

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: ONCE UPON A TEACHER:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
INVESTIGATION OF TEACHERS  
WHO BEGIN TO USE STORYTELLING  
IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

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It is through our stories that we come to know ourselves, and the world in which we live. For millennia people with no written language have used storytelling to transmit their culture, and to pass on their values, beliefs, and laws to the next generation, in short, to educate. Through recent research we have come to understand that our brains are designed to make meaning through narrative. It is through stories that we shape our personalities and our lives.

This is a phenomenological investigation into the lived experiences of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. I draw on the works of numerous storytellers, educators and phenomenologists to provide a ground for this study. The narrative that forms the framework of this quest is the phenomenological methodology of Max van Manen.

I traveled the path of this phenomenon through conversations with five elementary school teachers who began to use storytelling in their classrooms, and I used thematic analysis to transform the themes and insights that came from those conversations into a textual understanding. The performance nature of storytelling revealed the care that lies at the heart of pedagogy, and the ways in which that care is expressed.

By telling stories to their classes, my participants came to understand the richness of their pedagogical knowledge, renewed their confidence in their professional competence and returned them to their authentic teaching selves. Through storytelling my participants expanded their pedagogical horizons. By challenging themselves, they gained a greater awareness of their pedagogical practice, helping them create higher expectations for their teaching. Telling stories creates an understanding of the roles students play in the life of the classroom and an appreciation of the reciprocal nature of teaching.

Teaching as storytelling has possibilities for pedagogical benefits for teachers and students. This study explores the insights this pedagogy might have for teacher retention, connections to diversity, and teacher education. The nature of storytelling fosters care, creates community and nurtures more meaningful relationships. It might open opportunities for teachers and students to allow themselves to see and be seen, hear and be heard in mindful and authentic relationships.

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OF TEACHERS WHO BEGIN TO USE STORYTELLING IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

By

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Professor Joseph McCaleb  
Professor Wayne Slater

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my beloved grandmothers

Evelyn Curtin Dougherty, my first and best storyteller

Catherine Scott Hollywood, my quiet teacher

and

To all those who have loved me into being.

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## **CHAPTER ONE SURRENDERING TO THE SPELL OF STORIES**

Storytelling is an art, a science, and a way of life. To define storytelling or storyteller is to try to make concrete that which is abstract. Suffice it to say that storytelling is among the oldest forms of communication. It exists in every culture. Storytelling is the commonality of all human beings, in all places, in all times. It is used to educate, to inspire, to record historical events, to entertain, to transmit cultural mores. (Collins & Cooper, 1997, p. 1)

Once upon a time. Some have said that these are the four most powerful words in any language. These are words that open the doors to enchantment. Stories are the magic carpets that permit us to experience different worlds and different ways of being. They are guidelines for the present, pathways to the past and maps of the future. In story we fight alongside Athos, connive with Ananzi, spend two years before the mast, uncover fossils, walk with Gandhi, observe Frederick Banting in the lab, suffer with the victims of war, or boldly travel to alternate universes. Stories are all around us and available to everyone. Jane Yolen describes the plethora of stories available to us as “a veritable Sears catalogue of people, places and events” (1986, p. 3).

Once upon a time. What do people experience when they hear those words? Do they bring forth memories or perhaps cause feelings of anticipation? What do those words mean to people? Most of us are familiar with stories and storytellers from our earliest years. In many families there is someone who is the repository of the family stories, someone to tell you what trouble your dad got into when he was your age, or that your mother held the county record for blood donations, or that after your uncle lost the one true love of his life, he was never the same and died of a broken heart. If you are fortunate, as you grow, someone tells you the family history with its dreams and

disappointments. “Our stories are as deeply embedded as our bones, and they begin to form with our bones as the fetus is imprinted in utero with the rhythms, tones, and patterns of the mother’s voice” (Hearne, 2005, p. 40). Storytelling is a part of our lives.

Once upon a time. “The storyteller can at once celebrate, mourn, and honor the past” (Erdoes & Ortiz, 1984, p. xv). Storytelling may conjure up dark nights spent outside with your friends surrounded by all those spooky, nocturnal noises—listening to and telling the most harrowing tales you could devise, just to prove how brave you were. Cautionary tales, such as fairy tales and fables, warned you what could happen to an innocent such as yourself when you ventured unprotected out into the wider world, ignoring the advice of those who knew better. Stories may have been traditional parts of your family rituals or religious observances. Perhaps somewhere in your school years, a teacher made history or science come alive by telling you stories about the people and the discoveries that changed the world.

Once upon a time. Story and storytelling are ancient and universal. In *Touch Magic* (2000) Jane Yolen writes, “Storytelling may be the oldest of all the arts: the mother told a story to her child, the hunter to his peers, the survivor to his rescuers, the priestess to her followers, the seer to his petitioners” (p. 24). For centuries people who had no written language used storytelling to transmit the culture of their civilizations, to pass on the values, the norms, the laws, the will of the gods, and the beliefs from one generation to the next; in short, to educate. What you are reading now is a story. This is the story of the journey of how I came to know and love story and storytelling; how I came to know and love teaching; and how, happily I came to merge those two great loves. It is the story of believing in the power that storytelling has for teachers and

students. Like all stories there is a beginning, middle, and end. Like all good stories it is filled with colors: blue and black, red and silver, bright places and dark ones. Like all stories it is the audience who interprets the tale. Story is filled with color and dreams, as is teaching. Story is as solid as the heavens and as powerful as dreams.

“He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven”

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half-light  
I would spread the cloths under your feet  
But, I being poor have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread upon my dreams.  
(Yeats, 1899)

Yeats' poem provides an example of the art of interpretation that goes hand in hand with storytelling. The Irish poet, Yeats, tells a marvelous story of love and yearning in this poignant poem: the longing to have something of worth to offer, the desire to reveal oneself to the beloved, and the incredible vulnerability of that action. In my life this poem has a love story attached to it of its own. It is a bittersweet story about my son and his journey to adulthood. What I see in this poem is colored by my lived experience with my son. I cannot read it without thinking and feeling about my son. You, of course, will interpret this poem according to your own lived experience. Yeats' storytelling is enfolded in his poetry, but whatever the form, the story is here. There is a longing to communicate the heart's desires. Stories have the power to do that.

What does it mean to use storytelling in a classroom, to be a storyteller? What does it mean to be a storyteller for school-aged children or a teacher who tells stories in school? What is the experience of a teacher telling stories in class? These are the

questions that call to me, the questions that speak to my teaching self and to my storytelling self. The question that draws me into this study is **what is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?**

Until recently, my adult lived experience of the phenomenon of storytelling has been largely unexamined and unexplored; it dwelt in some taken-for-granted space, unhonored and unappreciated. As I look back, however, it seems to me that storytelling, along with teaching, has had me firmly in its grasp all my life, so that turning to this phenomenon for my research has been a homecoming, a relearning of understanding and wisdom I have always possessed, but misplaced. Storytelling and teaching were part of my life from my earliest days.

### **The Beginning is a Very Good Place to Start**

In this chapter I offer the beginning of my journey in story and my quest to find the places that story and storytelling have for us as human beings. I begin to explore and to uncover the power storytelling might hold for teachers in their classrooms and what it might be like for teachers who choose to begin using storytelling in their classrooms.

Storytelling and education are natural partners and have been so for centuries. Maria von Franz, a Jungian analyst and an interpreter of fairy tales, analyzes the patterns, themes, and archetypes in fairy tales. In *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1996), she draws attention to the early use of fairy tales as instructional material in Greece: “We read in Plato’s writing that old women told their children symbolic stories – mythoi. Even then fairy tales were connected with the education of children” (p. 3). In the late seventeenth century in France fairy tales were used to instruct aristocratic children in the proper ways to behave as members of the nobility (Zipes, 1994).

According to Joseph Campbell, the preeminent scholar, writer, and teacher of mythology, myth serves different functions for humans. One of these functions is pedagogical, “And this is the one that I think everyone must try today to relate to – and that is the pedagogical function, of how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances. Myths can teach you that” (Campbell, 1988, p. 39). In *Teaching as Storytelling*, Egan (1986) presents the concept of story as a fundamental component of our human nature. “The story form is a cultural universal: everyone everywhere enjoys stories. The story, then, is not just some casual entertainment; it reflects a basic and powerful form in which we make sense of the world and experiences” (p. 2). In what manner are teachers responsible for educating their students to make sense of the world? If teachers begin to use storytelling in their classrooms, in what ways might they help their students make sense of the world?

In the classic work, *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), the renowned child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim describes in detail the value that fairy tales have for children and how they assist children to navigate the treacherous path to maturity. Bettelheim states that the fairy tale should be told rather than read because telling creates an “interpersonal event into which adult and child enter as equal partners” (p. 152). What might be the experience of teachers who enter into an equal partnership with their students through storytelling?

Storytelling is often compared to another ancient art, that of weaving. Like a weaver, the storyteller carefully chooses the right materials, decides where and when to place them, uses those materials for maximum effect and potency, weaves them together and transforms the disparate threads to make whole cloth, a cloth that has meaning for

listeners and has a life of its own. The result is more than the sum of its parts. “As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, the shuttle flies and the fabric is stretched tight (Palmer, 2007, p. 11). I have discovered that many of the threads of my own story, my love for my family, my teaching, and the way in which I conceptualize my life, converge around story and storytelling.

### ***Beginning in Storytelling***

The storyteller is a chosen one: a transmitter of a history and/or a morality, a preserver of cultural memory, a repository of information, a walking library, a cultural and literary resource. (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 19)

Where did my wonder with storytelling begin? Perhaps that question should be rephrased in a different way: With whom did my wonder begin? I can tell you exactly: it began with Evelyn Claire Curtin Dougherty, my grandmother, who was easily the most significant person in my childhood. Evelyn came from a large family where education mattered and words were valued, and as I grew up I listened to my grandmother tell stories. Once she told me a story about my dad that illustrates the power of storytelling to cause delight, change perspective and shake up the status quo. This is a story that I never could quite believe until my father corroborated it. In 1925 she and my dad, who was four years old at the time, were visiting Uncle Charlie on his farm in upstate New York and my dad, bored by the grown-up talk, wandered into the barnyard where he was hissed at by a goose. My dad picked up a stick, hit the goose one mighty blow and killed it. Now as luck would have it, this particular goose turned out to be Uncle Charlie’s blue ribbon prizewinner. I believe it is safe to say that the remainder of the visit was somewhat strained. As a result of this wanton act, my grandmother and my father were



never invited back to the farm, which in fact, turned out to be a good thing. You see, each year all my dad's brothers and cousins had to go up to Uncle Charlie's farm during the summer and work for free, but my dad was never invited back.

That, of course, is the bare bones of the story without the snap and life my grandmother gave it. This story held me enthralled. What a piece of knowledge to possess about my self-contained father. I believe what gave this story some of its power was the outrageousness of the action of my father and the fact that I *knew* about it. What could have been the reasons my grandmother told me this story? Bruner writes: "Through narrative, we construct, reconstruct, in some ways reinvent yesterday and tomorrow" (2002, p. 3). Perhaps my grandmother wanted me to see and connect with my father as a multidimensional person, not just "dad." I think it is always wonderful and slightly unsettling to learn about a parent's life before you were in it. I never saw my father in quite the same way; my understanding of him had changed. This story gave me a glimpse of my father that I otherwise would never have had.

