random things because of the choice that he made. And he comes in the next day and he’s all happy and smiles, and wants to hug me. And you know, I gave him a hug but I said, “You know, Malcolm, I *am* upset with

you. And we need to talk.” We had a really big talk about what he did affected everyone in the class. And I debated about how I wanted to handle that. I thought maybe I would just have a couple of kids confront him. Then I decided not to do that...um...’cause he is really sensitive. So I had him, instead write an apology note to the kids and then he went around to each child individually... when they were just reading quietly and read it to them.

While she attends to the social and emotional needs of all her students, and maintains her instructional role under difficult circumstances, Chris sees an opportunity for reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Malcolm sees that in his life and in his world, reading and writing hold a central place in the maintaining of relationships and a respectful environment.

But Chris also articulates her frustration with the school system and its dismissal of children’s needs in place of standardization. She explains:

The only thing, the thing that gets me about this job has to do with the pressures from the County and the run around they seem to be giving us, and just the stuff they dump on us. It has nothing to do with the kids. Of course I’m gonna do my job in terms of what the County expects of me.

As Chris continues, she remains clear about what matters most:

I mean, they’re paying me to push these results and I have certain responsibilities that are part of my job, but my biggest responsibility is to do what I know is right for my kids. And I can still do that and satisfy what the County wants me to do. I don’t know how else to say that... In my mind my focus is with the kids.

Similarly, Rachel expresses her insistence that flexibility on behalf of the children takes precedence over the regimen of the curriculum. She explains:

In teaching you have to be flexible! If there’s a teachable moment, if one of my students says something and I love it I’m just gonna run with it. I don’t stick to any strict lesson plan. As I’ve been teaching more, I’ve been getting more and more laid back with the structure of the class, in the sense that we have a schedule or like...an agenda I’d say, and I like to get to all the things but if I don’t, I don’t! I don’t wanna rush. If they don’t understand something I don’t wanna rush through it and say, “Sorry, learn it at home!

In her current role as a reading and writing mentor, Suzanne provides other illustrations of effective instruction that do not forsake the recognition of children's individual needs. She describes her selection of books based on children's primary language, life experience, ethnicity, and emotional well-being:

Just recently, I had 4 different groups. What I did as a final piece was have them write a letter to the librarian recommending a book, which meant I had to choose a book for each one of those kids. OK? So I had a book for one kid...a girl...and it was a story about Mexico. It was fiction but it had a lot of Spanish words. Another child came from Mexico from a village way, way into the hills...he could barely read and barely write. I got him a picture book. A book that had no words, but he could look at the pictures and tell a story. There was another boy, a Black boy, a really sharp cookie. I got him a Patricia Polacco book, *Mr. Lincoln's Way* and I got that for him because he needed something to feel good about himself. There were two White kids in that group and one of them said to him the first day...I nearly had a heart attack. "Well, at least I'm not Black." I was livid.

Viewing Suzanne's approach in relation – in contrast – to a standardized way of teaching the same objective, her focus remains on individualizing based on her knowledge of the children. Another teacher, assigned the responsibility of teaching children how to write a persuasive letter about a book, might read a book out loud to her class and provide them with a "prompt," a beginning sentence or idea from which they must compose a letter. While the latter teacher might be fulfilling the requirements of the curriculum, she would not be attending to the children as individuals.

Suzanne illustrates the concept of curriculum as a "lived curriculum" (Aoki, 2005, p. 203), which Aoki also refers to as "the other curriculum" (p. 203). The lived curriculum, as Suzanne shows, evolves in contrast to the traditional notion of a planned, pre-determined curriculum, which is standardized and delivered to all children, regardless of their individual needs or interests. Suzanne allows "space for

stories, anecdotes, and narratives that embody the lived dimensions of curriculum life” (Aoki, 2005, p. 209), so that the lives of her students are woven throughout their lessons and their days.

Suzanne understands that she is responsible for engaging the children, and that she is responsible for providing materials and lessons that do so. For her, with her remarkable library of children’s literature books that line the shelves in her home, and her self- assigned project to purchase a book for each of the five hundred children in the school, the task is a joyous one.

For Paula, teaching four year old and five year old Head Start students requires the ability to create fun and creative lessons in order to engage the young children. She conveys her goal of individualizing instruction for each child, whether struggling or learning adeptly. She addresses the curriculum objectives, insisting that she covers them without drudgery and monotony:

You take poems and songs and books. Lots and lots of books. And you address all the phonemic awareness, all the letter ID, all the concepts about print in fun ways that totally involve the children. There are just so many hands-on games that you can play in your classroom in small groups that will get to those skills without teaching to the test. And the kids succeed.

Each time I meet with Paula, I am struck by her wealth of knowledge and her creative delivery of instruction. She masterfully balances skill-based instruction with literature, merging the two into a compelling pedagogy. High frequency words become pieces of food for a paper alligator, eaten after being read – a more palatable presentation for young children than flash cards requiring rote memorization. Wonderful verbs in story books turn into opportunities for creative movement, and books are quickly chosen based on unexpected events.

Paula embodies the concept of curriculum presented by Applebee (1996).

Paula invites her young students to “discuss” books with words, games, and creative movement. She shows, as Applebee describes:

...the process of schooling must be a process of actually entering into particular traditions of knowing and doing. Students must discuss literature they have read, not simply be taught about its characteristics; they must do science, not simply be told its results; and they must engage in mathematically based problem solving, not simply memorize formulas. (p. 36)

The Monday morning in April, when Sheila had planned to read a counting book, is a morning when we are all awakened to the howling of forty mile per hour winds. Without hesitation, Sheila decides to postpone her plan and instead decides to read a book about wind. After she reads, she invites the children to draw and write about what the wind can blow. Motivation is high because the relevance to their lives is concrete, obvious, and tangible. And of equal importance, Paula offers her students exposure to rich text that teaches them about their world.

Curriculum is never neutral. What we teach and what we don't teach are imbued with culture, both in the general sense and in relation to our daily lives. As Darling-Hammond (1997) insists, “To be effective, teachers must meet students *where they are*, not where an idealized curriculum guide imagines they should be” (p. 232). How, then, do my participants choose what to teach and what to celebrate? Do they involve the children in making those decisions? Do they incorporate the particular needs of the students as they decide what and how to teach?

Chris incorporates books into her teaching so that she can engage her students in difficult but important conversations. She uses children's literature to “mediate between broader cultural traditions and schooled knowledge” (Applebee, 1996, p.

37). In her effort to teach them about choices, and about the consequences of those choices, she draws from a favorite book of hers:

Do you know the story, *Amazing Grace*? I mean, that's a great one. I use that book all throughout the year for different things. I love to read that book and really talk to the kids because they can really connect with it. Maybe they haven't been made fun of because of their skin color or told they couldn't do something but when we talked about it I said to them, "I don't want you to raise your hand but I want you to think about if you're a boy, how many times you've been curious and wanted to jump rope with the girls. And either you tried to and someone said you couldn't because you're a boy or you didn't because you were afraid that someone would make fun of you?" And then I did the same thing with the girls.

Chris uses books to delve into life issues that she believes will serve her students well. She illustrates the importance of flexibility of curriculum and of curriculum being more than a prescribing text for teachers to follow. As Darling-Hammond (1997) explains:

If teachers are to succeed, they must have the flexibility to teach what students need to know based on what they have learned before. Teachers must also be free to use material that allows them to connect what must be taught with what students can understand. (p. 232)

Chris uses material that she chooses, to move beyond the cognitive domain of curriculum, to embrace social and emotional topics that broaden her students as human beings. She explains:

We just bought *A Chair for My Mother*, and I asked, "What do you think this book really is about?" "What's the author really trying to tell us?" I use the ocean metaphor to find deeper meanings. Like "helping each other when they need help and working really hard." I think they empathized with the mother in the story because they see that in their parents who come home from work tired but can't sit and relax.

Turning again to Applebee (1996) for an interpretation of Chris's pedagogy, I am struck by the way she invites her students to develop their own meaning from the texts they read. By asking questions, and by asking children to think deeply about a

book that has relevance to their lives, Chris models the layers and levels of curricular conversations. Applebee (1996) articulates this concept:

There is the formal curriculum as represented in lesson plans, syllabi, textbooks, or official curriculum guidelines; the enacted curriculum, which represents the transformations that take place because of the teachers' and students' interactions around the formal curriculum; and the received curriculum, which reflects how students make sense of the curricular conversations in which they are engaged. (p. 68)

Using the book, *A Chair for My Mother*, as the “formal curriculum,” Chris facilitates the “enacted curriculum” as she and the children discuss the book. As students discuss ways that they help each other and times when they have seen their own mothers tired from working, Chris monitors the “received curriculum,” which, in this case, involves inviting children to make connections from the book to their lives.

Will and Paula join in, describing the way they select and use books to teach their students about life, while also addressing the language development of the English Language Learners (ELL). I explore the centrality of language to a person's identity in Chapter Four, and again, here, where Cummins (1996) offers another perspective to introduce my participants' words. He discusses the relationship between prior knowledge and current learning:

We learn by integrating new input into our existing cognitive structures or schemata. Our prior experience provides the foundation for interpreting new information. No learner is a blank slate. (p. 17)

Paula shares what the “new input” looks like and sounds like:

It's talk, talk, talk, sing, describe what you're doing, describe every food... Words and words and words. It was read, read, read, define the words, find juicy words, act them, talk about the words, and if I could build vocabulary then my children could work on anything. I knew sooner or later they'd be able to decode words. That wasn't the part of reading I worried about. It was, “Do I know the word I just read and did anyone talk to me about the word I just read?” Language is what it's all built on.

Will echoes Cummins (1996) theoretical stance and Paula's pedagogical practice. He explains, "I acted out words as a comprehensible input thing, to get them to understand, to understand the book but also to build vocabulary." He continues with an example from his reading of the book *What Mary Jo Shared*. "I also emphasized words like *pink*, for Mary Jo's pink umbrella, because that was what *she* was so excited about. Her '*pink umbrella*.' It was to help understand the character."

With language as the vehicle for learning, the children are invited to add another layer to their identity. As Will and Paula continue to emphasize the importance of building the English language abilities of children who are new to learning English, they articulate the centrality of language for building human understanding and a sense of community. The words of Gadamer (2002) resonate:

Human language must be thought of as a special and unique life process since, in linguistic communication, 'world' is disclosed. Reaching an understanding in language places a subject matter before those communicating like a disputed object set between them. Thus the world is the common ground, trodden by none and recognized by all, uniting all who talk to one another. (p. 446)

Recognizing their responsibility in helping children to reach understandings and in "uniting all who talk to one another," Paula continues to share some of her lived experiences working with English Learners. Paula explains:

In purposeful teaching, I always look for at least three words in every book, that I think the children might not understand, and introduce those words first. And then when I come to those words in the book, I stop again and discuss those words in context to the sentence.

She continues with a rich and textured account of a child demonstrating his understanding:

I always try to teach children what a word is, with morning message, with play plans. So I was reading *Jump Frog, Jump!* I made a little stick puppet for every child and when they said the three words, they had to “Jump, Frog, jump!” They knew it was three words and that the frogs jumped three times. And later on in the day we were talking about spring and planting and I read *Muncha, Muncha, Muncha*. And it repeats this “muncha, muncha, muncha” because the rabbit’s eating all the farmer’s vegetables. And one of the little boys looked at me and said, “Miss Paula, that’s three words, just like jump, Frog, jump! And it was YES! I was so excited! This child put two and two together.

As my participants and I continue to explore curriculum models during our group conversation, feelings are strong and ideas are passionate. Committed to working in public Title I schools, my participants think about the issue a lot. They know that there are guidelines and attempted limitations to how they must teach, but they do not believe the guidelines should compromise their effectiveness. As boundary crossers in so many other ways, they become curriculum boundary crossers, too. They incorporate and assimilate the guidelines, pack them in their mind cases, and continue to journey with their students. They proceed to share their ideas.

Will begins, by suggesting that we can dissolve the theoretical dichotomy between a formal standardized curriculum and a transformative model:

As a new principal, I plan to tell young teachers, “This is your goal. Your kids have to be able to identify character, setting, whatever. But I’m expecting that you’re gonna use your own good creativity, sense, and all of the resources that you have to get them there. And along the way, I really want you to get them to think, not just to spit back what you tell them.” I rebel against the dichotomy that they’re trying to portray here.