### ***Beginning to Listen***

We enter into a story through the door of inner hearing. The spoken story touches the auditory nerve, which runs across the floor of the skull into the brain stem just below the pons. There, auditory impulses are relayed upward to consciousness or else, it is said, to the soul... depending on the attitude with which one listens. (Estes, 1995, p. 23)

Every summer in Sea Isle City, New Jersey, my grandmother and her sisters would gather on the sun porch of our rented beach house to knit and talk. They would gather a great array of knitting accoutrements about them: their current and future projects, their yarns, needles, bags, books, stitch holders, patterns, tape measures, and scissors. My grandmother sat in the corner chair, which commanded the best view of the

room and had wide arms to hold her cigarettes and ashtray. My great aunts would arrange themselves around her. On the days when my aunts were in residence, I wouldn't go to the beach with my cousins. I'd hang around that sun porch drinking in all their words until I was positively intoxicated with both my family and their stories.

The click of their needles made the background music. While they sat and knitted, they told stories about our extensive family, the people they knew and how they related to our family. I thought that they knew just about everyone in the world. My grandmother and her sisters were dazzling tellers of complex, complicated tales. You had to look sharp to keep up. They added to each other's stories, corrected them, and supplied missing information. Most of all they appreciated each other's stories. It was art born of long familiarity with the subjects and the styles of the tellers. To this day I can see myself sitting on the footstool, somewhat off to the side, practically immobile for fear of missing a word, riveted to what my grandmother had to say. On that sun porch I learned how to knit, and without knowing, I learned the cadence, the timing, and the voice of storytelling surrounded by the women I loved and found fascinating. To this day they hold the title of the best storytellers in the world.

I am reminded of what Casey (1993) writes about his childhood dwelling, "However distant in space and time it has become for me, the house at this address is still a place, a most significant place, as I return to it" (p. 274). I don't know that I so much return to Landis Avenue in Sea Isle City, for it hovers constantly and contentedly inside my awareness, full of stories of that time and place, stories that reflect the love and care of my family. The significance Casey places on his childhood home finds a counterpart with Heidegger (1971), who writes that being content, and dwelling with a sense of

peace, is the proper way for humans to live. I experienced that contentment and peace in my childhood. I wonder what would it be like if children felt that sense of peace in school? Both Casey's and Heidegger's words capture much of the way I feel about this place, this house, this time at the New Jersey beach and these people of my childhood. Their stories are my stories. They inhabit me and they accompany me always. I feel them strongly as I continue to journey further into story. They are my once upon a time.

Besides storytelling, my grandmother and her sisters instilled in me another enduring love, that of teaching. You could say I was raised in education. My beloved grandmother, her sisters and other members of my family were teachers. My family has its own mythology of teaching. I was raised to believe that teaching is a noble calling; that teachers are mighty warriors — powerful, influential, battling against ignorance, bringing the light. I was brought up to believe that teaching is an art and what happens between teacher and students is something that surpasses technical aspects. Teaching is an enterprise fraught with peril, glorious and dangerous at the same time; because as you presence yourself in front of the members of your class, you can never say with complete certainty what will happen or what might be the outcome.

I happily discovered that my family concept of teaching found an expression in *Releasing the Imagination* by Maxine Greene (1995). She writes:

We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share. It is simply not enough for us to reproduce the ways things are. (p. 1)

That sentiment expressed by Greene certainly fits with what I had been taught. I recall how heartened I was reading that word for seeking and searching, “quest.” It was

almost like a gauntlet being thrown down at my feet. This quest resonates for me. In addition Greene writes that it is vital for teaching to enthusiastically embrace all aspects of possibility and calls educators to harness the power of our imaginations, to be open to “all kinds of opening to possibility” (p. 5). Possibilities, according to Greene, are powerful things. Something that is a possibility has the “condition of being a real quality” (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2002, p. 2294)<sup>1</sup>. It has power and capability; it is a thing that can be achieved. Another reinforcing voice came from bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). She calls for engagement in a constantly changing classroom, where the dynamic interchange keeps teacher and learner present. These are some of the ideas that strengthened what I had learned from my family and helped to inform my own concept of education.

### ***Beginning to Teach***

So, I became a teacher and it was all I expected, and it was also a great deal more than I ever expected. I learned that no matter how well prepared you think you are, nothing can truly prepare you for the lived experience of that first year in the classroom. I learned many things; truth be told, I was the pupil that year. I learned that children have greater inner resources and resilience than we know. I learned that by the time you are six years old you have a lifetime of stories; it is just hard getting someone to listen to you, so my students gave their stories to me.

Children are not empty vessels who come to school merely to be filled with curricular content by means of special instructional methods. Moreover, children who come to school come from somewhere. Teachers need to have some sense of what it is that children bring with them, what defines their present understanding, mood, emotional state, and readiness

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<sup>1</sup> All dictionary references cited are from this source unless otherwise noted.

to deal with the subject matter and the world of the school. (van Manen, 1991, p. 7)

I learned that my students wanted to know my story. They wanted to know who I was and, more importantly, who I was for them. I learned that children come to school full to bursting with their stories and we do not listen. What might we learn from hearing the stories our students have to tell us? How might those stories make us better teachers and better people? I came away from that first year filled with stories: Peter who would not speak to me because he had been so in love with last year's teacher; the first interracial family I ever knew; the family who had spent every cent they had on treatment for their son's cancer; how grateful students and parents are for small courtesies; and the things I heard from parents that I wish I could erase from my mind.

“One learns to know only what one loves, and the deeper and fuller the knowledge is to be, the more powerful and vivid must be the love, indeed the passion” (Goethe, as cited in van Manen, 2003, p. 6). I have a passion and love for teaching and my feelings about storytelling and teaching are completely entwined with my grandmother, my family, and my place in this world.

### ***Beginning to Tell the Tale***

People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others, including the young. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi)

My initiation into an adult turning to storytelling came with my son, Timothy. As a young child Timothy never went to sleep (and in **my** lived experience it was never). I assure you there was no nighttime ritual neglected, no advice unsought, no trick untried; I could not get my son to sleep at night: nothing worked. That meant I did not sleep,

either. What could I do? It was in that trouble with sleep, both his and mine, that I began to reconnect with storytelling and the power that it has. One evening, after I had read every book we owned and sang every song I knew, I began to tell stories to Timothy. To my amazement stories poured out of me: where were those words coming from? It seemed there existed some dormant, unawakened wellspring, unbeknownst to me, that was inside waiting for the proper time to emerge. I told stories of Prince Richard (daddy, thinly veiled) and his faithful knight Timothy, stories of their quests, stories of the mythical creatures they encountered, stories of the evenhanded justice which Prince Richard and his faithful knight Timothy administered throughout the realm, stories of lives made better by noble actions of Prince Richard and his faithful knight, Timothy. To my surprise, Timothy was completely mesmerized. I would sit on the side of Tim's bed in his darkened room. I would call forth Prince Richard and the milk white steed he rode as he traveled forward in his kingdom, his faithful, true knight Timothy by his side mounted on his coal black horse. The two rode across the breadth of the kingdom and there was no trouble they could not overcome, no wrong they could not redress—none.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1995), a psychoanalyst and author of *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, describes the power of stories in various ways. According to Estes, stories bring forth, among other things, understanding, excitement, laughter and healing; in fact, stories bring forth all that is within us. Stories are the motor that sets our inner life in motion. They nourish us and provide us with what we need to understand our situations.

Bruno Bettelheim (1976), writing specifically about fairy tales, notes that these stories are designed to give the children who hear them a sense that troubles and strife are

a normal, expected part of life and they, the listeners to these fairy tales, small and weak as they may be, are completely capable of overcoming the inevitable difficulties of life. Persevering and overcoming these problems will eventually enable them to find a place in the adult world. This place will be one they have earned and for which they are prepared.

At the time I did not know these things and I had only the beginnings of understandings of what I was offering my son. There in the dark I would spin adventures for my son, and I could see my voice wrapping itself around him, threads of silken sound. I watched Timothy's face, which was always turned away from me, his eyes fixed on some distant point, and I began to understand that something extraordinary was happening, but I did not know what it was. My words were creating a time-out-of-mind for us, a warm, living space in a velvet night. Something was happening there in the dark, something that I had not anticipated. Timothy was completely entranced, in another world, a shining world of splendid deeds and warm friendship, where he was needed as much as needing, a world where he was nurtured and strengthened and where he had something of value to offer.

Timothy hung on my every word; however, I don't think he ever went to sleep. Those nighttime tales, where the wicked were punished and the good rewarded, gave Timothy a clear-cut message about himself and the world, a message that Bettelheim (1976) maintains is so necessary for the development of children. I have often tried to answer the question: what was it that was so compelling about those stories for Timothy? These were "wonder full" nights, the sort of wonder about which van Manen (2002) writes:

The person who is struck with wonder is overwhelmed with something that defies a quick resolution, strategic action. For the person caught up in wonder, what seems ordinary and commonplace has now become extraordinary, giving pause to ponder its existence. (p. 250)

Those commonplace nights with those simple stories had become extraordinary for both of us. My son and I were intimately connected by my words and we were both struck with the wonder van Manen describes. It has been twenty years and I still have not unraveled the complete meaning of those nights. They were my introduction as an adult to the power of story I had known as a child. Importantly, they were my first understanding of the responsibility of the storyteller. That time calls forth a memory of such sweetness and the wonder that storytelling can bring.

### ***Beginning to Know***

Verily the works and words of our ancestors have become signs and examples to people of our modern age so that they may view what happened to other folk and take heed. (Zipes, 1991, p. 1)

My next encounter with the extraordinary and evocative power of storytelling occurred when I told a story for teenage girls who were incarcerated in a juvenile detention facility. This facility was hidden away down miles of dark and empty country road; hidden away by barricades, guards, identity checks and escort requirements; hidden away by spotlights and coils of barbed wire. It was clear that the inmates were isolated from society in more ways than one. I walked down a grim hallway, worn in the way institutions get worn—too many people, too many memories, too much pain, too much traffic for the structure to bear, shabby, old and steeped in misery. While I waited for my audience a guard told me, “This facility is just a camp. The girls here are training for



adult jail. Some kids would rather be in here than on the outside because at least here they get fed and get to sleep.” At this point, I was ready to run.

I was taken to a large common room, painted that sickening green. Who makes that color, anyway? Is it just another way to inflict misery? Nothing was in that room but chairs; approximately eight to ten were occupied by young women; my audience. Introductions were made and I started. “*Once upon a time, in the ancient kingdom of Persia, lived a ruler, an absolute ruler...*” Almost immediately I could sense the atmosphere change as our reality shifted; through my words and their response to them, we created a new reality. We moved outside and beyond the confines of that ugly room. We were in the sumptuous court of the sultan and in the cave of the forty thieves, all round about with silken cloth and jewels. Together we imparadised that room, made it bloom like a fertile, green, and rich oasis. It was as though the listening girls were flowers and I held each one cupped in my hands. Their faces were turned up to me the way flowers turn to the sun, and I felt that I held them inches from the ground, borne aloft on the winds of words. The girls were enraptured by my story and they hung on to every word I spoke. I actually felt the weight of each one of those girls as they held on to my words.

We were joined together and my words were the lifelines going between us, feeding them, rescuing them, and holding them upright in their chairs. They were enthralled, were drinking in my words and myself, as though my story was quenching a desperate thirst. I remember thinking fleetingly, what if I let them down? What if I proved unworthy of the gift they were giving to me? But the power of the story carried me aloft along with the girls.

There was silence at the end of my story; no one moved. Then there was a long exhalation as if they had been holding their collective breath. After that, the questions began. “Does she die?” “Does the sultan die, does she kill him?” “Does he kill her?” “What happens next?” “You can’t stop now!” I could not have imagined the response I got from those girls, but it was not anything they said to me; it was who they were in front of me and who I was in front of them. I wrote earlier that there was no beauty in that room, but I was wrong.

I was privileged to be there, and to this day, I am not entirely sure what happened that night. It was certainly an unnerving and exhilarating phenomenon. What was it that made that night and that story such a profound experience for us all? It was apparent that these girls listened with more than just one pathway of hearing. They listened with artless beauty and amazement. They listened with the clear understanding of the danger and cruelty in the story. They allowed me to cross some boundary I had no idea existed. Those girls had listened with their souls.

I had started my work in phenomenology by then and I knew there was a great deal more to this experience than I was cognizant of; in fact, I knew there was a world beyond this experience. I was looking for answers, some kind of understanding of what lay behind this experience, some help in making meaning of that storytelling. I asked other storytellers if anything like this had happened to them. Some had no idea what I meant and some had heard of this type of phenomenon, but only just heard of it. Finally, my storytelling teacher told me I had an experience of telling on the psychic level and it was good to have that experience so early in my storytelling career, so that I would know

the power I was dealing with. That didn't sound too illuminating. I really didn't understand what he was saying to me.

As a storyteller and a phenomenologist, I wanted to know about this word, *psychic*. *The Online Etymological Dictionary*<sup>2</sup> lists *psyche* as descending from the Greek meaning “the soul, mind, spirit, breath, life, the invisible animating principle or entity which occupies and directs the physical body.” I believe that this is what my teacher meant: the breath from my body, the words of my story reached the “invisible animating principle” for those girls. My breath gave them new breath. The word *psyche* is related to *psykhein*, meaning to blow or cool. In the Judeo-Christian Bible God creates man and gives him life by blowing his breath into him. God gives man the breath of life. God gives man his psyche. Is it possible that being a storyteller is to have a part in a creation?

Ancient dissectionists spoke of the auditory nerve being divided into three or more pathways deep in the brain. They surmised that the ear was meant, therefore, to hear at three different levels. One pathway was said to hear the mundane conversations of the world. A second pathway apprehended learning and art. And the third pathway existed so the soul might itself hear guidance and gain knowledge while here on earth. (Estes, 1995, p. 23)

The responsibility that I first felt telling stories to my son came back in full force. I still marvel at what my story had done, but I was completely aware that I had not done it alone. I still don't pretend to understand it, but I will know it when I breathe it again.

### ***Beginning to Change—Story Takes a New Dimension***

While teaching in elementary school I sustained an injury that marked the beginning of a journey changing my life and making me more acutely aware of the power of words. An accident at work caused a spinal cord injury that led to neurosurgery,

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<sup>2</sup> All etymological references cited are from this source unless otherwise noted.

disability and a different life. As a result of the accident my spinal column was crushing my spinal cord and that pressure had to be relieved or I would suffer “loss of function.” Once again the power and importance of words began to reveal itself to me as I struggled to understand this curious phrase “loss of function.” Finally my husband made the meaning for me. Loss of function meant paralyzed and surgery was my only viable option. The power of words lies in their naming and giving meaning in the world whether you accept them or not. Words coming from someone else’s mouth can change the story of your life.

During recovery from surgery I became acquainted with narrative as a healing force, and used story to aid in my recovery. A book with which I became familiar was *The Call of Stories* (1989) by Robert Coles. Coles, a psychiatrist and teacher, believes that the study of narrative has the power to increase the empathy and effectiveness of medical students. His quest is to humanize his medical school students by involving them in literature which he feels will serve as an anodyne for the customary fast serve, fact filled, memorization driven medical training which is the order of the day, where the patient is often not the most important factor. Coles’ mentor recognized and impressed upon him the importance of hearing and listening to the stories of his patients, telling Coles compelling stories about patients, showing Coles the power of stories and how involved we become with others when we know their story. This teacher helped Coles realize that the histories of the patients are their life stories, and their stories are all they can bring to a doctor.

Coles had a close friendship with the physician and poet, William Carlos Williams, a man with an appreciation of story and language, who reinforced for Coles the

importance of story in the practice of medicine. Williams had a great compassion and appreciation for the stories of his patients, and passed on this admonition for medical practice. “Their story, yours, mine — it’s what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (Coles, 1989, p. 30). I wondered if my doctors had been students of Coles and knew my story, would they have spoken to me differently?

Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1995) uses story, myth, and fairy tales as a way for women to rediscover and uncover their rightful natures. Estes refers to stories as medicine. This naming of stories as medicine brings a different level, an entirely new realm of efficacy, healing, and power to the use of story, one I had never before considered.

Stories are medicine. I have been taken with stories since I heard my first. They have such power: they do not require that we do, be, act anything - we need only listen. The remedies or reclamation for any lost psychic drive are contained in stories. (p. 15)

In *Story Medicine* (2003), Joseph McCaleb adds another voice to this idea of storytelling as medicine, naming stories as “an urgently needed medicine” (p. 67). McCaleb places the power of storytelling to heal in the hands of English teachers. This article envisions storytelling and teaching as partners in creating nurturing schools. He writes: “I have come to believe that those of us who teach English are at the heart of a vital but mostly untapped treatment for the emotional health of our world” (p. 67). Although in this article McCaleb addresses English teachers, it is my belief that this power of story resides with all teachers.

This is certainly a powerful, compelling, and for me, a novel way to view the main intent and purposes of stories. Since I could not “do, be, act” much of anything, stories became my refuge. The idea that I was helping to affect my own recovery by immersing myself in stories was a revelation to me. This theme of story as medicine, as having curative power, is the essential content of *Arabian Nights, Volume 1* (Zipes, 1991). Scheherazade places herself in deadly peril, and is ultimately able to cure the sultan of his madness and restore the sanity and health of his realm through her nightly stories. I have always accepted this in stories, and then discovered from reading Estes that what I had known and understood as a healing and restorative outcome in fiction had its counterpart in the real world.

### ***Beginning to Grieve/Turn***

I returned to work in time for the opening of school and by October it was clear that I could no longer teach in elementary school. My doctor said my return to work had “failed miserably.” If I still harbored any doubts about the power of words, those doubts were removed. Being in school teaching was an enormous part of my life. My sense of self was not just wrapped up in teaching; it was intricately and intrinsically entwined. Being a teacher was a connection to my family and to the stories of my family members.

School was no longer my place and I had no place in school. I had no place anymore. Casey (1993) describes a phenomenon he calls “place alienation” in which a place, for whatever reason, is no longer what it once was to us. Suddenly I was required to view my school as an outsider would, looking in, having no intimate or contractual connection to it anymore. My body was outside the school, but my heart and mind were inside.

Casey (1993) writes that desolation is “an intensified solitariness. To be desolate is not only to be without hope – dis-consolate – but to feel that one is entirely alone without the resources normally offered by friends and family” (p. 192). I certainly had the support and strength of my family, which paradoxically, made it harder to cope with the desolation and displacement I experienced. I was aware that I had much to be grateful for; I felt silly grieving for my place, but still that grief, that sorrow lingered.

### ***Beginning to See***

Over time I began to piece my life together with help from family and friends. My *anam cara*, my soul friend, Janie, was right by my side, ensuring that I did. Janie, a storyteller, was going to a National Storytelling Conference and she insisted that I go. I could not go, of course. I had not been away from home since my surgery. I had not been on a plane since my surgery. I had not been on my own since my surgery. I had no clothes that would cover my scar. What if I fell? What if my tremors were so bad that I could not lift a fork? What if I discovered the depths of my disability when I was far away from home with nowhere to hide? How do you tell the story of someone moving out from illness or heartbreak? Is it like a quilt? Does it take place in pieces, each new thing as frightening as the first?

Janie persisted and told me stories of previous conferences, with hundreds of storytellers, each one with a particular, distinctive style, telling myriad wondrous tales. She enticed me with stories told by the waterside, torch lit stories told late at night, stories told at breakfast. She seduced me with music and vendors. There would be vendors selling books, tapes, noisemakers, instruments, and all sorts of storytelling accoutrements, masks, clothing, and jewelry. I would meet the most marvelous people,

many of whom were teachers. Besides, she said, I was already a storyteller. I realized once more the power of words to name what is true and the grace to hear that truth. I knew I was a storyteller, just like my grandmother and aunts on the sun porch. So, I decided to go.

“Ulysses”

Come, my friends,  
Tis not too late to seek a newer world.  
Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
Of all the western stars until I die.  
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;  
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.  
Though much is taken, much abides; and though  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved heaven and earth, that which w'e are we are,  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.  
(Tennyson, 1833)

Once again, the healing power of story came to my aid. We know the story of young, brave Ulysses, twenty years gone from home. I am captivated by the story of this Ulysses, a man wracked by time and fate, determined to yield to neither. This last section of the poem encompasses all I am learning about the power of story. It contains the restorative powers of Scheherazade, the medicine of Estes (1995), the conviction of McCaleb (2003), and the empathy described by Coles (1989). Courage has no age limit or physical requirement; neither does the desire to matter in this world. This poem gives me courage; as I read this poem, I take heart. My turning to storytelling is to look at that which abides.



### ***Beginning to Believe***

*The Wizard of Oz* contains a scene of wondrous transformation that has become an archetype of essential change. Dorothy Gale lives in a black and white world in Kansas where everything is small, tight, dark, oppressive, black and white, devoid of color. After her black and white house comes down from the twister, she opens her black and white door to a dazzling display of intense, riotous, vivid color, color so saturated it almost pulsates, a landscape drenched in light and space. What was dark became light; what was tight became expansive; what was repressive became enabling.

Attending that storytelling conference in Rhode Island was the equivalent of landing in Oz. It was a stunning, revelational, transformative three days. I was thrown into a world I never knew existed, thrown head first into a world populated by diverse, joyful, colorful people drawn together by their love of story and storytelling. There were hundreds of people intoxicated with the joy of telling. And there were teachers convinced that storytelling belonged in the classroom. Listening to those teachers, I became convinced that storytelling was a perfect fit for school. How might storytelling be brought more into schools? Could teachers be convinced? I came to believe that in addition to the curricular uses, the power of storytelling in schools could be used as a way to develop thinking which could provide children with a means to make sense out of disorder. It would provide a richness and nuance to education that cannot be captured by any other means. Story has the capacity to handle complexity, accommodate ambiguity, and paint a richer, more fully nuanced picture than many methods currently employed.

## **The Narrative Structure of Storytelling**

When I was a child I loved puzzles, crosswords, jigsaws, analogies, whatever I could find. I was intrigued by patterns and common denominators, by how dissimilar items fit together and how those items integrated into knowledge I already had. I enjoy drawing parallels between what I know as a teacher and what I know as a storyteller. As a teacher I was always concerned with the reciprocal constructs of teaching and learning. How are my students learning; what can I do better? As a storyteller I needed to ask a different set of questions. In the following section I tell the story of learning how to bring storytelling and teaching together, of rearranging my own practice and beliefs, moving out of my role as teacher and moving into my role of storyteller, of the attempt to partner with teachers to use storytelling in the classroom.

In *Understanding Reading* (1994) Smith writes, "... The human brain runs on stories. Our theory of the world is largely in the form of stories. Stories are far more easily remembered and recalled than a sequence of unrelated facts" (p. 181). Reading this was my Archimedes moment, my moment of enlightenment. Things became clear, although I am not sure I knew exactly what became clear, but my feeling was that I was on the yellow brick road. This quote was my Rosetta stone; it laid out for me the direction of my quest. This statement, more than any other, enabled me to connect storytelling and teaching. Once I made this connection, stories of research came falling into my lap. Eureka, I've got it!