He continues with an example of how a teacher can use a creative approach to teaching while simultaneously meeting the goals of the curriculum:

I feel that teachers have a misconception about what is really expected. I feel strongly that if you are doing teaching-centered subject-learning using constructivist activities, those children would know how many faces a cube has and if nobody had ever taught it to them they’d be able to figure it out

because they would know that all they have to do is think about it and imagine it.

Paula echoes Will's view:

I taught in fun ways. I knew I had to teach sorting, for example, but I knew there were fun ways to do it and that my babies would know sorting when we were finished. (Paula)

And, Chris speaks confidently about her response as the pressures to conform mount.

As expectations to standardize curriculum increase, teachers choose either to succumb to the pressures or they stand firm and continue to put their children's needs first. Chris addresses the pressures:

In my mind, my focus is with the kids. I'm still gonna teach the curriculum. But some people think you have to follow it like a script, but I look at it, look through it and just see what they suggest. I wanna know what to teach. I don't wanna know how to teach it. Because I think I can do it better.

Will, Paula, and Chris emphasize the importance of engaging their students with interesting and relevant lessons. They embrace the concepts of flexibility, creativity, and transformative learning, but they do not rebel against the guidelines imposed by the "formal" curriculum. They are able to cross the boundaries between the different curricula models, always with a focus on their children.

Honoring Every Sojourner

We can envision a school that models respect for every child if we engage in teaching practices like the following: invite a member of the school board to visit a school to be the audience, to sit and listen to a first or second grade child read, honoring the child's literacy skills; give each child the opportunity to read his or her beautifully bound book to an audience of parents and teachers; invite a little boy to read a piece of his writing to the whole school; patiently give children who need

additional instruction additional lessons; invite children to talk about the struggles of their parents; and turn a little girl's comment about her daddy leads into an impromptu lesson. By honoring each individual child according to his or her particular strengths, interests, and styles of communicating, are we not demonstrating that "multicultural education" is actually an acknowledgment of *individuals*? Beyond celebrating "Black History Month," beyond reading books that feature minority children, and beyond revising the curriculum to include minority viewpoints (Banks, 2004, p. 15) the curriculum can focus on the particular individuals who are present for learning.

The learning that Jose engaged in as he wrote about the earthquake in El Salvador, which he read during a school-wide meeting, was particular to Jose. While his personal connection to El Salvador may have made the topic reflective of his cultural identity, his writing is also reflective of his compassion. Another child from El Salvador may feel no inclination to write about the earthquake, or may prefer not to talk about it. The topics of the books published by the children for the Young Authors' Conference are a specific snapshot of *those* children, and create a particular curriculum of learning based on the topics they choose. Their *individual* culture, which includes their families, their interests, and all aspects of their lives, is inherently present.

We are our culture and our culture is us. No two people are the same. Two children with a shared language may not share the same religion. Children with similar shades of skin may not share the same language. Two children with a shared language and with the same shade of skin may have entirely different interests and

passions. As Nieto (2002) explains, “Culture is not something inherent, but often arbitrary and negotiated...culture is always heterogeneous and complex... (p. 13).

Thus, when we group children according to “cultural group” we are making generalizations about them. We are identifying them rather than allowing them to define themselves. By creating daily opportunities for children to shine, teachers can embody a curriculum culture that celebrates the individual and prepares them for life beyond the school walls. What, then, do those opportunities look like?

Journey toward Justice

Rachel incorporates a curriculum of social responsibility into her pedagogy, giving her students opportunities to serve others. Banks’s (2004) model of curriculum reform helps to frame Rachel’s goals.

Banks’s (2004) approach to curriculum reform involves a hierarchical structure, which includes “The Contributions Approach, The Additive Approach, The Transformation Approach, and finally, The Social Action Approach” (p. 15). At the top of the hierarchy, The Social Action Approach encourages students to make decisions regarding social issues, and invites them to take action.

Rachel naturally incorporates Banks’s (2004) Social Action Approach into her curriculum, as she guides the children in her class and seizes unexpected moments to teach lessons on life. She firmly believes that she holds some responsibility to teach her students about becoming responsible, socially conscious members of society, as well as to teach them the traditional school curriculum. She explains:

I keep my underlying backbone of what I really believe in there... You know, doing our homework every night, when I’m talking, being respectful; when there’s other people talking, being respectful and looking at them, working cooperatively in groups; being able to socially interact.

Rachel continues to describe ways in which she teaches children to become independent and self-sufficient. As she speaks, she illustrates Ginott's (1972) concept of "inviting cooperation" (p. 90). He writes, "Children are dependent on their teachers, and dependency breeds hostility. To reduce hostility, a teacher deliberately provides children with opportunities to experience independence" (p. 91). Rachel explains how she does just that:

Today, there was a whole cup full of broken pencils, and my student interrupted me to tell me that and I said, "Can you solve that on your own?" And he did. I want them to become more independent...we need to teach them more life skills not only how many edges and corners and faces does a cube have?! 'Cause in the end we need them to be able to go out into society and work and attend higher education...My first year...I chose to run the community service club because I wanted them to see that even if you don't have money to make huge contributions, you can do it with your bodies. You can do it by picking up trash around school, by helping others, by making little things out of paper to give to sick children, by doing a food drive... I want them to see how good it feels to help others.

Chris uses metaphors in her classroom, believing that they make difficult concepts about life more concrete and tangible for children. She talks to them about choices, and about the ways in which one choice – one action – can lead to consequences in the lives of others. She teaches her students about how their behavior can either hurt or help the work for a more just world. She explains:

When you make a choice it's going to get a reaction from other people. I use dominoes as a metaphor to show them how what they do affects everyone else. I tell them, "Imagine that the first domino here is you making a choice. You're this first domino. Your choice is going to affect another person and then another person... Something that you do could change the world!" When they're making a poor choice I say, "Think about the dominos." And sometimes I hear them saying that to each other!

As Chris works with her students, she models the philosophy of Sartre (1977), who writes that people are no more "than the sum of their actions" (p. 41). By

emphasizing the power of their actions, Chris shows her students that they have the potential to hurt or to help.

Children remember. They remember being humiliated. Just as I remember Miss Friedman at her garden gate and Chris remembers feeling frozen with fear in front of her third grade class, Shawn will probably “remember” Mrs. Roth “wishing he was dead.” But children also remember feeling loved, and they remember feeling inspired. Their teachers model behavior and priorities, whether consciously or not, and children receive important messages. A little boy who sharpens pencils on his own to help maintain his classroom and assist his teacher may forever remember feeling helpful and productive. A second grade boy who has been a struggling reader and writer, and who is encouraged to stand before his entire school, with his mother and sisters in the audience, and read what he has written about helping earthquake victims in El Salvador, may forever remember that moment with pride. And dominoes may forever be remembered as an enactment of choices.

In Chapter One, I share my own memories of Madame Williams and Mr. Reggio, teachers who demanded excellence, showed genuine emotion, and showed me that I could meet their expectations. At age 46, Will remembers his middle school French teacher, who communicated clear expectations, and who communicated to Will that what he knows matters as much as what he does not know.

He was funny and fun. He taught almost exclusively in French, which is very unusual. And I remember that on quizzes, you’d get one point if you had a correct sentence in French and another point if you were actually answering the question. So you could say, you know, ‘My name is Floyd,’ and you’d still get a point. As I think about it now, he had a mastery objective. His objective was that we would actually be communicating in French. Who cares if we knew, you know, how tall the Eiffel Tower was....*his* goal was for us to actually communicate in French.

Will's love of language, which was an impetus for him to become an ESOL teacher, was nurtured by Mr. Wood, and Will has not forgotten.

Suzanne, too, remembers a teacher with fondness:

I also had a kindergarten teacher who was Mrs. Desmond who was just wonderful; I just loved her to pieces. She was an older woman, and you just couldn't help but love her. I knew that she liked us. She was just gentle. She never yelled, she never screamed. And she would always compliment you and say, "Oh what a good job. Don't you look pretty today? Look at your curls." I had curls....I mean, she just made you feel good, you know? She was like a grandmother, but we knew she was our teacher.

Caring teachers leave a profound mark on children. As van Manen (1991) expresses, "For the young person, the pedagogical relation with the educator is more than a means to an end (to become educated or grown-up); the relation is a life experience that has significance in and of itself" (p. 73).

When teachers regard children as individuals, honoring their strengths, building upon their interests, seizing moments to create spontaneous curriculum, and inviting children to shine, they are engaging in a curriculum that incorporates the individual culture of each child. There is no labeling of children, but rather, children themselves identifying who they are. We are not forgetting race or language or country of origin. We simply are allowing the children to identify whether those particular aspects of their identity are salient for them, without assuming that to be so. We are not viewing all children as the same. We are merely inviting them to determine in which ways they are the same, different, or a bit of both.

Many aspects of culture are individual, and curriculum must build on that concept by allowing individual interests to guide what is taught. As Chris explains, "They're not all the same. Their culture is part of what they identify with and we need

to recognize that and appreciate that. They are all different. We need to be able to recognize differences and appreciate them.” When we view children as individuals, there is no dominance among them. And the threat of “the dominant culture prevail(ing)” (Mercado, 2001, p. 668) is minimized.

For my participants, the printed curriculum serves as a guide, not “the word of God.” The decision of *how* concepts should be delivered is a decision constructed as a joint endeavor between a responsive teacher and the children who have come to learn. In a classroom that reveals what Aoki (2005) calls “Curriculum-as-Plan” (p. 202), “students become faceless others” (p. 212). In contrast, where there is “the lived curriculum” (p. 203), “teachers and students are face-to-face” (p. 212). Standing face-to-face with their students, how do my participants connect to them, person to person? In the next section, I explore this question.

Connecting Separate Worlds

When children come to school each morning, they come from *somewhere*. They leave their homes and their lives and enter the part of their lives where they must function independent of parents and family. As “cultural ambassadors” (Landa, 2005), they move back and forth between home and school, and beyond one meeting a year between their teacher and their parents, they bounce back and forth without a systemic infrastructure for the two parts of their lives to be connected.

How do their teachers conceptualize their dichotomous lives? Do they try to lessen the schism? Do these teachers believe that families have a significant place and play a significant role in the school lives of their students? Do they forge relationships and collaborations with parents and extended families?

Building Bridges

Rachel believes that communicating with parents creates a sense of comfort and accountability for her students:

I feel like a bridge. I'm bridging the home and school connection. And when the child knows I'm interacting, that I'm gonna contact mom or dad or whoever, aunt or uncle or grandma, or the caregiver, it creates a sense of comfort for that child. They know that I'm gonna share with their parents and that their parents are gonna come to me. It bridges those two barriers you know, it breaks down the barrier.

Nieto (2002) once again offers insights to illuminate Rachel's words. Elaborating on the metaphor of a bridge, she writes, "A bridge provides access to a different shore without closing off the possibility of returning home; a bridge is built on solid ground but soars toward the heavens; a bridge connects two places that might otherwise never be able to meet" (p. 18).

Suzanne views her role as a safe and trusting confidante, and as one who is able to "make it right." Describing how she, as principal, responded to angry or upset parents, Suzanne explains:

I would let them get it out. There's an Italian phrase: *svoogatie*. Just get it out. And that's what I would let them do. I wouldn't interrupt them. And like what you're doing with my now, I would pick up on things and say, "Explain that to me. Tell me more about what happened and about why you think that happens." And so they would start to open up...

Just as Will demonstrated in a hospital room, where he visited one of his students, Suzanne models that "Speaking, rather than 'letting be,' solicits the Other" (Levinas, 1969, p.195). Suzanne neither dismisses nor chastises angry parents. And she does not become defensive. She speaks to them and invites them to speak to her, creating a spirit of collaboration on behalf of the children. She continues:

Parents would come in and be very emotional...and I would go over and hug them. I mean, what do you do when somebody's crying? You go over and hug 'em, right? I'd say, "Don't worry about it. We're gonna help him, we're gonna work together. And I did the same thing with...parents who came in and said, "How do I know my child is going to get a good education?" They would come and they would talk to me 'cause they knew they could talk to me. They knew there was somebody at the school who could make it right.