Another puzzle piece or guide was presented in a neurology journal. In their article "Neurology of Narrative" (2001), Young and Saver investigate why we have such connections to story and storytelling. They write, "What predominates or fundamentally

constitutes our consciousness is the understanding of self and world in story” (p. 73).

The authors describe how we order ourselves and the world around us through our stories, and that we humans tend to overlook how narrative pervades our thinking because stories are so all encompassing. Young and Saver present narrative as an essential feature of human development and essential to the development of culture, a view shared by Bruner (2002). Young and Saver continue their ideas on the story/brain connection:

While we will not hold onto the words of a telling, our story’s core will make a cognitive space or an environment for thought that can be drawn upon when the gist of the story serves a new purpose. (2001, p. 74)

This is the second statement I had read, amazing and revealing, about stories and the workings of our brains. To hear a story, conserve the essence of it over time, and have it leave a cognitive space, an imprint for thought – these all contribute to the invitation for the use of stories in teaching. Such a space holds great possibility for acquiring further knowledge, for a mind richer and more receptive to making connections with new information. How might this knowledge stimulate the thinking and creativity of teachers?

If I were still in the classroom, this is knowledge I would want to have. I began to think of all that I would have done, where and for what I would have used storytelling. The list is long and lustrous, but that time is past. Now I want to know of other teachers: why they would use storytelling in their classrooms, and what the experience is like of telling stories to a class?

### ***Beginning to Tell in School***

In order to fulfill the internship requirement for a doctoral degree, I worked as a resident storyteller in my neighborhood elementary school from September 2005 until April 2006. The story of my storytelling internship is one with many characters: myself, myself as storyteller, the principal, the five teachers with whom I worked, and the students. The principal was an enthusiastic supporter of and a believer in the benefits that storytelling held for students. My initial meeting with the teachers allowed me to see that this was very much the principal's program and not one instituted from the ground up. I got the impression that they may have been "volunteers" and I wanted to be sensitive to that possibility. I was received politely; however, it was clear that a few of the teachers were not at all that convinced about the merits of this storytelling program. They were wary of yet another volunteer, wondering how good I would be. Would my stories be educationally sound? Would I honor my commitment and show up on a regular basis? How disruptive would I be? Was I a spy for the principal? Would I be reporting back to her about practices I observed? As a part of the program the principal required some sort of written response on the students' part after each story, which while it would serve as a language arts activity, might have been seen as an added burden.

As I began to use storytelling in the teachers' classrooms, I was surprised to discover that while I was in the school as a storyteller, I had not left behind the self that had been a teacher, a teacher of teachers, and a student of schools. I was surprised to discover how often the evaluative side of my other self emerged, particularly with respect to how my storytelling project was used or not by the teachers. It seemed that I could not divorce my lived experience as a storyteller from my lived experience as a teacher. Why

was this persona of teacher so hard to shed? I became aware of how much the identity of teacher meant in my life and how reluctant I was to give it up.

The teachers may have had reservations about me, but the children decidedly did not. After the first week when I passed by any of the classroom doors, the students who saw me would begin to spread the storyteller sighting around the class. “The storyteller’s coming; the storyteller’s coming. Teacher, the storyteller’s coming. Are you coming right now?” Each week the children greeted me as though I were a beloved member of their family and this never wavered over time. How lovely. I admit I basked in that welcoming warmth. I am sure that the teachers noticed how the students treated me, how they wanted to be near me and have my attention and I wondered what they made of that. Did they think this warmth and affinity was only available to me? Was it something they wanted for themselves? Did the type of overt affection given to me conflict with their identities as teachers?

At school I was a celebrity with special status: I was the storyteller. Children felt free to approach me at any time. Children even left their lines to hug me and their teacher would not chastise them. If you are familiar with elementary school procedures you know that a great deal of time and effort goes into producing orderly lines of children traveling through the halls; then you know that this was quite something. The rules were relaxed for me. I met a student and his parents in a store and the boy introduced me, “This is my storyteller,” not, “This is the storyteller.” I was his storyteller. I told stories to him. What is it about the storyteller that lets children know we are safe? Why do they feel so safe with us? Collins and Cooper (1997) write that perhaps the most important thing created by storytelling is relationship:

One student remarked, “I don’t remember what stories my father told me. I only remember that storytelling created a special bond between us. It wasn’t what he told. It was the wonderful knowledge that he found me important enough to take time to tell stories to me.” (p. 1)

With a very few exceptions, all the children were on their shiny best behavior when I came in because storytelling was an event and I deserved that behavior. It was my experience that the children drank in the stories, almost as if they were parched. When I reflect about my storytelling experience at this school, I always think of my student’s audience reaction to storytelling in terms of water, drinking in, soaking dry ground. After my story they always told me how much they liked it, how I was the best storyteller they had ever heard, and could I come back tomorrow? I think that they were trying to give something back to me in partial payment for my story and their experience of it.

To be honest, I am sure that I was a welcome diversion from what appeared to be, in my experience, a regime of all work and no play. I was surprised to find how governed by standardized testing the experience of second grade was. In the time I was there I rarely saw any direct teaching and upon reflection, I can see the reason for that. These teachers did not have the protection of tenure. How could they tell that I would not be reporting back to the principal? If I did see direct teaching, would it be used as an informal observation? Four of the five teachers were new teachers and it appeared to me that the supports for all teachers, particularly beginning teachers, were not in place and they were relying on each other to determine best practices. The teacher of teachers’ side of me was definitely uneasy. However, that was not why I was there! Who knew that I would start my storytelling career by keeping my mouth shut?

When I first started to use storytelling in the teachers' classrooms, they worked at their desks while I told stories to their classes. It did not surprise or offend me that teachers used storytelling time as an opportunity to catch up, for teachers rarely find the time for all their duties. On several occasions they left the room to attend to other tasks while I was there. As I reflect about this, I realize that this could have been a disaster, both for them and for me. What might happen if a child was hurt or needed some other type of attention and the teacher was out of the room? Fortunately as time went on, perhaps three weeks into the project, a shift occurred and some of the teachers began to listen to the stories. One teacher moved closer to me, almost next to her students. Another teacher would perch on top of a desk right behind his students. This change seemed to signify to their students that they were part of the audience and the story was for them also. This became a commonplace practice for three of the teachers. It felt to me that they had assumed a different role during storytelling; they were no longer officials in charge, the leaders of the class; instead, they were part of the class. They joined with their students in a shared experience. From my own classroom experience I know that this shift is a rare event in classrooms and can change the dynamic of the classroom over time. I thought of this as a triumph. They felt the lure of story, and it had become an important time for them, too. This shift that the teachers made in their physical space, what van Manen (2003) calls lived space, is an example of how the storytelling space is different from the other classroom space, and the teachers wanted to be a part of that charmed circle. It showed recognition, understanding of, and respect for the importance my storytelling had for their students.

### ***Beginning to Gather***

In every primary classroom, there is a gathering place. Casey (1993) might call it the “hearth,” the focus and center of the room. Generally it is separate and away from the desks or tables. In that place there is a chair for the teacher and room for each child to sit on the carpet. This is where the class gathers. This is a rich and evocative place and it is where I told my stories. This place by the rocking chair, this locale, this space, gathers the children, gathers the life and spirit of the room. Heidegger<sup>3</sup> (1971) uses the word gather to mean many things. According to Heidegger this carpet would be a locale, something that allows space to emerge. That space is “something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free ...” (p. 152). The days I use storytelling in their classrooms, this space in the classroom has been made just for storytelling. It is the locale that enables the storytelling to be called forth.

While Casey addresses particular places, such as the gathering place in the classroom, saying that these places “serve to implace you, to anchor and orient you, finally becoming an integral part of your identity” (1993, p. 23), van Manen addresses the concept of lived or felt space which he defines as how we internally react to where we are and how we behave because of it. “So it appears that lived space is a category for

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<sup>3</sup>Heidegger’s involvement with and membership in the National Socialist Party in Germany and his refusal to clearly repudiate this association sullies his reputation and colors our perception of Heidegger’s philosophy. However repellent his political beliefs and actions were, he remains one of the leading figures in phenomenological thought. I agree with Moran who writes, “It would be a mistake to dismiss his philosophical contribution to ontology, phenomenology, and so on, on the grounds of his personal, shameful activities” (2000, p. 220). I have chosen to view Heidegger’s contributions to phenomenology in concert with, and tempered by the other voices in the phenomenological community.



enquiring into the ways we experience the affairs of our day to day existence” (2003, p. 103).

Echoing van Manen’s concept of lived space as the internal felt space, Casey writes: “The ‘how’ and the ‘who’ are intimately tied to the ‘where’ which gives to them a specific content and a coloration not available from any other source” (1993, p. 23). I, as the storyteller, gather the children to a particular space and together we make room for new ways to be. This space has the room for the universe if we just call it in.

Several weeks after I began my internship, one teacher told me that she felt compelled to listen carefully to my stories because her students asked so many questions about the story during the week. I have never decided whether she meant this as a compliment, but she was reinforcing for me how important the stories had become to her class. Some of the teachers told me how the children talked about the storyteller constantly. They recited my stories, including the ones from the beginning of the year and they eagerly anticipated my next visit.

As I had promised, I connected my storytelling to the curriculum whenever possible. When Aesop’s fables came up in the reading curriculum, I told Aesop’s fables. I used stories such as *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* to illustrate math concepts, and I used the multicultural nature of story to reinforce map concepts. I spoke to the teachers about the jewels of possibilities available to them through storytelling. However, I did not get a sense that the teachers saw storytelling as something to add to their repertoire. Why should that be so? Did they not recognize how engaged their students were? What could I have done to increase their interest? Was I a voice crying in the wilderness?

Alas, I had to accept that other teachers might not share my enthusiasm about storytelling.

Two of the teachers did feel storytelling had a decidedly positive impact on the quality of children's writing, and that storytelling called upon the students to use higher order thinking to construct narratives. One teacher noted that storytelling provided a vehicle for writing more sophisticated and complex stories. Another reported that the children in his class had begun to take upon themselves additional writing tasks, in addition to requesting to work with me on several writing projects. Several commented on the students' ability to remember every story I told, and that they were learning to use and develop their own imaginations, to supply their own pictures for stories—not rely on someone else. Maybe I was not crying in the wilderness after all.

I consider these comments by the classroom teachers to reflect a range of curriculum benefits that would be important to teachers. These benefits include development of long-term memory, focused attention span, and strengthening the students' imagination and independence. After this experience of telling stories in a classroom setting, I had evidence of storytelling's curricular benefits, which certainly pleased me, because the Adequate Yearly Progress component of the No Child Left Behind Act is never far from the minds of teachers and administrators.

To be truthful, I admit that I thought once these teachers were exposed to storytelling, the scales would fall from their eyes and they would immediately embrace storytelling as the way to teach, not only to reap the above benefits, but to spark the creativity and excitement that exists in all children, and to effect a new way of interaction in the classroom. Well, that didn't happen. Looking back I see there were many layers

beneath the surface of my experience that helped to shape it. I had stepped into a traditional bureaucratic organization with a hierarchical structure, and bureaucracies do not like change; they depend on routine and order. Perhaps I challenged the security of the teachers, some of them still in their probationary period. My experience of storytelling in the classrooms was shaped by the culture and climate of the school, relationships with the principal and other teachers, styles of teaching, of interpersonal relationships, and, I am sure, many things I did not consider nor understand. In a very real sense, I was skating on the surface of the experience of being in that school at that time.

Egan (1986) believes that children's imaginative mind have been neglected.