The basic humanity in Suzanne's attitude and interactions with parents rings out. One might almost consider her actions as obvious. Parents are upset and she reassures them. Is that not what we all do when someone for whom we care shows distress?

However, I need not look any further than the same school, a few months after Suzanne retires, to see how easy it can be to anger, alienate, and outrage a community. One of the most challenging moments of my teaching career occurred as I stood at the front doors of Hampstead Heights, monitoring dismissal time. With a new principal and a new school culture, I realize that changes are occurring at every level of the school. Whereas in Suzanne's school, dismissal time was an opportunity to chat with parents, admire babies, and hug children goodbye, I find myself being instructed to keep parents behind newly placed orange traffic cones that are lining the sidewalk. When several parents ignore the cones and begin to enter the school, a new staff member raises her voice and demands that they move back. Tempers quickly flare and my colleague requests that I help her stand in front of the doors. In a heightened emotional state, reeling from the awareness that my school is gone, I tell her, "I am not going to help you keep parents from entering their children's school." I walk inside the building and wonder if it is time for me to leave. The following day, when – at the request of the principal – a security guard from the school district's central office stands at the front door to monitor dismissal, my wondering turns to

decisiveness, and I begin to make my plans to vote with my feet and to leave the school at the end of the year.

The actions teachers take with parents speak volumes about their philosophy. Do they regard parents as partners or as hindrances? Do they interact with parents only when they have to, or do they welcome and embrace every opportunity to engage in dialogue? Do they contact parents only when children are having difficulties, or do they extend their hands in recognition of work well done?

According to Levin (1989):

Nothing can be more effective in driving people crazy than not listening to their efforts to communicate distress. Moreover, since we human beings are essentially social, and our sense of ourselves is constituted through our interactions with others, not being *heard* by others diminishes our capacity to hear ourselves, and may sometimes so *deprive* us of the possibility of listening to ourselves that it even becomes difficult for us to know our real needs and concerns. (p. 105)

Outside the doors of Hampstead Heights, I saw Levin's words personified, as parents' needs were dismissed and as they were deprived of articulating their concerns.

In contrast, Paula shares some of her philosophy:

On the first day of school, when I have half my group there, that night I will call every single parent and thank them for sharing their child and tell them about the day that we've had together so that the next time *if* I have an issue, it's not a bad call right off the bat. I've established that I care about your child and now because I have a problem I need your help solving it. So those kinds of inter-relationships need to be built because it's a village because it's a family in the classroom. It needs to be viewed that way. It's not just a job. It's not just an 8:30-4:30 job.

Listening to Paula's words, I have hopes that perhaps the bumper stickers that read, "Forget the village. Where's the parents?" may begin to disappear - or at least begin to model correct grammar. I hope that the words of Wild (1969), in his introduction to Levinas's (1969) *Totality and Infinity*, become enacted. He writes, "...If

communication and community is to be achieved, a real response, a responsible answer must be given. This means that I must be ready to put my world into words, and to offer it to the other. There can be no free interchange without something to give” (p. 14).

Like Paula, Rachel also expresses the importance of communicating and communing with parents. As previously mentioned in Chapter Four, having spent a year living in Costa Rica, teaching English to adults and children, Rachel now speaks Spanish. She shares anecdotes from her life as a teacher:

Every morning I have parents that come in. We speak in Spanish, we speak in English, whichever, you know, back and forth and we’ve created a really good relationship. And I like to call parents and say things I was really proud of, or send notes home. Parents know that they’re welcome in my room which is very important to me. I want them to know that I care about them, I care about their kids. It’s an open door if they wanna come and observe their kids in my classroom they can. I’ve got nothing to hide. I’m proud of what I’m doing and what their children are doing in my classroom.

Scaffolds

As they embrace the families of their students, my participants recognize that a child is part of a family, and that children do not leave behind their home identities, their life-worlds, when they walk out of their homes and come to school each day. They bring their hunger, their fatigue, their pain, and their concerns. Their teachers must decide how to attend to their needs. Chris shares a story about one of her students, who, like Tara, often asks if he may go and see the nurse. Chris shares her response to him:

Hmmm. I notice you need to keep going to the nurse during guided reading time when you’re supposed to be working by yourself and you keep coming back and there’s nothing wrong. Once you go and come back then you’re fine...So if you really need that rest maybe you need to rest at home.

Chris neither shames nor humiliates him. She makes clear observations about his behavior and suggests a solution for the problem she notes. We also see Chris addressing the physical and emotional needs of her student, recognizing how his fatigue is impacting his accessibility to learn. Putting learning front and center, Chris nevertheless realizes that learning does not occur in isolation, that learning is more than a cognitive process. While scaffolding his behavior and recognizing his physical needs, Chris also shares how she collaborates with parents.

Parents come to me and ask me what do I do? How do I get my kid to stop doing this or how do I get my kid to listen to me? They ask me basically to discipline their children or what they can do at home in so many ways....this father has asked me, "What strategies can I use at home to get him to listen to me? What can I be doing at home to support you?"

Paula also talks about the importance of being proactive with her young students, checking in with each of them as they enter her classroom in the morning. She explains that knowing her children intimately, and in their totality as members of a family, is a precursor to being able to teach them.

If you do not get to the heart and soul of the child and the family, if you do not know where that child comes from, if you don't know what needs the family has.... You cannot teach...you can't teach that child if they're hungry, if they're sleepy, if they're hurting emotionally or physically.

Paula continues to explain the particular ways that she attends to the individual needs of children. As she speaks, I am, again, reminded of Lara, who continually demanded that she needed a drink, a visit to the nurse, and a trip to the bathroom. I recall how Lara and I negotiated a reasonable number of times she could leave the classroom, resulting in her increased ability to remain with the class. Paula shares her experiences:

I had a little boy who had been away from his mother...she was a drug addict and he had been with grandma. He was *so angry* that any little thing that happened...like if his hat fell off the hook when he came in...he would fall apart. So he needed a space where he could go quietly and fall apart. And then when he was ready he would come back into the group again. So it depends on what the child's needs are. You have to address their individual needs and what works best with them.

Paula demonstrates patience and kindness as she works with children, scaffolding their behavioral development. As van Manen (1991) explains, "Patience enables the educator to bring the child into harmony with the course of time required to grow or to learn something" (p. 150).

Paula continues to describe her varied approaches with children in need of patient teaching. As she explains, her efforts are directed at one ultimate goal: what do children need so that they may succeed?

One little girl had to have a chill out time. She knew when she was getting ready to explode she'd say, "I have to go and think." Maybe the child is next to you all the time at circle time and you just need to tap their shoulder to redirect their behavior. Sometimes I had a deal with a child where I had a hand signal. He didn't get to interrupt every time, but I said he had five free interruptions during circle time. And literally, he would watch my hand and when it got to nothing he had a consequence. It's like, *what does each kid need* in order to be successful?

Van Manen (1991) offers additional meaning to uncover Paula's individualized approaches, designed to help children master the behavioral expectations of her classroom. He writes, "When expectations and goals have been set at appropriate levels, patience allows us not to worry or to give up when they are not fulfilled, when more time is needed or when other approaches need to be tried" (p. 150).

Often, there may be heart-wrenching explanations for a child's problematic behavior, an explanation that demands more than a hug or a high five. There are times when children are expected to carry tremendous burdens from home, burdens that

they cannot put to rest for a story or a word study lesson. Too often, their burdens reflect the struggles of disenfranchised populations, like the mother and son in Langston Hughes's (2003) poem, "Mother to Son:"

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor-
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now-
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Too often, their burdens remind us that our students are the young victims of a society still wrought with racism and social stratification. It is at these times that we remember how teaching in a Title I school brings us face to face with the issues of an imbalanced society, and the critical importance that we stand with our students and tell them, "Don't you fall now."

Rachel tells of a time she did just that:

This one boy...he has a rough situation at home. Very rough. His mom's been in jail and he knew she was coming back and he had this mindset that his mom was gonna come back and they would move in together and, you know, he'd be whisked away and life would just go back to being normal. And, in fact, she's in a halfway house getting, you know, transitioning back, and he's being passed around from aunt to aunt. So you wonder, you know, sometimes he can't focus, he has a lot of issues in the classroom. And I have to remember

to just step back sometimes and remember this is the situation and I have to make accommodations for that.

The child's burden becomes one which Rachel assumes as her own. But for her, it does not feel like a burden. Helping a child in need to learn, is what she chooses to do. She does not wish to do what is easy. She wishes to do what will help her students. When her colleagues complain about challenging children, describing them as horrible, Rachel responds, "I want them to see that I'm gonna love them and care about them unconditionally...even if they're "horrible." Rachel's determination reveals her strength and trust in herself. In the next section, I explore the concepts of strength and confidence among my participants, and uncover how they elicit those characteristics as they engage in their pedagogy.

Breaking Barriers and Standing Strong

I am humbled as I speak with my participants. They are committed to their work, they are dedicated to their students, and they are consummate professionals. They are masters of their craft and they are proud to say so. With pride in themselves, are they, then, better able to instill pride in confidence in their students and in the families with whom they work? Are they better equipped to intervene in difficult moments with parents when they feel that children are being mistreated? Does their confidence contribute to their vigilance and their call to action?

The word "confidence" is derived from the 1430 Latin word, "*confidentia*," which means, "to trust" (Chantrell, 2002, p. 94). How, then, do these teachers demonstrate trust in themselves so that they deflect challenges that they believe are unwarranted or unfair? How do they raise their voices and join the conversations

about education that occur *about them* but not *with them*? How do they remain true to themselves and to the words of Marian Wright Edelman (2003), the author of the words “where no child is left behind,” (p. 21) who writes, “Lord...Use me as Thou wilt to save Thy children today and tomorrow, and to build a nation and a world to where no child is left behind, and every child is loved and every child is safe” (p. 21)?

Knocking Down Walls

Rachel, who is the youngest of my participants, at age 26, defiantly challenges anyone who treats her with disrespect, who lacks trust in her. She describes times when older teachers seem not to value her opinion because of her age. “Maybe I don’t have as much expertise or years of experience,” she says, “but you need to listen to me. Maybe I have a good point.” She also describes a time when a parent challenged her judgment. “I had to show her the evidence and I had no problem standing my ground,” she explains. “You know, I’m not gonna change a grade or be any different to this parent than to the other one.” Rachel’s words and actions demonstrate that “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). As she says, she may have fewer years of teaching techniques than a teacher who has taught for 20 years, but her strong sense of “identity and integrity” provide the foundation for her “standing her ground.”

Rachel is equally adamant and confident when she feels that she needs to advocate for a parent:

I was trying to explain to this one dad...to teach him his rights, which he needs to advocate and ask for an EMT for his child. I said, ‘You need to come in and request this and you need to be at the meeting. By doing this we have more of a chance...’ And so he did and that was really nice to see that we

could work with him and we could get something done, that we could both accomplish a goal and get some things to help his son in school 'cause he was worried about his son.

Suzanne's confidence also presents itself during her first years of teaching, and grows exponentially from then. She trusts herself and she acts decisively according to that trust. In her early days, working in a non Title I school, Suzanne confronts the academic pressures from parents. She describes a meeting: "I just stood up and said, 'Now listen! I'm from Massachusetts and I can tell you right now they don't take five year olds at Harvard!'" A few years later, beginning her tenure as principal at Hampstead Heights, Suzanne again asserts her confident decision making on behalf of the children. Trusting herself, she makes immediate changes in the school that embrace her philosophy – children first – and by association, attention to families. She explains:

The first week before school, I met with a lot of people. Janet came in and I said, "Tell me what your job is." And she said, "Well, I'm the crisis intervention teacher." And I said, "From kindergarten to third grade? Why do you need a crisis intervention teacher?!" "Well," she said, "When the kids get disruptive the teachers send them to me." And I thought, "Oh, no. No, no. We're not doing that!" So I just changed her job. Because to me, if the kids were misbehaving in class, the teaching wasn't good. So I changed her job to a parent coordinator. She spoke Spanish and she was the one that did the outreach for the parents. She was the first one in Montgomery County. Hampstead Heights was the first school to have a full time parent coordinator.

Suzanne, like Rachel, demonstrates a fierce knowledge of herself and the wisdom to act on that knowledge. As Palmer (1998) articulates, "The selfhood of the teacher is key..." (p. 7). He continues:

Who is the self that teaches? ...is the most fundamental question we can ask about teaching and those who teach – for the sake of learning and those who learn. By addressing it openly and honestly, alone and together, we can serve our students more faithfully, enhance our own well-being, make common

cause with colleagues, and help education bring more light and life to the world. (p. 7)

Blind confidence can be arrogant and destructive. But when confidence is guided with vision, with skill, and with knowledge – and with “the undeniable presence of loving responsibility” (van Manen, 1997, p. 6) – mountains can be moved. Using her vision and her confidence, Suzanne also created a summer school program, which broke new ground. She tells how she proposed the program and how, “We were doing things as a staff that Montgomery County is still now trying to put in.” She continues:

I went to the school cluster PTA with all the big-wigs and everybody there and I said, “Look. If you gave every elementary school the cluster \$25,000 they could have the four-week program like we did. Think of the difference it’s gonna make for kids.” I mean, I threw everybody out of wack. Remember the summer when we had classes and the recreation program? You know, kids would have an hour of reading and writing, of language arts, and then they’d go to recreation time. Then they’d come and have another class, then they’d come and have a hot lunch ‘cause I wasn’t gonna deal with those hard as rock nectarines anymore and those frozen sandwiches. No!

I recall my joy as I taught a class during the first year of Suzanne’s summer program. I taught a class of children who would be starting first grade the following fall. Pursuing my favorite unit of teaching and learning, we focused on the ocean. We read books, wrote our ideas, gathered with other classes to sing, and met as a school to recite poems about the sea. But Suzanne knew that for many of our children, the ocean remained a mystery. And so on the last day of summer school, we loaded the children onto buses and we took them to the beach. For Suzanne, it was simply the right thing to do.

The courage to say no, and doing good because that is what is right, are the responsibilities of good teachers. When my friend, Sherrie, and I said, “No, we’re not

doing that!” in response to our principal’s insistence that we participate in an awards’ assembly, we knocked down a wall of emotional oppression against young children. By saying no, we said no to sending our students a message that we valued some of them more than others. We stood firmly and announced that, for us, teaching was an act of the heart, and that we could not participate in a heartless display of favoritism. Sherrie and I showed that “identity and integrity are more fundamental to good teaching than technique – and if we want to grow as teachers – we must do something alien to academic culture; we must talk to each other about our inner lives...” (Palmer, 1998, p. 12).

When we examine our inner lives, do we find walls that need to be knocked down, hiding inside each of us? Do we need to remain vigilant about our own beliefs and attitudes that may be damaging to children? Do the confusing messages we receive about our own and others’ identities, and the ideas of other people that we read, threaten to contaminate our own self-perceptions? How do we maintain a stance of responsibility for the well-being of our students, living the words of Levinas (2001), who says, “all men are responsible for one another and I more than everybody” (p. 169).

As he reflects on his interactions with children, Will struggles with his perceptions about his expectations of different children. He engages in deep soul searching and painful acknowledgements, as he describes a conversation he has with Tad, a child who has behaved inappropriately on the bus. As he speaks, Will refuses to retreat from his troubling realizations:

I’m interviewing kids who might have had something to do with pushing and shoving on the bus. “Tad...come here. I need to meet with you.” So this

attractive fifth grade Black boy comes with me, we sit down. “Well..Mr. Taylor, I just wanna begin by saying that before this ever happened I was aware of this situation...” And my prejudices just hit me in the face. The kid was not supposed to be...(pause) articulate...

As Will continues, he explains that, in his experience, referring to Black Americans as “articulate” is highly insulting. He explains that the comment is inherently racist and prejudicial because it implies that “articulate” Blacks are rare and exceptional, while suggesting that Whites are simply *expected* to speak articulately. Will elaborates:

So I was aware of how surprised I was that this little Black boy was extremely articulate. If a little White kid had sat down dressed exactly the same way, ‘cause you know, Tad is well dressed, you know, good looking kid, well kept, if a White kid had sat down the same way, it would not have surprised me.

As I probe to understand Will’s sense of surprise, he continues, unraveling how the surprise is inextricably linked to his expectations.

It surprised me ‘cause I wasn’t expecting it. Now, if I try and unpack why I wasn’t expecting him to be, that’s not an easy thing to unpack. I can’t say exactly why I wasn’t expecting it. I can try, but it’s a guess ‘cause it’s just subconscious why I was surprised...I don’t exactly know. Um...(long pause) I was expecting him to speak in a more street language kind of a way, um...

Will becomes more and more pensive as he tries to understand himself. I ask him if his surprise might be associated with the fact that Tad seems “different” because he speaks differently from most Black boys he knows, including his own two sons. He answers very softly, “He is. He is...But I don’t wanna be surprised!”

Will continues to excavate the meaning he finds in his reaction to Tad, and emerges with an understanding of his own beliefs about “Black urban language” and “standard English.” Fox (1997) refers to “Black English or Black English Vernacular” (p. 237) as “Ebonics” (p. 237), and defines it as “a dialect of American

English. Fox explains, “It is not a separate language and it is not in itself slang, though it, like all languages and their dialects, employs slang to some degree” (p. 237). Showing his awareness of the dialect, Will tells more. “Because of my fascination with language...I love how Black urban language is very, very sophisticated and intricate and rich and full...I love that.” Will, then, proceeds to work on discovering why he expects *every* Black child to speak “Black urban language,” while simultaneously acknowledging the importance he places on code-switching and mastering different registers of English. He seeks to untangle his beliefs, struggling to find the right words:

I think...all kids have to learn you know the different registers of language and be completely fluent in basic standard English so they can get ahead in life. But you know, they're fifth grade. They're still gonna be doin' a little bit of this (hand gestures) when they're talking' But not Tad. So...(long pause...sigh) This is a great, great discussion. There's something about, um, you know the value we place on standard English versus Black English. I am ..intrigued...with Black urban language but (long pause...) there is a value in....there is great value in being able to navigate standard English dialect as well. So a kid who sits down in front of me (long pause) and is speaking beautiful standard English (long pause...sigh...long pause) I'm gonna expect that more often from a White kid...I think...(long pause...silence). And I have a lot of guilt about that....

Will seems to be struggling with what he knows about Ebonics and its relationship to race and class. Is his guilt, therefore, reflective of the societal injustices associated with the dialect? Fox's (1997) words help to frame Will's guilt:

Ebonics...is associated with a group of people already indentifiable because of race and economic status...Ebonics stirs images of the problem of urban life – poverty, crime, unemployment, substandard housing, inferior education...people of all races express the belief that, if the young people can escape the language, they might also escape the poverty and the other problems that seem to go with it. (p. 238)

Will continues, seeming to suggest that he has, in fact, internalized an association between Ebonics and poverty, perhaps with the suggestion that he believes that poverty is the fault of those who live in its grip. He also considers the possibility that his perception lies with his association between intelligence and code-switching.

Now, if I thought that it was a benign thing where I was just expecting one kind of language from one kid and one kind of language from another kid that would be less troubling. But I'm obviously ascribing some sort of intellectual capacity with that ability...at least with the ability to code switch. I'm deeming this kid to be bright and that kid not to be bright based on their verbal abilities...

As Will reveals the part of himself that he finds distressing, he nonetheless continues to probe. And in doing so, he begins to reconcile with himself.

So that's troubling. Even though, here's the thing, here's one silver lining once I get to know the kid I make my decision about...(sigh)...God forgive me...about whether the kid is bright...why I should even be trying to decide whether the kid is bright...you know we're not supposed to do that anymore at all...cause they're all bright...but I make my decision about whether the kid is bright based on actual information. Oh wow...wait...I wanna say just that again. OK? I make my decision about whether or not I think the kid is bright based on actual information. What I'm aware of is my presupposition, the stuff that I come to that first interaction with. That's what I'm aware of.

Will's courage intrigues and touches me. He engages with his own feelings in a way that threatens to reveal a distasteful side of him. But he does not shy away and hide. He chooses to continue exploring his interaction with Tad until he finds an answer. He does not hide from the truth. He chooses to acknowledge the answer even though it shames him.

Vivian Paley (2000) writes about her own attitudes and expectations toward the Black children in her classroom, showing how she elicited different responses to Black and White children. Paley shares how she attends to her realizations and emerging self-awareness as she writes:

I begin to watch myself. Do I respond to each child in a similar way? What sort of behaviors draws my attention? The self-scrutiny proceeds with no formal plan but is rather a collection of random thoughts and fragments of conversations in scraps of paper. (p. xiv)

Like Paley (2000), Will's honesty about his own humanity humbles me. His willingness to excavate his deepest beliefs – that he has an initial, visceral reaction to children and his language expectations of them, based on their race – reminds me about the need for such honesty among those of us who choose to teach young children. With honesty and openness, can we, then, begin to internalize a belief in the hybridity of identity, as I discussed in Chapter Four? Can we work to knock down the wall within us that separates our tendency to judge and to expect on the one side, from the work we need to do to view each other as individuals on the other?

Just as in life and in love, the absence of truth and honesty renders us hovering on the surface of existence, without the depth and passion that life has to offer us. We might live in an intellectual realm, convincing ourselves and others about our own happiness, but do we really feel the kind of joy that causes a visceral ache in our hearts? The same applies to teaching. Can we ever fully engage with our students if we lie to ourselves about what we believe about them? Are we truly able to see the limitless potential in their eyes if we do not believe they can reach beyond the horizon, beyond borders? Can we ever break down the walls that divide us from our students if we continue to build walls within us, dividing our hearts from our minds?

Following the Equity Trail

As I listen to Kris Guitierrez give a talk in Chicago (2007), I am intrigued by her words. She is passionate in her conviction about the need for action. She speaks about policy changes and about attitudes. She talks about equality and about

hypocrisy. She states, “We need to look at the ecologies that cannot be reduced to variables. We need to re-evaluate how we measure schooling because it doesn’t match the social realities. We need to challenge the meta-narrative that minority kids are a problem and the meta-narrative of fear. Equity is used as a rationale for “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) but then it drops out.” As Meier and Wood (2004) emphasize, NCLB focuses entirely on “a narrowing of the (test score) gap between rich and poor students” (p. xxi):

Compelling research on larger themes – the social reasons for school dropouts, the weakness of social capital in regions with apparently “low performing” schools, the misdesign of many schools, the evidence of growing inequities among population groups and communities, the impact of now ubiquitous media on the basic learning of children and adolescents, for example – find no place in the act. (p. xxi)

Guitierrez demands, “The equity trail must be followed. How much data do we need? Action must be taken now!”

Reflecting on the lives, the words, and the actions of Suzanne, Rachel, Paula, Will, and Chris, I know that there are teachers who understand and embody these ideals. These teachers work for equality and fight the hypocrisy. They adhere to the requirements mandated by the school system but not at the expense of their students’ individual needs or their own creativity and knowledge. They measure their students’ performance with an eye to their own teaching as well as to quantifiable data, and when their students struggle, they find out why and they make adjustments. They know their students as children first, and they are aware of the social realities of their students’ lives and the challenges faced by their families. When their students struggle, they do not judge, but rather, they ask how they can help and they advocate and collaborate on behalf of their students. They do not rest until they see that their

students are learning. They provide food and shoes, as well as lessons about life and fairness. They offer comfort and compassion as well as books and paper and pencils. They believe that their students are worthy of love, of praise, of respect, and they celebrate their successes, knowing that failing is simply not an option.

How, then, can I use the remarkable illustrations – the “practical theorizing” (van Manen, 2003, p. 120) - of effective teaching that my participants have so generously shared with me? How can I translate their stories into implications for pre-service teacher education? On one level, the experiences shared by my participants convey the daily challenges of being a teacher. Their stories convey the unexpected, unplanned events that characterize teaching, a profession that demands flexibility, humor, and spontaneity. On a deeper level, however, their stories communicate philosophical beliefs and world views. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from both aspects of the accounts shared in this chapter.