As we gain greater understanding and respect for the role imagination plays in the minds of children, Egan maintains that we must develop a curriculum and teaching methodology that reflect this knowledge. Given that there are many benefits of storytelling enumerated for students, a teacher could choose to incorporate storytelling for any or all of them. But what is the experience of storytelling for teachers themselves, and what can be learned from it to enhance pedagogical practices?

### **Phenomenology: Uniting Body, Soul, and Mind**

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a philosophy that seeks to discover the essence of phenomena and to interpret it in ways that increase our understanding. Its goal is to name and to render meanings and insights about the nature of the phenomenon being studied. The phenomenon that calls to me is: **What is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?** What are these experiences, and how do we understand and interpret them?

### ***Beginning to Explore***

One of the ways in which phenomenological researchers seek to uncover the essence of a phenomenon is to look, to see, to penetrate below the surface of the experience. The surface of an object or entity is the topmost layer or boundary of the object. It displays the superficial or external aspect. The surface has length and breadth, but no depth. It is apparent as opposed to real. When we use the expression, on the surface, we mean to say that we have given only a first glance to the phenomenon: we know only a broad outline; we have not examined; we have not looked closely. Phenomenology is not content with the surface, for as Heidegger writes, the surface or appearance of a phenomenon can be deceiving, concealed or undiscovered. It is a study that goes beyond the surface to find the essences of meaning that lie within a phenomenon.

The search for the essential nature is the heart of phenomenology. McCleary (1986) and Bachelard (1958/1994) give us two insights into this search. McCleary writes that phenomenology uses the power of our imaginations to “make explicit and come to know essential structures, which would otherwise remain merely implicit and unquestioned” (p. 59). According to Bachelard, phenomenology gives him the ability needed to measure the depth of his study of imagination. Phenomenology is a suitable way to study things that are complicated and complex; to study things that have depth, things that require a long, second look. Phenomenology supports a richness of discussion, a search for the core of things. This search is the lifeblood of education. Through phenomenological research, teachers may come to understand their ways of being around storytelling, their ways of being around curriculum, and their ways of being

around their students. Phenomenology is closely akin to storytelling. What else would you call the quest for the heart and essence of a phenomenon but the telling of its story?

Van Manen (2003) writes, “All phenomenological human research efforts are really explorations into the structure of the human lifeworld, the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations” (p. 101). He tells us that the best place to begin the phenomenological inquiry of common experiences is with our own lived experience. That is what I have done. In this chapter I have told you some of the stories of my life that caused me to turn to teaching and storytelling, a turning that has evolved over many years. This turning brought me around to the question that calls me. This is a question that combines my life’s passions of teaching and storytelling: What is it like to be a teacher who tells stories in the classroom? **What is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?** Does storytelling by teachers make a difference? How might we know that?

### ***Beginning on the Road***

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the path I choose to follow in my quest to reveal the essences of the experiences of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. Van Manen outlines the path for hermeneutic phenomenological research that I follow. In *Researching Lived Experience* (2003), van Manen identifies the research activities as follows: (1) turning to the phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (2) investigating the 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 (pp. 30-31). I am guided by this methodology as I pursue my phenomenon. In the chapters that follow, I tell the story of my desire to know the heart, soul, and spirit of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. In Chapter Two I search out what other educators, psychologists, and neurologists have discovered about storytelling. I tell of my lived experiences teaching students storytelling at the college level, and of my increasing involvement in the storytelling community. In Chapter Three I outline the philosophic work that grounds my study and the methodology for my engagement. I tell this story using the works of Heidegger, Abram, Bachelard, Gadamer, and van Manen among others. In addition, I tell the tale of how I conduct my research working within the framework of the guidelines proposed by van Manen for the conduct of phenomenological research. I also proceed with the way I engage teachers to discover what it means to be a teacher who tells stories in the classroom. In Chapter Four I take up the task of making meaning by thematic interpretation of what has been brought forth in my conversations with my participants. In Chapter Five, as the story nears its end, I explore the openings and possibilities for pedagogy this research reveals.

## **CHAPTER TWO BEING TRANSPORTED BY STORYTELLING**

Then the Persian sage stepped forward, and after prostrating himself before the king, he presented him with a horse made of the darkest ebony wood with a gold and jeweled inlay, and with saddle stirrups and bridle suitable for the majesty of the king. When Sabur saw the horse, he was extremely astounded and admired the beauty of its form and style. So he asked, “What can this wooden horse do? Tell me its virtues and whether it can move. “My lord”, the Persian answered, “if one mounts this horse, it will carry him wherever he wants. It can ride through the air and cover the space of a year in a single day. (Zipes, 1991, p. 75)

### **The Journey That Story Is**

Storytelling is rather like having a magic carpet, a carpet woven by unseen hands, woven with the gleaming threads of wanting to know. It is woven with the restless, itchy threads wanting to go anyplace that is not here: with the iridescent threads of flight, with the sparkling and exciting yarns of adventure, with the thick threads of longing and loss, with the supplicant strands to the gods, and with the exultant, exuberant fibers of joy. In *1001 Arabian Nights* (Zipes, 1991), Scheherazade tells tales of sorcerous conveyances such as ebony horses and magic carpets, that respond to the will of the user and that will take you wherever you desire to go, or perhaps, more importantly, wherever your destiny leads you. Stories are the magic carpets at your disposal. Storytelling waits upon your pleasure to transport you to realms familiar and strange, delightful and terrible. If teachers believe that they have the power of that magic carpet to convey students to wondrous places, how differently might they teach?

Storytelling is so ingrained in us that we even ascribe to our inanimate objects the ability to tell the stories of our lives (Young & Saver, 2001). There is little cause to wonder that we imbue the objects that surround us with the power of stories when we realize that the human brain is structured to process information in a narrative fashion.

Narrative is the way we make meaning and memories. We understand our experiences and our lives through our stories. Narrative provides the structure, the framework that enables us to make sense of our world with its inherent uncertainties and inconsistencies (Bruner, 2002). Bruner goes on to say: “We seem, then, to have some predisposition, some core knowledge about narrative from the start” (p. 33). Elements from many different fields of study, such as neuroscience and the studies of consciousness, psychology and the development of self, concern themselves with narrative. Narrative, it turns out, is what makes us human.

In Chapter One I tell the story of my turning to the phenomenon of the lived experiences of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. In this chapter I build on my turning to storytelling and expand the multiple understandings of narrative and storytelling and how they might inform and transform the classrooms of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. I take you with me on my journey, my quest, a magic carpet ride of stories and storytelling, to wherever your destiny or your heart’s desire lies.

### ***Expanding My Range***

Teaching is not something we do to students; it is rather, an experience in which we are side-by-side, simultaneously teacher and learner.  
(Hultgren, 1992, p. 221)

In 2000 I began teaching Language Arts Methods to seniors in a College of Education. Since I was eager to take advantage of what I saw as the natural connection between storytelling and education, I required my methods students to tell a story for the students in their elementary classrooms. My intentions were to provide my methods students with first hand experience of how powerful storytelling can be, how it can



facilitate learning, how storytelling can help children get in touch with their imaginations, and how it might help them to develop deeper connections with their own students. This was quite an agenda.

I gave this assignment because I wanted my methods students to realize that teaching is not a simplistic, scripted activity, and I wanted them exposed to the concept that teaching consists of more than preparing their students for standardized testing. I believed that it was important for them to have some experience with an alternate model of teaching. I wanted them to have the fire for teaching that I had. Egan (1986) believes that we must tap into the imaginative fount that all children possess. “My point is that we need, for the educational benefit of children, to reconstruct our curricula and teaching methods in light of a richer image of the child as an imaginative as well as a logico-mathematical thinker” (p. 17). Storytelling seemed to me to be the easiest way to provide my students with a small sample of Egan’s model for teaching.

How might these students react to an unconventional assignment? No other assignment caused so much consternation among my students. Why was this assignment so stressful? Folk wisdom has it that people fear public speaking more than any other activity. Danoff (2005) writes, “I have observed the easy transition from teaching to storytelling. The skills of teaching are remarkably similar to the skills of storytelling” (p. 40). I knew that, but my students did not. Perhaps the consternation was due to my methods students not having enough teaching experience to be sanguine about the outcome of telling stories. I was asking my students to face their students without the comfort of curriculum guides or support of prepackaged outlines. What I was asking my methods students to do was present *themselves* in front of others. I also believe that the

discomfort they felt may have had to do with their dis-ease with an assignment they perceived as out of the ordinary. Hultgren (1992) writes of the tensions inherent in moving from the familiar ways of being-in-the-world and the sometimes-uncomfortable journey to a new way of being, and this storytelling assignment was providing ample evidence of that. These were young men and women who had been exposed to four years of the current methodological framework in teaching in education and they weren't about to rock the boat at this stage. The problem for them was that *I* was rocking the boat. Even though I assured them that they could create a different, more collaborative, more cooperative mindset in the classroom, they did not believe me. What is the experience of teaching reluctant students? What does it mean to be seen as a teacher, as a storyteller, as a teacher who tells stories? What is the lived experience of being a novice?

I decided to travel to each one of their assigned classrooms and tell stories in their classrooms for their elementary students prior to their telling stories themselves. What is the lived experience of diving into the deep end of the pool? It seemed perfect: I would use storytelling in their classrooms for the elementary classes to which my methods students were assigned, giving them an opportunity to see the power of story for themselves, and perhaps, allaying some of their fears. At the same time I could engage their teachers in conversation regarding what they felt about storytelling and any role they might see for storytelling in the classroom.

### ***Showing Up***

Here I am facing down a pack of ravenous and frenzied second grade kids. This seemed like such a good idea back on campus. Now I am sure this is a huge mistake; these kids probably never listen to anything. What was I thinking? I will be exposed as a fraud in front of everybody. Why didn't I stay in my safe college classroom? (My reflections)

I was a wreck when the time came to use storytelling in their classrooms. My lived experience was a combination of nerves and more nerves. I had told my methods students how children *loved* stories, that storytelling would be an important tool for them in the classroom and my credibility was on the line. I was scared to death that my storytelling would flop. What is the lived experience of telling stories to young children? Was I more concerned about my students, the stories, or my image? How uncomfortable was I going to be with the classroom teachers in the room listening to me? Where did my fear end and my confidence begin? What if I forgot my story? What if I looked stupid in front of my students? What was I thinking? I had put myself in my method students' place and their fears were now mine.

Considering the state of near panic into which I had worked myself, the storytelling was far more rewarding than I could have imagined. In each classroom the students received me enthusiastically. My method students were quite relieved to see that someone actually told stories to children and lived to tell the tale, with arms and legs intact, no less. When it came time for them to tell their own stories, I could see that my modeling of storytelling had given most of them permission to enter into this event in a more wholehearted manner than they had previously thought possible.

When all my method students had successfully completed this assignment and the ordeal was over, I was anxious to know what the experience of telling stories to their students had been like for them. Although I believed that I had established a trusting environment with my students, I was aware that they might have an eye on their grade and be somewhat constrained in their responses if they found the experience less than

wonderful. I can remember all too well the experience of telling teachers what they wanted to hear. I wondered if I would be skillful enough and impartial enough to hear what they were saying about their experience.