I explore these questions and these lessons in Chapter Six, as I offer suggestions for how to begin an “equity trail” for each pre service teacher, as he or she joins the privileged ranks of America’s teachers of young children.

CHAPTER SIX

FOLLOWING THE EQUITY TRAIL: A KALEIDOSCOPE OF LEARNING

Bringing it all into Focus

My call to phenomenology first came many years ago, when I realized that I resist trying to quantify human behavior. As a classroom teacher, I chose to include lengthy narratives in my students' report cards, feeling uncomfortable with assigning letter-grades to young children. Nor could I follow teaching and grading formulas without feeling that I was dehumanizing and standardizing children. Rather, I saw each child in my classroom as a contributor to our fluid and collective mosaic of childhood and learning.

Now, as I approach the end of this phenomenological excursion, I am faced with the responsibility of articulating the transformations I have experienced along the way. As van Manen (1997) explains:

The theoretical practice of phenomenological research stands in the service of the mundane practice of pedagogy; it is a ministering of thoughtfulness. Phenomenological pedagogical research edifies the same attentive thoughtfulness that serves the practical tactfulness of pedagogy itself. (p. 12)

I approach this enlightening task – reflecting on my personal transformations – by continuing to share my journey with my fellow sojourners: Suzanne, Paula, Will, Rachel, and Chris. Together, we explore many powerful ideas, which I presented in Chapters Four and Five, and I now think about how those ideas influence our sense of who we are as educators. By examining the words I have written, I seek to demonstrate how my “phenomenological research description carries a moral force” (van Manen, 1997, p. 12). How can the ideas I share affect our work with children?

How can we learn from my excavations in ways that can be productive and transformative to teacher education? How can we better follow a moral path as we teach, to serve the children in our schools?

In preparation for guiding future teachers, I realize that while they cross the boundary from student to teacher, I am about to cross another boundary, the boundary between researcher and teacher educator. What have I learned from my phenomenological journey about myself? What have I learned from the words and experiences of my participants?

Pieces of the Picture

Remaining true to phenomenology – the theory of the unique – I do not attempt to cast the words of my participants into a static, permanent picture, with the intention of sharing results or suggesting its replication. As van Manen (1997) tells us:

As in poetry, it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study. ..the poem itself is the result...So phenomenology, not unlike poetry, is a poetizing project; it tries an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling...thinking on original experience...(using) language that authentically speaks the world rather than abstractly speaking *of* it...(p. 13)

Rather, I examine the essence of what I have uncovered, through the lived experiences of Will, Rachel, Paula, Chris, and Suzanne. What have we learned about ourselves – about our choices and about our interactions – and what it is that we do in our classrooms?

Van Manen (1997) writes about the essence of a phenomenon, helping to capture my meaning. He explains:

The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of...that phenomenon. In other words, phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience...The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner. (p. 10)

How might the essence of my exploration serve as a guide for teacher education in early literacy, so that pre-service teachers can learn to uncover the unique, rather than quantify a standard? Like a kaleidoscope that shifts its images of shapes and colors, each one as beautiful as the last, how can we help emerging teachers have the courage to create their own designs, with the confidence that they, and that each child, have a unique and valuable contribution to make? How might we guide them to approach literacy education as a creative and evolving process, rather than a formula? This chapter explores possible interpretations to respond to these questions.

My participants describe their personal choices and their daily travels across boundaries, as they choose to work in Title I schools. As well as choosing to physically cross the economic and racial divides, passing through neighborhoods with guarded parking lots and lush, green lawns, and into neighborhoods with monotonous rows of apartment buildings and a colorless landscape, they also explore the ways in which they move across socially constructed concepts such as race and culture. They teach in a time when schools remain highly segregated and emotions are high. As Kozol (2005) writes, quoting schoolteachers, “If you want to see a *really* segregated school in the United States today, start by looking for a school that’s named for Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks” (p. 24). My participants brave the oppressive forces of separateness, and work toward the vision of a world that celebrates

differences and builds community, all the while honoring individual voices. They embody the ideal described by Giroux (1992), by “organizing schools and pedagogy around a sense of purpose and meaning that makes difference central to a critical notion of citizenship and democratic public life” (p. 174).

In addition, as they discuss their pedagogical practices and their engagement with curriculum, I discover that they are also curriculum boundary-crossers, finding ways to negotiate an increased emphasis on standardization, while maintaining their responsibility for meeting the needs of their students. Listening to the powerful forces of human choice and determination to cross boundaries, I wonder what lessons can be gleaned for teacher education.

Pieces of Identity

My journey leads me to realize that a guiding force underlying boundary-crossing is the boundary-crosser’s sense of identity, which exists within a tension between inner knowledge and outside perception. As I did in Chapter One, my participants work to untangle their own sense of identity, realizing that by crossing the boundary of race and culture, they are called upon to examine themselves. They also realize that their identities are continuously being shaped by those around them, and they talk about the tension created by the two forces as they share their views on who they believe they are, and how others perceive them to be.

Sartre (1977) addresses the subject of perception, suggesting its inherent subjectivity and its inextricable tie to choice:

Perception depends upon this pre-existent element of choice, which determines the form in which we perceive...every phenomenon of which we become aware. What is perceived is not the reflection of something objective

which the mind duplicates within itself; it is the result of that something and of the mind's percipient activity...There is, therefore, no objectivity. (p. 13)

Sartre's words suggest to me the subjective nature of phenomenological research itself, and the importance of inviting each child and each teacher to speak on his or her own behalf. In this spirit, my participants and I articulate new, unique, and multi-dimensional aspects of our identities as we speak to each other. We reject the limits on our identities imposed on us by others, and recognize the choices we have about who we are and who we want to be as we work in a world plagued by inequity and injustice.

A piece of myself. I began this process in Chapter One, and as I reflect further, I remember the events from my life that brought me to my abiding concern – the experience of early literacy teachers who choose to work with low-income minority children. Images of South Africa, memories of immigrating, remembrances of beloved teachers, and moments from my life in classrooms, form the pieces of my past, which collectively merge together into a colorful collage of my life's journey into teaching. I recognize that while some people may view me as a White woman, they do not see the complex layers of my identity, of which being a White woman is just a piece. They do not know about the “lasting scenes of experience and reflection and memory” (Casey, 1993, p. xiii) from my life which have shaped my identity as it is today.

David Grossman (2007) captures this tension, as he writes about one of the Jewish and Israeli legacies, the widely held though inaccurate notion that Jews only know two ways of being: the victim or the aggressor. He challenges this notion as he writes:

All of a sudden I am not condemned to this absolute, fallacious and suffocating dichotomy – this inhumane choice to “be victim or aggressor,” without having any third, more humane alternative. When I write, I can be a human being whose parts have natural and vital passages between them; a human who is able to feel close to his enemies’ sufferings and to acknowledge his just claims without relinquishing a grain of his own identity. (p. 31)

Grossman’s (2007) poignant words have personal relevance to me. As I explained in Chapter One, Israel, which represents a central place in my life and a symbol of my identity, remains a magnet for world opinions and a place for rhetoric to marinate.

The constant attention Israel receives often causes me pain and frustration, and, yet, I realize that I can choose how to respond to incidents when they occur.

Recently, as I was leaving the university campus, I found myself driving behind a car with a bumper sticker that read, “Stop Israeli Apartheid,” a phrase that became popular in the 1980’s when college students began to pay attention to South Africa and called for divestment, while simultaneously responding to the Palestinian *intifada*. Angry but calm, I pulled up next to the driver prepared to ask, “Have you ever been to Israel?” and “Did you go to South Africa during *apartheid*?” but he drove away before I had the chance. In this moment, I knew that I had changed. More aware of who I am today, and what I believe about myself, I feel more able to talk about issues around identity and belonging, conscious of my ability and my right to name and identify myself, in spite of others’ attempts to label me. I have learned to talk about my “inner life,” which Palmer (1998) notes as a fundamental characteristic of an effective teacher. I have experienced the affect of phenomenological research, which van Manen (1997) describes as having “a transformative effect on the researcher himself or herself” (p. 163). He continues to explain:

Phenomenological research is often itself a form of deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness and tact, and so on. (p. 163)

Pieces from my participants. Similarly, my participants articulate the ways in which they view themselves, resulting in their own “increased thoughtfulness.” Will discusses his belief that he is “a good guy...cool...not prejudiced...and really enlightened.” Yet at the same time, he worries that he will do or say something that might hurt a Black person, and reveal him as being racist. He also discusses his role as a father of two African American boys, a role that is central in his life, but hidden from view when he is not with them. He describes their conversations and their jokes about race, a prominent discussion point in their home:

They were both five when we adopted them. One is now 18 and one is 13. And so we talk about it a lot. More in a joking way than anything else and it’s usually brought up by them. They make fun of me for being White and make fun of me for talking White. It’s pretty constant. Dean, who’s 13, will say (mockingly), “Oh, isn’t that in-te-rest-ing!” He’ll make fun of me and he’ll think it’s hysterical.

Rachel’s tension around her identity stems from being Jewish and from growing up with a single mother. As she says, “Sometimes I don’t think people understand me.” She expresses her pain and dismay at continuing to hear disparaging jokes about Jews, which resonates with me as I recall comments such as, “That school is too Jewish.” Rachel also articulates the manifestations of her Jewish identity, including her awareness of the painful history of her family in Nazi Europe, an aspect of her identity that she shares with Paula. And Suzanne, the daughter of Italian immigrants, describes her personal view of who she is when she works with children and families, “I forgot about being White. I related to the immigrants because my parents were immigrants. My mother often spoke of how hard it was for her in

school, as she was seven when she came. There were eight in her family and she came just at the start of WWI . So my race didn't matter as much as my ethnicity.”

Painful pieces. Finally, my participants explored their own perceptions and expectations of their students and families. Recognizing the challenges faced by these children, including the challenges that poverty brings, they realize that their high expectations and their attention to children’s individuality can help to determine a child’s success. Nonetheless, in some instances, my participants find themselves exploring painful realizations about their expectations, leading them to engage in further discussion of their inner lives. Together, we discovered aspects of our inner beings that we had not explored before. At this point, I am left wondering if we all proceed through our days and our lives without ever examining our deepest feelings and our fiercely-held attitudes.

When I listen to Will’s courageous acknowledgement that he holds expectations about language based on the race of his students, I realize that I have my own acknowledgments to make. When I do, I, too, make a fascinating and troubling discovery. I am standing in a movie theater, buying popcorn and a man and his small son walk up to the counter next to me. I hear the father speaking Spanish to the man next to him, as his son peers over the counter. I, then, hear the father asking his son, “How much does the candy cost? How much money do we have? So how much change will we get?” I smile and I am touched by his attention to his son’s learning. I immediately realize that I am touched because the man is Latino, and from so much of what I have read, many Latino parents do not participate in their children’s education.

When I reflect on my reaction, I shudder. I do not know whether my reaction would have been different had I not read research on oral language development, school readiness, and academic gaps based on racial and socio-economic categories (Hart & Risley, 1995; Lee & Burkham, 2002). I do know, however, that I must work to undo the expectations based on generalizations I have read. How can I remember to have confidence in my own experience? How can I remember that lived experiences and the phenomenological theory of the unique must guide the teaching that I do with literacy teachers of young children?

I strive to remember the individual identities that each child brings to school. Just as I choose which parts of myself to bring forward, so do children, and they must be free to make those choices for themselves. Because of, not in spite of, the continued racism, discrimination, and segregation that taint the United States, public schools need to minimize the focus on race – questioning the assumptions made about individual children based on race – and transform the ways we think about each other. If teachers allow children to define themselves, to *choose* their identities, accepting whichever identity they bring forward, children will learn that they are loved and respected, and will feel confident that they have important contributions to make to the world. By welcoming children’s identities, in all their permutations, teachers can practice what Giroux (1992) calls “border pedagogy,” the way in which “difference becomes the intersection of new forms of culture and identity” (p. 174). By seeing that they, indeed, have choices to make about how they wish to live to the world, children will be equipped to confront difficult choices that life inevitably presents to

all of us. Many children will make race the central piece of their identities, but some will not. Whatever they choose, the choice must be theirs.

Sen (2006) writes:

...the role of reasoned choice needs emphasis in resisting the ascription of singular identities and the recruitment of foot soldiers in the bloody campaign to terrorize targeted victims. Campaigns to switch perceived self-identities have been responsible for many atrocities in the world, making old friends into new enemies and odious sectarians into suddenly powerful political leaders. The need to recognize the role of reasoning and choice in identity-based thinking is thus both exacting and extremely important. (p. 8)

How can I now contribute the idea of exploring our inner lives to the conversation about teacher education, so that students are given the opportunity to explore their identities and recognize the importance of allowing children to do the same? In the following section, I explore the possibilities.

Magnificent Mosaics

As college students decide to enter the teaching profession, they cross a border of their own. They begin to prepare for their transition from being students to being teachers. They begin to adopt a new identity. Like a kaleidoscope that shifts its shapes and colors, pre-service teachers must learn to explore their beliefs as they interact with children, creating colorful and ever-changing constellations of human connections. As they do, how can we, their own teachers, join the constellation, helping to shape and color their voyage? How can teachers learn to recognize the particular hues, shades, and shapes of their own, and of each child's identity, without putting color before individuality? How can they understand that the collective mosaic is only as beautiful as each of the pieces, and that each piece must be treasured for the whole picture to emerge?

Colorful Pasts

Pre-service teachers might begin by examining their own identities, as I have done with my participants. Then, perhaps they will begin to conceptualize themselves as co-creators of a kaleidoscope mosaic, who turns the cylinder to create new designs, and as pieces in the picture.

Pre-service teachers, invited to do their own searching, can unearth the moments from their lives that bring them to their current turning – their choice to become a teacher. We can invite them to write about their childhoods, their school experiences, and their moments of shame and of success. They, too, can describe memorable teachers, ones that humiliated them and others that inspired. Their words can, like Chris', remind them of how they want to treat their own students, remembering the horror of feeling publicly shamed. Their memories can also arouse smiles and laughter, as Madame Williams's memory does for me, and as Mr. Wood's unique way of teaching French does for Will. We can ask them to think about the teachings of their parents, and the stories from their childhoods.

As Palmer (1998) shares:

Encounters with mentors and subjects can awaken a sense of self and yield clues to who we are. But the call to teach does not come from external encounters alone – no outward teacher or teaching will have much effect until my soul assents. Any authentic call ultimately comes from the voice of the *teacher within*, the voice that invites me to honor the nature of my true self. (p. 29)

Whatever pre-service teachers choose to speak about, the more trust we establish, the greater the likelihood that they all will uncover moments of pain and struggle, because no one's life is free from hurt. When they do, we have the opportunity to

engage in conversations about empathy and compassion, recognizing the bonds of humanity that are formed when we dig within ourselves and reach out toward others.

Having taught undergraduate pre-service teachers for three years, there are a few moments that stand out in my mind that transformed me, and, I believe, my students. On one occasion, as a young woman begins to sob as she describes how her mentor teacher reprimanded and humiliated a first grade boy for lying. By empathizing with the child, and feeling compassion for him, she feels a flood of rage and anguish, and she feels safe enough in our class to express herself. As she sobs, she speaks, not hiding her face, knowing we want to hear her story. As she speaks, the student next to her rubs her back, and the rest of us listen.

When she is finished, I explain that her display of compassion for a child is a gift that will serve her well. I express my admiration for her, admiration that “translates emotions...in the face of that which oversteps the mark” (Derrida, 1987, p. 14). We, then, talked about ways to draw upon our own experiences and memories as anchors for empathizing with children and seeking understanding for their behavior.

Their emotions, and the way they express them, are sources of tremendous information for teachers. The rage, anguish, joy or pain that they feel, offer foundations for their empathy and compassion toward children. How can teachers, then, become more aware of their feelings? How can they turn back to their own childhoods to remember the emotions they felt as children?

Capturing an Image

As we speak, and as we listen, we are unable to observe our own expressions. We feel strong emotions, but we cannot see our faces. On occasion when my eight

year old son, Adam, feels upset or angry and a mirror is nearby, I notice that he watches his reflection as he yells or cries. He seeks to make a connection from how he feels to how he looks as he feels those feelings.

While we cannot see ourselves without a mirror, we can turn to the power of the camera. My grandmother, Jane Finn, taught me about the magic of photography when I was a child, and her lessons have stayed with me until today. She was a nationally famous portrait photographer in South Africa, and a pioneer – being one of the first professional women entrepreneurs in the country. In the 1930's my grandmother established a photography studio in Johannesburg, creating magnificent portraits of all who came to see her, including her children and grandchildren. My favorite pictures of myself as a child are the portraits she took. I am struck by my eyes every time I look at them. The shape and color have not changed, but the messages that they convey transform my image from one of innocence and joy to one of uncertainty and tentativeness. They are the eyes of childhood.

Today, I photograph my own children. The wall that lines my stairway displays annual portraits I have taken of each of my two children. Each year, I capture them looking at something that holds their interest. Their heads are turned slightly, so that I see three-quarters of their faces. They sit in fall leaves, on warm beaches, and on the grass in front of our home, looking beyond the camera's eye. They remain forever mine, and yet they are looking away from me, beyond our lives together, into their futures. Like Rachel's student professing, "I want to be a teacher," I want my children to feel that their futures are limitless and that they can cross any boundaries they choose. I want this for my own children and for the children I teach. I wonder if

pre-service teachers might explore whether they share this desire, and, if so, how they can convey that sense of hope and inspiration to their students.

Using the power of the camera, and of our own eyes, pre-service teachers can look at photographs of each other as children, seeking to unearth the emotion captured in the camera's grasp, and share conversations that uncover what the images seem to say about the younger versions of ourselves. For each one of us, our own faces remain a mystery. When I speak, I cannot see myself. When I feel a strong emotion, I cannot see the way my face conveys that feeling. As Anton (2001) examines:

...my seeable face is not for-me but is for-others. My face, as it is for-me, is not an object I am directed toward, but rather, it is part of the lived-body's means of being-toward...a face is part of the lived-body's comportmental directedness, part of the intention the body maintains toward objects, persons, and events. This also means that faces, as being-for-others, are equally expressive fields by which we, as outside ourselves, are present for others' viewing...We can "see" objects of concern "on" the faces of others...the seeableness of my face exists only through other people; it depends upon others for its releasement and appropriation, even if this flees from me. (p. 65)

By peering into the eyes of ourselves in a photograph, we can try to uncover some of the mysteries of our childhoods, and remember moments that bring us closer to the young children we now teach. Like the photograph of the "African Staff" in my school yearbook, from life in 1973 *apartheid* South Africa, a photograph can speak volumes.

While we each create our own unique mosaics of memories, some of their shades and shapes may resemble each other and offer opportunities to blend and merge ideas, and to share feelings. As I read *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003), I am struck by the poignant familiarity I feel with the story's characters. While Ashima is

from India, and I from South Africa, we are both immigrants, both touched by a duality of loyalty and belonging, never feeling completely at home. Whereas her children have grown and left her, while mine are still at home, I proudly anticipate the day that my son and my daughter will find their own path into the world without me, realizing that everything I do with them and for them is in preparation for that time. While she is returning to India for many months, while my visits to South Africa are infrequent and brief, as I read, I feel her anguish:

Ashima feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone...She feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign...For thirty-three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked ...She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. Though his ashes have been scattered into the Ganges, it is here, in this house and in this town, that will continue to dwell in her mind. (p. 278)

As our students turn toward their choice to become teachers, they will simultaneously turn the kaleidoscope of their lives, bringing into focus the moments that contributed to their desire to teach. They will create an image of themselves, comprised of each precious piece of their identity, soon to be brought forward to touch the lives of children. They will do what Maxine Greene (1994) describes: "To reach into my own story" (p. 1). Being conscious of who they are and from where they have come, they will be aware of their own pain, their own struggles, and their own moments of difficulty. With self-awareness in full fruition, they will, then, be poised to experience empathy for the struggles of their students and families.

Forming New Constellations

As I reflect on the significance of my own hermeneutic journey, during which I have made meaning from words I have read and words I have written, the power of literacy has deeper meaning for me now than ever before. From reading the words of brilliant philosophers and scholars, to speaking and listening to my remarkable participants, and, finally, to transposing my thoughts about my phenomenon into written words, I have explored my inner world and the lives of my participants. My literate journey has been enlightening and personally liberating, allowing me to give form to images and ideas that had been confined to the private, inner-workings of my mind.

Now, the circle of my present journey begins to close. I have excavated and explored the experience of teaching young children to read and write, and to think about their lives. By teaching young children to be literate, teachers offer them the same gift that I have received throughout this exploration, the gift to be able to read and write and to explore their world with words.

As Sartre (as cited in Greene, 1994) notes, reading and writing do, indeed, represent one of the finest freedoms available to human beings:

...At the heart of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral imperative. For, since the one who writes recognizes, through the very fact that he takes the trouble to write, the freedom of his readers, and since the one who reads, by the mere fact of his opening the book, recognizes the freedom of the writer, the work of art, from whichever side you approach it, is an act of confidence in the freedom of men. (p. 62)

Each one of my participants works with Levinas' (2001) "infinite resources of the singular self" (p. 207) to transform societal injustice by teaching young children

to become literate, and by engaging in a human pedagogy that invites all children to speak, to listen, and to experience a democratic and respectful community. Through powerful literature that engages children in conversations about their lives; by offering children to make choices and to recognize that their choices affect others; and by showing children that they and their families are valued and celebrated for their individuality, these teachers teach children *about* equality and justice by *incorporating* equality and justice into everything they do.

Literacy exists in a highly political arena. As Maxine Greene (1994) explains:

As a set of techniques, it has often silenced persons and disempowered them. Our obligation today is to find ways of enabling the young to find their voices, to open their spaces, to reclaim their histories in all their variety and discontinuity. Attention has to be paid to those on the borders, on the margins, the too frequently smothered voices...The texts are and will be all around us. We have to insist on opportunities for persons to structure their experiences by means of those texts, by means of books men and women have made. (p. 10)

By being literate, they then have numerous choices before them, and the opportunity to help change the political, economic, racial, and social landscape of America. As

Casey (1993) suggests:

Granting that there is no unidirectional causality coming from place to person, we might be tempted to maintain the very opposite, namely, that places take on their character from the people who live in them. (p. 304)

If our young students, grow into literate, creative, and thinking adults, and enter adult society with a desire to enact democratic ideals and human justice, might the character of the United States become more equitable? Might they be the generation that transforms the educational inequities in this country?

Creating Literary Configurations.

Once we guide teachers through an exploration of themselves, we can encourage them to invite the voices of their own young students to speak, reminding them to remain poised to listen. What will they hear? Will it be responses to powerful literature, books such as the ones Suzanne, Will, Rachel, Paula, Chris, and I describe? Perhaps it will be stories from their lives, from their homes hidden from the view of middle-class neighborhoods, such as a little boy telling about his mother who has been in jail, or another talking about how his brother killed his goldfish. Maybe the child's voice will be heard as he proudly reads something he has written, something that reveals what matters to him, like an earthquake in El Salvador or something else that will knock his teacher's socks off. It might also be a voice that describes a picture of a beloved daddy, or a photograph of a family. When we invite children to share their voices, the possibilities of what we hear and what we learn are endless. As Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen (2003) remind us:

...When we speak of invitations...we mean...that each child's voice can be heard, and that their speaking can make a difference to our curriculum decision making. Improvising on children's responses to our standing invitation demands a commitment to recognizing human relationships as a fundamental source of knowledge. (p. 21)

Choice remains inherent in creating the space for human relationships to flourish in classrooms. Teachers must believe that they have the power to make choices about what to read to young children and about topics for the children to write. They need help being able to reconcile the demands of a standardized curriculum and their own creative imaginations, challenging the restrictive nature of traditional education, which Jardine et al. (2003) capture. They explain:

The power of classroom activities in traditional practices lies in their instrumental capacity to achieve measurable, objective ends. In traditional classrooms, no one worries much about the development of imaginative capacities....Learning is what children do in order to demonstrate their ability to read and calculate. Imagination has little, if anything, to do with these developing abilities. (p. 104)

We must show them that, like a kaleidoscope, the configurations and constellations of their imaginative presentations can be numerous. As we do, we must equip them with resources to draw upon.