What I heard, saw, and felt from my students was elation; they were triumphant. They had overcome their self-doubt and done something bigger than they thought they could. I also heard surprise: surprise that they actually enjoyed the experience of telling stories, or at least did not find it too onerous; surprise that this assignment truly gave them confidence and increased their feelings of comfort in front of the class; surprise at how easy it was once they forgot about themselves; surprise at how their children hung on every word of the story; surprise that the story was a source of comment and remark weeks after the event, and that their children could recite chapter and verse of each story; surprise that what I had been saying to them was found to be experientially true. Until they told that story, until they had that experience, they did not believe that what I had said was true. I can honestly say that was the best morning I ever had teaching methods. I was, however, left with questions: Why had this been so difficult? What changes when what you think is possible expands and becomes greater? What is the experience of facing your fear? How does that change who you are?

Soon afterward, Robin Groce (2004) published her study of elementary teachers and storytelling. This study, *An Experiential Study of Elementary Teachers with the Storytelling Process: Interdisciplinary Benefits Associated with Teacher Training and Classroom Integration*, describes the experiences of teachers with storytelling after participating in an in-service training designed to facilitate delivery of lessons in the content areas using storytelling. Groce reports that storytelling was effective in all areas

of curriculum. “As a result of increased storytelling implementation, the teachers found that storytelling helped not only enhance their language arts program, but also helped improve reading skills and practices in science, social studies, and bilingual education” (p. 127). Groce recognizes that while the training the teachers received was important to the classroom implementation of storytelling, the development of community that resulted from the discussions and feedback among the teachers was highly influential.

All the results from the study were presented in terms of curriculum gains teachers made, which appeared to be of considerable value. However, the voices of the seven teachers in the study are never heard directly. There is nothing reported in the study about the teachers’ lived experience of telling stories. They have no direct voice in Groce’s reporting. This seems to me to be rather ironic because it is the teachers’ voices that are heard in the act of storytelling. There is a rich body of research and knowledge concerning the importance of stories and the telling of stories for our cognitive, psychological and emotional development. However, I have discovered there is little, almost nothing, in the research that records teacher voices and experiences with storytelling. This became a reality that shaped my research.

### ***Family Stories***

Every aspect of our lives is intertwined in stories. Stories are integral to the way we live and the way we learn. “Stories are the fabric of our private lives, our relational networks, our social traditions, and our cultural and historical institutions” (Botella, Herrero, Pacheco, & Corbella, 2004, p. 119). We are surrounded by stories even before we are born. We are born into families who have their own rich, complex stories, and we learn our place and role in the family from the stories we hear. These stories shape our

personalities, teach us, and connect us to others (Osatuke, Glick, Gray, Reynolds, Humphreys, Salvi, & Stiles, 2004). From these family stories we learn about our families, our world and ourselves. “Biologically and psychologically humans are formed by narrative. Almost every brain structure is involved in the process of narrative construction, and thus we may say that the human mind is, indeed, a narrative brain” (Goncalves, Henriques, & Machado, 2004, p. 103). How might story and storytelling facilitate students’ learning? How might teachers begin to use storytelling to transform their practice, and when they do, what is this experience like for them?

In *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins* (1988), Elizabeth Stone explores the power family stories have and continue to have in our lives. Our family stories reflect how we were formed inside our family situation. These stories matter because they give messages and instructions, issue warnings, and provide a sense of worth and values.

Stone writes:

Family stories are one of the cornerstones of family culture; they throw what may be mute and habitual into sharp relief. By their presence, they say what issues — to the most public and predictable to the most private and idiosyncratic — really concern a given family. (p. 17)

Our childhood stories, the tales of who we are and how we learned about the world, resonate for us. Those stories that captivate us, like the story of my father and his goose, illuminate our character and the character of others. In his memoir *Growing Up*, Russell Baker describes the delights of listening to his various aunts and uncles:

If my homework was done, I could sit with them and listen until ten o’clock struck. I loved the sense of family warmth that radiated through those long kitchen nights of talk. There were many chords resonating beneath it, and I could not identify them precisely. I was absorbing a sense of them and storing them away in memory. (1982, p. 116)

Baker's happy remembrances, how he "stores them away in memory" illustrate the conclusions that Young and Saver (2001) present about the brain's capacity to remember and to create a narrative space. Teachers who use storytelling in their classrooms tap into their students' capacities to create that receptive cognitive space, and teachers who tell personal stories give students delicious glimpses into their character and entry into a different world. What is the experience of teachers who choose to tell personal stories? How might telling personal stories change the relationship between teachers and students? What might that make possible for each?

### ***A Thing Woven***

We are familiar with the pervasive use of textbooks in school; we have a textbook for math, one for science, several for reading. The current meaning of the word *text* is a book or document, something written and printed. It is the actual representation of the author's words. Looking farther back into the etymology of the word *text*, we see that it comes from *textus* meaning the style or texture of a work; literally it means "a thing woven." The word *texere*, means "to weave." There is an infinite variety and beauty in woven objects, such as our magic carpet. The character of something woven is determined by the way individual strands interplay; there is a contribution from each element involved. It is an interactive process. A teacher, willing to depart from the modern meaning of *text* and operate from an older understanding of the word, might use stories to weave words to create meaning for students in a more immediate and engaging fashion.

Gadamer (1960/2004) writes that hermeneutics, the study of interpretation, was originally used to understand text, the written word. What if we were to shift our point of

view and use story as our text, to use the process of interlacing threads of varying complexity to make the interrelated whole found in stories? What would be the experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling as texts to engage students' thinking? What does it mean to weave concepts together to create knowledge in action? Our students come to us from worlds filled with stories. They already have many sophisticated threads on their learning loom waiting to be woven into their school learning, and it only makes sense that teachers use forms with which they are familiar.

### ***The Story of Ourselves***

Stories we hear play an integral part in the basic formulations of our personalities, so the study of narrative is also the concern of psychologists and psychotherapists.

Boothe and von Wyl (2004) view narrative as a key component in the socialization of children. They attribute a primary role for storytelling in the development of a child's self-concept and in the formation of secure attachments. Parental storytelling contributes to a child's sense of individuality; the stories parents tell their children form a basic component in a child's level of confidence as the child matures and moves into a wider world. Boothe and von Wyl echo the conclusions of Bettelheim (1977) with regard to the importance of stories in the socialization of children. What would be the experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms with these ideas in mind?

The psychologist and author Jerome Bruner, who has explored the relationship of self and narrative in several of his works, makes sweeping claims regarding the central role of narrative in the creation and development of our concept of self and our understanding of the world. Bruner (1986) believes that we have a predisposition, an innate inclination to organize facts into narratives. He posits that we as humans have two



forms of thinking and constructing reality: the paradigmatic mode, which is formal, procedural, and logical; and the narrative mode, which deals with human actions and consequences. It is the narrative mode of thinking that creates stories and makes possible our ability to deal with the ambiguities of life.

In *Making Stories*, Bruner (2002) puts forward the idea that our sense of self is continuously being constructed and modified to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and he states that the making of a self, the forging of an identity, is in itself a narrative act. He asserts, “It is through narrative that we create and re-create selfhood, that self is a product of our telling and not some essence to be delved for in the recesses of subjectivity” (pp. 85-86). Bruner explores the idea that we construct our identities, our very selves, through the stories we tell others and ourselves. Metzger (1992), a writer and therapist, conceptualizes a similar notion of identity: “Each of us is an exceedingly complex being, containing so many selves that we are more like communities or large populations than single individuals” (p. 67). Story and storytelling offer the means to organize a sense of self in ways that are acceptable to our sense of who we are. Metzger warns us that clinging to stories that no longer reflect our lives may trap us into a life which is not our own.

This creation of self and its impact on others is reflected in the story concerning my math aptitude or rather my lack of it. My family’s story is that I am bad at math. I have always been bad at math. Everyone in my family knows I am bad at math. My father, however, is a math whiz and my inability to grasp basic concepts was a source of dismay to both of us. Each time he attempted to help me with my arithmetic homework, the result was a disaster: tears on my part, exasperation on his. You see, you just have to

understand: I am bad at math and my father is a math whiz. I believed this story, and the subsequent actions deriving from it, such as deciding not to take higher math courses in school, were the embodiment of the family story. This is a potent story because, besides defining me along with my abilities, it helped shape and color, for better or worse (and worse it was), my relationship with my father whose good opinion I greatly desired and did not get in this arena. In addition, it helped to define my relationship with my siblings, not to mention leaving me with a lingering sense of inferiority.

One of the points Bruner (2002) makes about our self narratives is how we shape them based in part on what we think others want from us. My story reflects Bruner's contention that "Self-making, anomalously, is from both the inside and the outside" (p. 65) because everyone in my family, inadvertently I'm sure, contributed to reinforce this math phobia and other stories about myself along with all the other family members. I am confident that this math story of mine dovetailed with and helped shape the self-narratives of the members of my family who watched these exchanges. Ironically, years later while I was researching storytelling and teaching, I came upon *Innumeracy*, a book by J. A. Paulos, a professor at Temple University. Paulos writes that storytelling "is as effective an educational tool in mathematics as it is in other domains" (2001, p. xiv). I am reminded of the old saying, "If I only knew then what I know now." I can only wonder what my attitude toward math might have been if I could have seen through a different lens. This math story became not only my own self-making story, but also a defining story for my family. It is an example of the powerful effect Stone (1988) attributes to family stories, in that the expectations of our family can become adopted as our own:

For better or worse, and whether we collaborate with our families or not, we are shaped by our families' notion of our identities...The image they mirror back to us exists earlier and more substantially than we ourselves do. And among the primary vehicles families use to mirror us to ourselves are the family stories we hear about ourselves. (p. 167)

In addition to the role of stories in creating the self, Bruner writes that there is a regulatory function that stories perform. In *Acts of Meaning* (1990), Bruner states that in order for a culture to be viable, it must have a mechanism to resolve conflicts, provide for differences in conduct, and have the ability to restore its members to normalcy from the effects of the aberrations and deviations that occur from that code. Stories serve the function of reconciling the cultural codes of conduct imposed upon us, and the inevitable departure from those codes of acceptable behavior. This reflects the sociological function of myth that Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth* (1988) related to maintaining and transmitting the social order. The classroom is a culture of its own with conflicts and deviations from the norm. What would the life experiences of teachers be if they used storytelling to cope with, react to, or possibly derail deviations? Would storytelling help to create a climate that reduces disruptions?

In *Making Stories* (2002), Bruner writes, "The narrative gift seems to be our natural way of using language for characterizing those deviations from the expected state of things that characterize living in a human culture" (p. 85). The stories we tell are a way to rectify and respond to those actions that others might question and are a way of normalizing puzzling or frightening behavior. These are a means of guiding behavior, cautionary tales that are meant to keep us on the straight and narrow by letting us hear what happens to those who don't.

In *Touch Magic* (2000), Jane Yolen writes, “The great archetypal stories provide a framework or model for an individual’s belief system” (p. 17). We use stories to rehearse, prepare for, and cope with the vicissitudes of life. Russell Baker’s (1982) sense of his ability to make his way in the world was shaped by his mother’s stories regarding his lacking the quality of “gumption.” The family stories Elizabeth Stone (1988) sets down are filled with family definitions that mark members of the family and provide guideposts for the conduct befitting a representative of the family.

Stories we tell ourselves help shape our identity. We use the stories we tell ourselves, along with the ones we hear from our families, to develop a coherent self, and we are constantly telling stories to create and recreate our selves. Most of us can recall the stories we told to explain our misdeeds to authority figures and our exploits to our peers. We use our personal stories to develop autonomy and to distinguish ourselves from the other people in our lives and the stories they tell about themselves. The children we teach have been hearing and telling stories, creating their identities, long before we teachers meet them. How would it help to transform teachers’ practice if they included and celebrated their own stories and the stories of their students?