Children's literature is an invaluable source of precious materials, but our pre-service students need us to show them the best of the best. If they are to use books in the ways my participants demonstrate, they first need to be familiar with the books from which they have to choose. They must be aware of books that address important and, sometimes, difficult topics, and have the opportunity to talk about ways to present them.

For example, during our group conversation, my participants discuss some of the books they choose to read to and with their students. Paula tells about a picture book about skin color:

The Colors of Us, by Karen Katz, is a beautiful book...it talks about honey and mocha and paprika. And we went through all the different shades. And we did a lot of that all through the year. Talking about how we're the same and how we're different.

And Will, who reads *What Mary Jo Shared* to his students explains:

I made a conscious choice to have a bunch of books that had non White kids in them. And that was one of the ones I always loved. But also, you know, there are certain books that work and certain books that don't. That one is a very simple, logical understanding, something that every kid can relate to: "I want to be special I want to share something that's special. Now it's not special anymore!" So it really relates to them on a deep level. It also portrays an African American father in a very positive light, very professional light. He's a professor at the university. All those reasons.

Using wonderful children's books, my participants teach young children how to engage with fine literature. With the knowledge of a large repertoire of children's books, pre-service teachers can then learn how to facilitate conversations among children, where multiple perspectives are heard and respected.

When teachers use books that reflect salient and relevant aspects of children's lives, they invite children to think deeply and reflectively. I explore this idea in my book *Listening to Young Writers* (Landa, 2005):

Wonderful books matched to the experience of children give them fresh ideas and new perspectives on familiar things, broadening their perspectives and providing insights into their own experiences. (p. 73)

Teachers who include fine children's literature in their pedagogical practice, and who create rich classroom libraries, offer children the opportunity to learn about themselves and their world. Through books, children are exposed to concepts and ideas that enrich their own repertoire of experiences, while becoming boundary-crossers, too. As they turn the pages of a book, they cross over into new territories, seeing and hearing about new concepts, seeing familiar concepts presented in new ways.

Fisher, Flood and Lapp (1999) offer additional insights into the importance of children's literature. They discuss the power of books toward overcoming stereotypes and prejudices:

Students arrive in our classes with a number of assumptions about people. Often these assumptions are stereotypes born of lack of adequate information. Multiple literary experiences in literature about children and adults from a variety of backgrounds enhances children's overall literacy development as it expands their worldview...As teachers, choosing books may be our most important task. We suggest the selection of literature that is

representative of the full range of human experiences found in our world. (p. 128)

Literature, then, adds to the important identity work for both children and their teachers. As Will explains, for example, he chooses books for many reasons. And, as in his selection of *What Mary Jo Shared*, one of his reasons includes its positive portrayal of an African American father, an important consideration given our larger world in which Black men are still negatively stereotyped on television and in movies.

Like the choices we make regarding our cultural identities, teaching is, itself a cultural practice. The way we teach involves decisions and choices that we make from day to day and from moment to moment, from the books we choose to read, to many other aspects of pedagogical practice. Joseph et al. (2000) discuss the cultures of classrooms:

...When thinking about a school or classroom culture, we must simultaneously imagine not a static entity but an assemblage of individuals who have different family cultures, different understandings and values influenced by race or ethnicity, gender, class, and religion as well as their own creativity and imagination; that in the classroom or school they participate in common activities, understand these activities somewhat similarly, and affirm certain values about knowledge, learning, and conduct – these suggest the existence of a culture, albeit not in a monolithic sense. (p. 18)

The creativity and imagination that teachers bring to their work can spawn a classroom culture of exploration, enthusiasm, and learning. How can teacher educators, then, embody and model teaching pedagogies that encourage such a culture?

Choosing our Patterns of Teaching

What choices do we make as teacher educators, as we sit and stand among our students? As we talk to our students about democratic pedagogy, do we dictate the terms of the concept or do we invite discussion and disagreement? As we teach them about integrating curriculum, do we assign them to subject-focused course syllabi? As we talk to them about the developmental continuum, do we assign them the same projects and assume that they all have the same needs?

Gadamer (2002) explains the relationships between subject matter and the manner in which it is presented. He writes:

...Subject matter appears truly significant only when it is properly portrayed for us. Thus, we are certainly interested in the subject matter, but it acquires its life only from the light in which it is presented to us. (p. 284)

How we teach is, perhaps, more important to students' learning than *what* we teach.

The centrality of the relationships between teachers and students, and the individuality of each child remain central.

Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen (2003) engage in an interpretive exploration of "the basics" (p. 85) of teaching and learning in classrooms. They write about the living nature of subject matter and the importance of inviting students to interpret their own meaning:

...Insofar as they form parts of a *living* discipline, that discipline is precisely *not* fixed and finished but is rather, ongoing, still "in play," still "open to question" in our human inheritance. To understand these matters this way is to learn to endure the fact that the seeming fixity of our current knowledge will, *of necessity*, have to experience, to suffer, to endure, to undergo the arrival of an unfixed future and the questions it might hold, questions we might not have even imagined or desired. This open, living endurance, we suggest, is *basic* to the disciplines taught in schools. (p. 85)

Given that teacher education programs often present content-based coursework according to discipline, such as reading and language arts, perhaps a less “fixed” approach would allow students to view knowledge in a more lived way.

As I write, I often pause to read what I have written. As I read other texts, I frequently note page numbers, knowing the material I have just read has relevance of my own writing. The dichotomy between reading and writing is artificially imposed in schools, not reflective of its authentic application. Similarly, as students learn the content of science and mathematics, they engage in reading and writing, listening and speaking. They are engaged with language.

I envision a teacher education program in which subject matter is presented in a more integrated way, with as much attention to how students learn as to what it is they are learning. The “how,” in fact, becomes a more lasting lesson in its relevance to future, lifelong learning. The *process* of learning is central.

Just as I uncover the courageous and creative way in which my participants cross borders, and make choices as they proceed, I seek to uncover how we can apply the same principles to teacher education. How can we can cross borders as we teach, forfeiting traditionally narrow pedagogy for a more transformative approach? In what ways can we invite our students to cross borders of their own so that they may explore the choices that lie in front of them, as well as the less obvious choices they can uncover?

Returning to the power of my imagination, I see in-service teachers visiting my undergraduate classes, talking to my students about their lived experiences with children. I hear the voices of teachers, like the voices heard on the pages of this study,

being shared with students, resonating, enlightening, and personifying the mystery that awaits them.

While teacher education programs offer students time and experiences in classrooms, they do not provide ample time for students to engage in dialogue with experienced teachers. My own 18 years of experience in the classroom, affords me the knowledge that every moment during the school day is consumed by the needs of children. Time for adult contact or communication is limited and coveted.

My desire to cross borders in the spirit of teacher education involves another boundary to overcome. As I pursue my exploration, I observe the deep chasm between another two spaces – theory and practice.

For three years of my doctoral work, I was both a classroom teacher, and a student and researcher in a university setting. I moved across the boundaries and between the two worlds with energy and passion, keenly aware of Suzanne’s mantra, “Children first.” As I did, I read all theories and every piece of research with an eye on children. My questions consistently asked if the words captured the real lives of children and families, or if they cast children as numbers, data points, and categories. I remained aware that research and theory change the shape of the kaleidoscope’s body, setting the parameters around the “findings,” but the children and their teachers create the changing shapes and designs.

Today, I feel a concern, as I remain outside the walls of elementary schools. My concern is that if researchers and theorists remain removed from classroom life, the fluid transformations of children’s lives are frozen into a static and lifeless mold in their minds. I worry that their findings constrict their imagination and build

veritable walls around the hope for endless possibilities on behalf of young children living in poverty.

As Van Manen (2003) pointedly notes:

In the name of children, we gather at learned conferences where we give speeches, proclaim truths, and study or listen to those so much wiser than we are. For the sake of our children, we teach teachers, read and write articles, purchase and publish books...In these texts, in these spaces, great teachers of teachers assemble to influence those who influence children. (p. 140)

When university instructors and researchers do not live in classrooms with children, do they forget about the magnificence of children's spontaneity and contributions to their own learning that challenge any formula or equation? Do they forget that any aspect of children's lives and learning that they study exists within a larger picture, a unique design unlike any other? Do they remember the centrality of "recognizing human relationships as a fundamental source of knowledge" (Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2003, p. 21)?

Today, as a visiting researcher in schools, I often think about Shawn, and I yearn to hear that he is doing well. I wonder about Lara, imagining how she sounds with a New Zealand accent, and I smile as I remember her limitless energy. I look at photographs of so many of my students and I feel a sense of joy and of pride, remembering our shared love of learning and of each other. Realizing how much I miss young children in my momentary exchange with Paula's student, who loves her daddy – her "favorite" – I realize the need for teacher educators to remain connected to the worlds of young children. How can a textbook or an article ever capture the delight and surprise that the faces of children offer us? How can a lecture convey the power of teaching that emerges, when, "from moment to moment, teachers and

children read from each other's faces and eyes what is important, interesting, disturbing, moving, boring, stirring, disquieting" (van Manen, 1991, p. 179)?

By moving between universities and schools, both teacher educators and pre-service teachers can bridge the gap between theory and practice, blending them into one: a theory of lived experience where children's lives determine theories and where theories remain as fluid as the shapes and colors of a kaleidoscope.

Giving Shape to Invisible Borders

As the colorful bits fall together inside a kaleidoscope, they are, almost at once, shapeless and well-formed into a visible pattern. They remind us that the moment between being invisible and unrecognizable, and being present and imposing, is fleeting.

If we choose to take our students beyond the university classroom walls, crossing the boundary between theories and lives, we can show them the hidden line between a neighborhood without electrical appliances and a home with a glamorous kitchen, a line that is but a fleeting moment. They will see how neighborhoods with few cars but with crowded bus stops, are but a short moment away from homes with hammocks and guards protecting parking lots. Before we can ask Paula's question, "Do they not see or do they not want to see?", we must bring the picture into focus. We must enter the schools and neighborhoods behind the invisible walls, and ask our students, "What do you see?" Perhaps, then, Paula's question will no longer be necessary to ask.

Once we have entered the hidden neighborhoods, we have taken a first step across the boundary line. To go further, we must engage in human dialogue and interaction. Levin (1989) tells us:

Communication requires more than the successful performance of speech-acts; it requires, among other things, the capacity to be touched and moved by what one sees, and the capacity to listen carefully and with an open mind. (p. 102)

With an open mind, and an open heart, our students must meet the courageous people who live there, the children and their families. In this way, they will add pieces to the unfinished mosaic in their minds, the pieces that add reality and humanity to their perceptions and beliefs. Because, as Suzanne reminds her teachers, we must not make assumptions and we must not judge. We must listen as the pieces of the picture fall into place and watch as they come into focus. We must help our students feel comfortable moving across borders, and back again, focusing on the shared humanity that exists in all places, irrespective of the amount of money people have or the languages they speak.

While my daughter Shari's friend, Karla, shared a room and a bed with her mother, denying her a place of her own, she also enjoyed a sense of closeness and comfort. As Shari and Karla moved back and forth between their two homes, playing and learning together, they saw the commonalities between them. They were two little girls, two friends, who, in spite of the economic, cultural, and linguistic differences between them, had much in common.

Reminders such as this, help me balance my sense of concern with awareness that the quality of life in America – where the dollar is king – is not solely determined by money. This tension and this irony play an important role for teachers working

with low-income children, whose lives are often judged and evaluated by the fact that they live in poverty. But, poverty notwithstanding, love and devotion are not determined by the dollar.