In my experience as an elementary school teacher, I often heard fellow teachers make the observation that the research findings on teaching and learning, which would be beneficial to them in their practice, rarely make it to the classroom level. The extensive research on narrative and the telling of stories is a case in point. It appears that the work being done demonstrating how the telling of stories supports and enables cognition is missing from classroom life as well. The human brain is structured for narrative; it is organized to process information in a narrative fashion. This understanding of brain

organization supports the use of storytelling in schools to foster cognition and healthy psychological development. However, it may not be this function of storytelling that immediately connects with teachers and students. It may not be part of their story about storytelling. It may be that teachers value the more familiar power of storytelling: to name and place experience, to evoke an emotional response. What might teaching look like if the teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classes could combine these two aspects of storytelling? How might it change teachers' practice and students' learning? What does it mean to connect teaching with storytelling?

### **Unraveling the Threads of Storytelling**

Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said. (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 370)

#### ***Beginning My Quest***

When I began my journey to understand storytelling, to find out “what lies behind what is said,” I quickly realized that storytelling has as many definitions as there are stories. So, I did what comes naturally to educators—I took a class. Out of that class grew a storytelling group that met once a month, to tell stories, to work out specific problems with a story, to provide feedback and support for our efforts, and to enjoy the stories. I was the new kid in town, the one with the least experience storytelling, and I was thrilled to be a part of this group of **real** storytellers, women who were willing to accept me as a storyteller because I had named myself as one. In my experience this was a passionate group, dedicated to creating stories that entertained and stories that touched the heart. I got to see and hear first hand other storytellers at work, always a compelling

occupation for me. It was endlessly fascinating to watch how these storytellers made their stories, how each of them used so many ways of being around a story, how that process depended on what they wanted to say, and how each story had something about it that caused it to fall together. Watching others work to create a story gave me confidence that my own story making process was right for me. Out of this group grew performances for all ages.

### ***What is Storytelling?***

Stories become a way, in other words, of capturing the complexity, specificity, and the interconnectedness of the phenomenon with which we deal and thus redressed the deficiencies of the traditional atomistic and positivistic approaches in which teaching was decomposed into discrete variables and indicators of effectiveness. (Carter, 1992, p. 6)

Story and storytelling surround us all; it is in the air we breathe. Our lives are lived in stories. But what exactly is storytelling? Who exactly is a storyteller? Stories are made up of carefully chosen words, and for phenomenologists, words have great import and are also carefully chosen. The origins of words, their etymology, may reveal important information. So, I set off on a quest to find out, to know, and to understand the meanings of those words “storytelling, story, and tell.” I was delighted to discover that these words have rich, exuberant, and colorful histories.

### ***The Roots of Storytelling***

According to the *Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology* (1995), in both the Old French and the Anglo Norman, the word for story is *estoire*; in Latin, it is *historia*, meaning account or tale. If we look farther back, we find that the word story derives from three Greek words: *historia*, which is a learning or knowing by inquiry, record, history or narrative; *historein*, meaning to inquire; and *histor*, meaning wise man or

judge. In my understanding these three Greek words encapsulate much of the sense storytelling makes in general and in education. It is clear from these energetic terms, the Greeks did not consider storytelling a spectator sport; the listener and the teller are equally involved in a reciprocal, interactive process. With the word *historia*, we are a listener and a learner; we learn and finally know based on our listening and inquiry. *Historein* means to inquire, and implicit in that inquiry is interest or intrigue; there is something here we wish to know, something that has caused curiosity, something that needs to be asked and then answered. When we inquire we seek information by asking a question. The aim of any inquiry is to know. The wise person (to use a less sexist term) or judge, the *histor* has “the understanding or discernment of what is true, right, or lasting, and is able to make good judgments. The judge, the wise person wants to know. It may be said that the listeners put the story on trial, as it were, to determine what truth or validity is held in the story for them. The listener, the wise man, makes this judgment. We decide the worth or fitness of the tale; we decide what the story contains for us.

Looking farther back reveals that in Proto Indo European, story comes from the base *weid* that is to know, literally to see, and is related to the Greek *eidemari*, to know. Running through all of these etymologies is the crackling sense of agency, action, and the drive to *know*, which is the foundation of our humanity.

Story is defined as “a true narrative, or one presumed to be true, relating to important events or famous people of the past.” The definition goes on to include the following: an historical account, events recorded by historians, a recital or account of events, a coherent account of a set of facts, a history, a narrative of fictitious events designed for entertainment of the hearer, a lie, an account with no basis in fact, a person’s

account of his or her experience, and a painting or sculpture representing a historical subject, any work of pictorial or sculptural art containing figures. With a definition that is wonderfully wide open, a teacher who tells stories for students will engage with most of the meanings of story, such as the true recital of events; the desire to entertain or the transmission of knowledge, depending on the intent for storytelling. Livo and Rietz (1986) describe story as:

A universal mirror that shows us the “truth” about ourselves—who and why we are. When we look into this mirror, we see daily routine and mundane circumstances transformed into something profound. “Story” takes the ordinary and binds it into all of human existence, revealing the significance of the trivial. Through “story” we can transcend the experiences of daily living. (p. 4)

There is much “ordinary” in the school day. What would the experiences of teachers be if they believe that they have the power to transform that ‘ordinary’ into ‘something profound?’ How might their practice change in that light, looking through that mirror?

### ***Tell***

When storytellers talk about the act of telling stories, they often refer to it as “tell” or “telling.” Tell comes from the Old English, Old Saxon, *tellian*, Middle, Modern and Low German and Middle Dutch, *tellen*, and is a word rich in meaning. To tell is to give an account or narrative, to make known by speech or writing, to give evidence, to communicate information, to utter words, to instruct or inform, to order or direct, to recite a passage, to count for something, to act or operate with effect, or to make an impression. Telling illuminates, opens up, brings things forth that were unknown or hidden. Telling causes things to happen and brings about change. When I told my college students they would “tell” stories, my spoken word changed their lifeworld. Our relationship changed



by my telling in ways I could not have predicted. To tell is to take action; the teller does something. When a teacher tells a story, he or she operates with effect; that story does not fall on deaf ears. More likely it travels the path Estes (1995) writes about—the path to the brain and to the heart.

Most of us are familiar with the definitions of tell that concern ordering and directing in the classroom, initiated by the teacher. This form of communication that conveys information and little else, is usually a one-way street, from the teacher to the students, and demonstrates the “power-over” paradigm described by Kreisberg in *Transforming Power* (1992). This model leaves little room for actual communication. The definitions of tell that more accurately reflect what a storytelling teacher might do are the ones that describe *counting for something, operating with effect and making a difference*. What might it be like for teachers to experience the immediacy of making such an impression and a difference with their communication?

### ***Storytelling***

Storytelling by its nature is designed to have an effect, to operate with purpose. It would seem that if we are predisposed to stories and storytelling, the classroom is a logical place for them to be in the forefront because our communication with our students needs to count for something rather than merely uttering words. Does the experience of storytelling for teachers include a sense of counting for something? Do storytelling teachers experience themselves as making a difference with their stories?

Storytelling is an interpretive art form, beginning when the storyteller chooses a story to tell, and it continues to evolve throughout the process of making and finishing the story. Storytellers interpret their own stories, but as they tell the story, they know that the

audience makes its own interpretation. Gadamer (1960/2004) understands that text will always be understood in different ways, and in verbal texts, it is the language that shows what understanding is. Rather, language makes the work of art appear as itself for the first time. “Our verbal experience of the world has the capacity to embrace the most varied relationships of life” (p. 448). Thus, language enables me to create the object of my attention for myself. “Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs” (p. 389). Gadamer writes that understanding, and thus interpretation, are connected in a fundamental way to individual modes of thought, to our own native language.

Storytelling is an art. “It is the most basic and accessible of all our art forms. It is an act of pure creation. It is experience and imagination made manifest in language” (Niemi & Ellis, 2001, p. 50). Livo and Rietz (1986) also describe storytelling as an art form, an ancient, oral, sophisticated practice, and one with a ritualized and patterned form. It is immediate, existing in the present moment, and it is changed by each audience. “Storytelling is an oral art form whose practice provides a means of preserving and transmitting images, ideas, motivations, and emotions that are universal across human communities” (p. 7).

In her book, *The World of Storytelling* (1990), Pellowski uses this definition of storytelling:

The entire context of a moment when oral narration of stories in verse and/or prose, is performed or led by one person before a live audience; the narration may be spoken, chanted, or sung, with or without musical, pictorial, and/or other accompaniment, and may be learned from oral, printed or mechanically recorded sources; one of its purposes must be that of entertainment or delight and it must have at least a small element of spontaneity in the performance. (p. 18)

Something marvelous happens in that described “context of a moment.” Storytelling is a reciprocal process; something happens for the performer and the audience; something is evoked from both of them. Pellowski’s definition of storytelling states that one of the purposes of storytelling must be to give delight. Delight means to give great pleasure or joy, or to take great pleasure or joy, or to please greatly. The audience and the teller are engaged in a dance, and each partner influences the lived experience of the other. How often do teachers engage in activities that produce delight? What might engaging in such pursuits mean for teachers? How might the practices of teachers change if they felt they could delight their students? It is delightful to contemplate.

Storytelling can be such a homey, familiar thing that we sometimes forget the power it has for the teller and the audience. In *The Storytellers Start-Up Book* Margaret MacDonald (1993) describes the various benefits of storytelling. Individuals listening to and telling stories improve their abilities to listen, speak, and use imagination. Through stories we enhance our understanding of ourselves, our culture, and the culture of others. Listening to stories gives individuals a sense of belonging to a group, and it gives access to acceptable avenues for expressing emotions.

For groups, the story becomes a shared experience that helps to bind the group together. Stories assist communities to regulate behavior and pass on traditions, norms, and culture. For the teller, “Story carries the ability to calm a group – or to energize them. Story offers the power to hold a group in your sway. Story can give you the pride of performance and the joy of sharing” (MacDonald, 1993, p. 102).

Witherell and Noddings (1991) write, “To educate is to take seriously both the quest for life’s meaning and the meaning of individual lives” (p. 3). The authors identify narrative as a primary tool for educators. Collins and Cooper (1997) write that the fundamental benefit of story is that it makes meaning; it pervades all learning.

Understanding story helps us to understand our lives and is primary in the work of educators. “Stories invite us to come to know the world and our place in it. Whether narratives of history or of the imagination, stories call us to consider what we know, how we know, and what and whom we care about” (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 13). Their book is a collection of essays from educators who explore narrative and describe the ways in which the power of story can model teaching and learning in their lives. One storytelling teacher, Kim Stafford, discovers that he carries a feeling of unexpected dis-ease and discomfort as he prepares to tell traditional stories of the Nez Perce, a people driven from the land by white settlers one hundred years ago, to a class whose members are descendants of those who displaced them. He discovered that these ancient tales still have the power to evoke feelings of dis-ease and discomfort in the children of the displacing forebears. The ancient stories have the power to evoke feelings and emotions that resonate through time.

Stafford tells a story in which he maintains that understanding the messages in stories has the power to save lives. He writes of his experience when a remembered story of a king and his hawk saved him from drinking polluted river water at the bottom of Joseph Canyon in Oregon. With regard to storytelling and narrative, Stafford has come to understand that all of the stories in his essay are centered on one idea: saving lives. “A story saves life a little at a time by making us see, and hear, and taste, our lives and

dreams more deeply. Story does not rescue life at the end, heroically, but all along the road, continually” (Stafford, 1991, p. 28). What might the experiences of teachers be who believe that by storytelling they are helping their students to save their lives in some fashion? Would part of that experience include saving themselves?