I, again, turn to Ashima, in *The Namesake*, (Lahiri, 2003) to help articulate my thoughts. As she lies in her hospital bed, haven given birth to her son, she and her husband, Ashoke, reflect on the infant's American existence:

Apart from his father, the baby has three visitors, all Bengali...Dr. Gupta gives the boy a handsome illustrated copy of Mother Goose rhymes. "Lucky boy," Ashoke remarks, turning the beautifully sewn pages. "Only hours old and already the owner of books." What a difference, he thinks, from the childhood he has known. Ashima thinks the same, though for different reasons. For as grateful as she feels for the company of the Nandis and Dr. Gupta, these acquaintances are only substitutes for the people who really ought to be surrounding them. Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side, the baby's birth, like almost everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true. As she strokes and suckles and studies her son, she can't help but pity him. She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived. (p. 25)

As I did for the first years of my doctoral work, teacher educators and pre-service teachers alike can experience the joy and the pain of seeing life behind the hidden walls. If we do not make this a priority, we run the dangerous risk of relying on sterile research that casts children's lives in the mold chosen by the researchers.

Opportunities to cross the social, economic, and racial divides remain endless. Choices await us, but we are responsible for making the choices. Several choices come to my mind, as I reflect on the precious experiences I have had with children and their families.

In addition to working in classrooms, learning the skills of teaching, I envision pre-service teachers acting as mentors, working closely and intimately with one child

and one family. Each one might be asked to conduct ethnographic documentation on the life of a family, focusing on the child's educational development.

The Head Start model of home visits provides a powerful example, accessible for university programs to emulate. As Zigler and Muenchow (1992) explain:

Head Start staff were to visit parents of enrolled children at least three times a year, if the parents consented. This was the forerunner of all the home-visitation projects today. (p. 112)

During my three years as a Head Start teacher, I recall home visits with both fondness and sadness. While the children were always excited to see me in their homes, and I to be with them, the circumstances in which some of them lived caused me to go home at night and cry. Some children had no beds, many lived with stifling heat or poor lighting, and several buildings reeked of urine.

Suzanne offers her own troubling picture of a home that she saw:

I had to take one of the kids home one time...they were sick...and I walked in that apartment...the temperature had to be 95, there were three television sets going on and two people smoking to the high hills.

Poverty notwithstanding, the light in the children's eyes and the love of their parents gave me hope. And, my tears and sadness did not last long, before they were transposed into feelings of further determination and purpose. While I knew that I could not change the circumstances of my young students' homes, I could contribute to their budding literacy. I could offer them a step on their developmental ladder and be another voice in their lives telling them they can achieve.

Similarly, while offering support to the child and the family, each pre-service teacher who visited children's homes would experience invaluable lived experiences that would challenge walls of assumption and judgment with unsurpassed force.

Students coming in, believing that poor parents don't care about their children, would see parents struggling to survive, while holding on to their hopes and dreams for their children.

Recalling the words of my participants, as they talk about their relationships with their students' families, offers additional models to emulate. Rachel talks about her attendance at evening events at her school and about her open-door policy during the school day. Chris discusses her efforts to share her discipline practices with parents. Paula tells that she calls parents at the beginning of each year to introduce herself and to share her excitement about the children. And, Suzanne describes the way she puts parents at-ease so that they talk to her about their concerns. She also remembers:

It was important to bring the parents in. My point was to get them to come to school, to come to parent conferences, to get them to come to programs. And that they should feel welcome because they never felt welcome before. And that worked. I think it worked.

When I ask Suzanne what meaning she attributes to having parents in the school, she explains:

It's support for the kids. They'd come and say, "Ms. B! My mom is coming to school today! She's going to come visit me!" It was so important to them because it wasn't just the fact that they were coming to school but: It was *OK* for my mommy to come to school. It was *OK* for my dad to come to school. That they were welcome and they had a chance to show them their school work and what the school looked like. It made the kids feel good. It really did because they were proud of their school. You know...it was a good thing.

How can teacher education programs include discussions about such practices in their curriculum? Might we ask exemplary teachers and principals to come to our university classrooms and talk to our students? Might we require our students to

observe several examples of parents participating in their children's school lives, and capture those observations through writing or photography?

While choices remain limited for the families of low-income children, our efforts toward educational transformation and social equity can help to reduce the mountains of oppression and the barriers to success for our students. As Paula says, "If they can read, they can do anything!" and as Will declares, "These children are brilliant!"

Perhaps, if we show pre-service teachers the richness they will experience by working in Title I schools, we will encourage more talented teachers to work in Title I classrooms. Perhaps their efforts to pursue the equity trail through the power of literacy, will help to transform the relentless, colorless landscapes of poor neighborhoods into yards with hammocks, streets lined with fall leaves, and places of hope and prosperity.

Imagining Future Pieces

Throughout my exploration, my participants and I work to articulate the ways that we offer our help, based on a position of social justice and social transformation. Rachel insists, "What can we do? We can't change our skin color. We can't change how society is. Helping is what we can do. What we need to do is be an agent of change." Will describes his efforts "to be a connection to the power structures," on behalf of families who are marginalized by language or income level.

Levinas (2001) describes the efforts of one person in assistance to another as unsurpassable “goodness” (p. 207). He explains:

Inspired by love for one’s fellow man, reasonable justice is bound by legal structures and cannot equal the goodness that solicits and inspires it. But goodness, emerging from the infinite resources of the singular self, responding without reasons or reservations to the call of the face, can divine ways to approach that suffering other...(p. 207)

Listening to my participants, I begin to wonder whether the counter-hegemonic efforts in American education have developed elements of hegemony themselves. Dare we talk about helping, without being questioned about our moral intentions? When we talk of helping, will we be told that we are merely perpetuating the cycle of White dominance? As I ask these questions, I must also wonder whether they will be asked of me by those who read my work. Remaining true to the complexities of who I am, where I am from, and where I hope to be going, I remain poised and confident to participate in these conversations.

I embrace the opportunity to enter into dialogues about race and its position in education. As I have engaged in my study, I have discovered problematic issues, and am eager to pursue them. I know that I am uncomfortable with the term “minority” when discussing children who are not “White.” The use of the word “minority” subjugates the children, to whom it refers, placing them in the context of a majority-dominated society. It denies them an identity of their own. I am, however, equally uncomfortable with the term “children of color.” All children have colors, as well as many other attributes. I do not wish to define them by the color of their skin. How, then, shall I describe them? Is describing them according to a one-dimensional attribute necessary? Herein lies a future conversation.

As I wonder what those conversations might sound like, I realize that they will have the potential to offer the academy insight into the lived experiences of teachers and young children engaged in literacy. Further explorations might examine the perceptions and experiences of young children who attend Title I schools – children of color whose teachers are White. What will the children say about race and identity? What will they tell us about their sense of the choices they have in their classrooms and in their lives? I would also embrace a study about the experiences and perceptions of parents in Title I schools, wondering if they feel that their voices are welcomed and valued.

A Final Focus

As I write the final words of my exploration, I feel that I have crossed another boundary. As in all of life, it is my journey, not my destination that resonates within me. What, then, has my journey taught me?

As a final transformation, I recognize the remarkable power of the written word. My hermeneutic exploration feels like a rebirth, an opportunity to see the way I exist in the world through more focused eyes, a more sensitive heart, and a fully present mind. I again turn to the words of the Israeli writer, David Grossman (2007):

I write. I feel the wealth of possibilities inherent in any human situation. I sense my ability to choose between them...I indulge in the richness of true, personal, intimate language. I recall the delight of natural, full breathing when I manage to escape the claustrophobia of slogan and cliché. Suddenly I begin to breathe with both lungs. (p. 31)

The word is mightier and more penetrating than the force of a sword. Words remain forever and words have the power to change hearts and minds. I choose to continue creating beautiful, eternal designs on paper, words that capture fleeting

moments in the lives of children. I choose to continue to marvel at the unique lives that all children bring as they enter the doors of our classrooms and to write about them, so that the moments are captured forever, as memorials to the endless possibilities that children bring to the world.

APPENDIX A: SECOND GRADE FAMILY LITERACY CELEBRATION

A Celebration of Reading and Writing

March 22, 2005

Welcome to our celebration! Today, your guide will be _____.
As you walk around the room with your guide, try and answer the following questions!

BIOGRAPHIES:

1. **What do biographies teach us?** _____
2. **How many second graders made biography posters of artists or musicians?** _____
3. **Who was a great leader of the Indian people?** _____
4. **Who led 300 slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad?** _____
5. **Where was Martin Luther King born?** _____
6. **What was Martin Luther King's "dream"?** _____

7. **Who is one of the greatest basketball players?** _____
8. **Who made a biography poster about Moses?** _____
9. **What are the names of the four American presidents that you see on the biography posters?** _____

10. **Who helped blind and deaf people learn to communicate?** _____
11. **Who was born in Israel and now lives in America?** _____

12. Why did Itai choose to do a biography on David Ben-Gurion? _____

FOLKTALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD:

- 1. What is the title of one folktale from China?** _____

- 2. Which book does Angelina try to persuade you to read?** _____
- 3. What is the title of a folktale from Japan?** _____
- 4. Which South African folktale do Omer and DeVonte think you should read?** _____
- 5. Which Jewish folktale does Rachel think you should read?** _____
- 6. What is the title of a Native American legend?** _____

“WERE ALL A FAMILY UNDER ONE SKY”

- 1. Who was born in Egypt?** _____
- 2. Who was born in Texas?** _____
- 3. Who was born in Japan?** _____
- 4. Who was born in India?** _____
- 5. Who was born in Holland?** _____
- 6. Where were YOU born?!** _____

BOOKS BY LOCAL SECOND GRADE AUTHORS:

- 1. What is the name of the flat mountain in South Africa?** _____
- 2. What are 3 things that change in the world?** _____

- 3. What do bats use to locate their food?** _____

4. What are the two kinds of elephants? _____

5. Why do you think there are hands joined together on the book about freedom? _____

—

POETRY

1. What is one interesting way that Aviv T. describes a cat? _____

2. What is one way that Lia describes heaven in her poem? _____

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title	CROSSING THE DIVIDE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF WHITE EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY TEACHERS WHO CHOOSE TO WORK WITH MINORITY CHILDREN IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS
Why is this research being done?	This is a research project being conducted by Melissa Landa at the University of Maryland, College Park, under the direction of Dr. John O'Flahavan and Dr. Francine Hultgren. The purpose of this study is to gain some understanding of White teachers who teach literacy to young, low-income, minority children. I am inviting you to participate in the study because you have worked with young children in Title I schools for more than five years.
What will you be asked to do?	<p>The research procedures will occur over three months and will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audio taped conversations with the investigator; Classroom Observations; Personal, written responses to questions; An audio taped group meeting <p>All formats will be determined by mutually agreed-upon times and places. Each of these procedures will produce written text, which will be analyzed by the researcher. The topics of each procedure will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your choice of teaching in a Title I school; Your experiences working with low-income children of color; Your experiences teaching early literacy.
What about confidentiality?	<p>This research project involves making audio tapes of you. We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, we will refer to you by a pseudonym in the text. Notes, cassette tapes, and transcripts will be accessible to the researcher only. At the completion of the study, tapes will be erased and notes and transcripts will be shredded.</p> <p>____ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study. ____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.</p>
What are the risks of this research?	There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. However, if any questions posed to you cause you discomfort, you are free to refrain from answering the question.
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to benefit the participants. But the results may help the investigator better understand early literacy teaching, in order to inform teacher education.
Do you have to be in this research? May you stop participating at any time?	Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw your participation at any time. There are no penalties for choosing not to participate, or for withdrawing from the study.
What if you have questions?	Please address your questions to: Melissa Landa

Project Title	CROSSING THE DIVIDE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF WHITE EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY TEACHERS WHO CHOOSE TO WORK WITH MINORITY CHILDREN IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS	
	<p>204 Currier Drive Rockville, Maryland 20850 Melissa@optnw.com (240) 506-5701</p> <p>This research is being supervised by: Dr. John O’Flahavan Department of Curriculum and Instruction University of Maryland College Park, Maryland 20742 Johno@umd.edu 301-405-3149</p> <p>And by:</p> <p>Dr. Francine Hultgren Department of Education Policy and Leadership University of Maryland College Park, Maryland 20742 fh@umd.edu 301-405-4562</p> <p>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678 This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>	
Statement of Age of Participant and Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that: You are at least 18 years of age; The research has been explained to you; Your questions have been answered; And you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i></p>	
Signature and Date <i>[Please add name, signature and date lines to the final page of your consent form.]</i>	NAME OF PARTICIPANT	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

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