### **Storytelling in the Classroom**

Children’s hunger for stories is constant. Every time they enter your classroom they enter with a need for stories. (Wright, 1995, p. 5)

Narrative—live, face-to-face, heart-to-heart story-making—is the language of relationships. (McCaleb, 2003, p. 70)

### ***Reflecting on the Difference***

Before I began to use storytelling with grade school children, I assumed that storytelling would be fairly closely related to my experience as a classroom teacher. I was surprised and somewhat discomfited by just how different the experience was of being a storyteller rather than a teacher, as I write in Chapter One. The two roles are quite dissimilar.

One of the most notable aspects of being the children’s storyteller was the deep affection these children felt for me; and they displayed a complete, unshakable confidence in my affection for them. It is quite something to be loved by children. I realize that I had that love when I was a classroom teacher, and that is probably what made it so hard to leave. I found myself working harder in order to be worthy of that honor. The students believed that I was there solely for their benefit and that I wished them nothing but good. This reminded me of John O’Donohue’s (1998) description of the *Anam Cara*, the soul friend. I was the person to whom anything might be said, whose heart might share any burden, whose love was steadfast. I recall many of the things

shared by these children: happiness, despair, loneliness, and betrayal. You would think that such young lives could not possibly hold such things, but you would be mistaken. One little girl told the story of how her father had attempted to murder her mother while she was present. I remember denying this story in my heart only to discover it was true. In that same school was a boy from Darfur. At the time I knew him, he had no voice at all, nor any stories, but he liked hearing mine. I know he had stories, but was not able to tell them. I wonder what my stories meant to those two children. I wonder if my stories brought them surcease. There is no way to know. That is the nature of storytelling; it is the gift given with an open hand and the understanding that each listener will make his or her own value and meaning.

How did I react to this love and faith? I felt honored, flattered, resentful and frightened, all at the same time. This acceptance by the children reminded me of my storytelling for the juvenile offenders, and made me aware of my responsibility because my story had created an alternate vision of the world, just by telling them a story. Gadamer (1960/2004) writes: “Thanks to the verbal nature of all interpretation, every interpretation includes the possibility of a relationship with others. There can be no speaking that does not bind the speaker and the person spoken to” (p. 397). As McCaleb (2003) writes, narrative is the language of relationships. My speaking created the relationship, and I was bound to those children. Even today, years later, when I see them the bond still exists. How might a person move back and forth between the roles of teacher and storyteller? What might the storyteller know that the teacher may not? What does it mean to be a teacher as storyteller? How might this faith and affection transform

a teacher's work? What might be the experience of a teacher who create such bonds with students?

My adventure of telling stories to elementary school children was filled with surprises, mostly delightful ones. One element of my phenomenon revealed itself later in my time at the school. It seemed my stories were being told over and over again by the children, complete with all of my vocabulary, intonation, and gestures intact. These children, after hearing the story once, remembered each and every story. If they got something wrong, perhaps the sequence, they would self-correct. I thought this was a remarkable achievement on their part. I must say that my classroom teacher self was making plans for the storytelling club, the recital for their parents, the creative writing activities, the literature units. So it was puzzling to me that the teachers seemed unimpressed and not at all interested. I couldn't understand it, but there wasn't much I could do about it beside continuing to tell stories. Were they indifferent because the stories were not their particular knowledge, and had not been imparted by them? Who decides what knowledge is valued, and what changes we would see if knowledge were not compartmentalized? How might teachers who are storytellers breach that departmental chasm of divided knowledge?

Egan (1986) calls for a comprehensive curriculum reform based on story that moves away from the mechanistic, part-to-whole curriculum design currently in vogue, to one that is more interconnected and coherent. He presents a story-based model that can be used in all content areas and explores specific applications, in addition to addressing the larger implications for curriculum. This model implies that the content of the curriculum, to be of maximum educational value, needs to reflect the power and

fundamental importance of the conceptual tools it is to be built upon. Egan writes that by the time they arrive in school, children have been dealing with, and have developed the concepts to deal with, such matters as love and hate, good and bad, fear and courage, confidence and anxiety. Their experience of the world has been dramatic and significant. What would the experience of teachers be whose view of students reflects that of Egan? What type of stories might they tell?

### ***Our Storytelling, Our Teaching***

Barbara Reed (1987), the Director of the Connecticut Storytelling Center asks the essential question: “Does this ancient tool [storytelling] have any value in the modern elementary school curriculum, and, if so, what is it?” (p. 35). She answers the question by setting herself the task of telling stories to six classes of elementary school students, including two bilingual classes, over a course of twelve weeks. The evaluators of the effectiveness of the storytelling project were the classroom teachers where the storytelling took place. As with much research about storytelling, the results were both what you might expect and what you might not anticipate.

Reed (1987) writes that the teachers in the project responded with a resounding confirmation of storytelling’s cognitive and affective importance for the curriculum and the students. Participating teachers had provided a list of learning skills they felt storytelling would improve, such as, increased listening ability and improved attention span, sequencing, recall of details, and fluency in writing, and all of the teachers did see improvement in each of the target areas by the end of the experiment.

Teachers noted in their remarks that they were particularly taken with the differences storytelling made for children who had not previously been successful



members of the classroom community. The teachers reported, “The chief value of the project lay in the way it allowed certain children to bloom, fostered group cooperation, and gave children an opportunity to be generous” (p. 39). Each time I read that finding, I am stopped in my tracks and feel that one sentence contains worlds within it. The teachers did not give specifics on what success or bloom meant in their classroom, but I have been a classroom teacher long enough to have seen children who do not thrive, who sink into the background, who are not successful at being a child in school. To have storytelling provide nourishment, the soil to feed young minds, to “allow certain children to bloom” and “to be generous” is a testament to the enormous power and potential storytelling has in education. How might teachers’ practice change if, through storytelling, they felt they had the power to have children blossom who might not have done so previously?

For Reed (1987), the biggest surprise and most significant benefit was the reaction of the teachers and the belief expressed by them that they had learned and benefited most from the project. They were eager to continue telling stories to their students because they saw the rewards storytelling had for their students. It became apparent that the teachers’ view of the benefits they received was mediated by the benefits they saw that storytelling had for their students. Reed is clear that any lasting results of a program such as this one depend on the participation of the teachers who are willing to take on the task of storytelling. Although the article gave no indication of what followed this study, it may be reasonable to expect that these particular teachers, who have seen the benefits of storytelling for their students, would be amenable to continuing this practice.

This is a compelling study. It has almost everything I could wish for: rousing support for storytelling, and evidence of strong curricular connections. However, something is missing, the voices of the teachers. This was true in Groce's (2004) study, and it is true of this study. There was much reported *about* teachers' reactions and results of using storytelling, but little is reported about the actual experiences of the teachers themselves. What would we hear if we could listen to the teachers' voices?

The United States Department of Education, in its 1986 report, *What Works: Research about Teaching and Learning*, gives a strong endorsement to storytelling in schools. The report presents the information that storytelling motivates young children to read, introduces them to cultural values and literacy. Storytelling is recommended for students who may be struggling. "Even students with low motivation and weak academic skills are more likely to listen, read, write, and work hard in the context of storytelling" (p. 23). This Department of Education statement gives official blessing for a strategy that will assist all students, not only the slower ones. Once again this is an endorsement of storytelling, but it does not directly include teachers and their experiences of using storytelling in the classroom.

The more I delve into my question about the lived experiences of storytelling with teachers, the more I realize that the curricular aspects of teachers telling stories in research are, if not paramount, then close to it. This is what is considered to be of importance. Collins and Cooper (1997) in *The Power of Story* are among the many researchers to list storytelling benefits for the classroom. According to Collins and Cooper, storytelling enhances imagination and visualization, develops appreciation of the beauty and rhythm of language, increases vocabulary, refines speaking skills, improves

listening skills, and allows students to interact with adults on a personal level. It enhances writing skills, develops reading skills and sparks an interest in reading. It also enhances critical and creative thinking skills, nourishes students' intuitive side, helps students see literature as a mirror of human experience, and helps students understand their own and others' cultural heritage. This is an impressive array of benefits, but it excludes a focus on teachers and what we might learn from their lived experience as teachers who begin to use storytelling in the classroom. We have a list of benefits storytelling offers to students, but where is the corresponding list of benefits for teachers? Where are the teachers to tell me about their experiences? What might their insights reveal about pedagogical practices beyond skill improvement?

Many teachers and organizations have found storytelling to be the method of choice to teach a variety of lessons across the curriculum. One of them is Yannis Hadzigeorgiou, who teaches physics at the University of the Aegean. Hadzigeorgiou uses storytelling to humanize his subject and to teach students that science is a human activity and cannot be divorced from the people who practice it. In *Humanizing the Teaching of Physics through Storytelling: The Case of Current Electricity*, Hadzigeorgiou (2006) presents an organizational framework for casting the stories of physics into a compelling narrative.

In a Position Statement from the Committee on Storytelling, the National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE] wholeheartedly endorses storytelling as an effective method of delivering curriculum, calling storytelling “the best vehicle for passing on factual information” (Teaching Storytelling, 1992). The NCTE recognizes the interactive nature of storytelling, its comfort in emotional as well as cognitive arenas. But the

statement returns to what storytelling offers in the way of improving reading skills, as well as the manipulation of language that storytelling affords listeners. However, its *factual* statement that storytelling is the best way to pass on information misses the transformative power of being in a story together.

These lists of advantages and benefits for teachers who use storytelling in their classes remind me of a menu from a Chinese restaurant: one from column A, the cognitive domain; one from column B, the affective domain. What attracts one teacher might be the possibility of enhanced reading scores. Perhaps another wants to build a sense of community; still another wants to improve listening skills. It might be that storytelling speaks to a teacher's need to understand the multicultural classroom. The possibilities are limitless, and if storytelling is used by the teacher, it will be chosen based on the pedagogical needs of the individual teachers. It is possible that the educational benefits of storytelling don't sort themselves out and that the reasons teachers choose to begin storytelling are not necessarily the reasons they stick with it. This is all in the realm of "what if." What if a classroom teacher chooses stories for a particular reason? How would that color the experience? Would the experience of storytelling be different? What can we learn about pedagogical engagement and being-with students in teaching? Would the teachers stay focused on the reasons with which they started?

If our brains are structured in narrative form, it seems reasonable to take advantage of the possibilities that exist in storytelling. What is the experience of a teacher who tries storytelling? What is it that might prevent a teacher from using a method that matches the lives and minds of students? Is it perhaps not knowing about those benefits or, not knowing how to begin using storytelling in their classrooms? How

might storytelling change teaching? Does it, in fact, change teaching? Can it be possible that teachers simply do not see themselves as storytellers? What would the experience be of teachers who consider themselves storytellers?

***Flying Farther on the Ebony Horse***

The union of the mathematician with the poet, fervor with measure, passion with correctness, this surely is the ideal. (James, 1920, p. 138)

Once upon a time, a long time ago in the ancient world, so the story goes, the study of mathematics and the study of poetics were once united, but, because of quarrels and differences, split into separate disciplines and remain so to this day. In our modern world, on the Greek island of Mykonos, a group of people with richly diverse backgrounds in mathematics, philosophy, teaching, and literature assembled to search for the common ground between mathematics and storytelling. Tomlin (2005) tells the story of a conference sponsored by the Greek novelist, Apostolos Doxadis, the aim of which was to explore the possibility of bringing together mathematics and narrative once more. This conference grew out of the realization of the importance of narrative to mathematics. Participants at the conference recognized narrative as helpful in providing a vehicle for mathematicians, who are (so the article says) notoriously bad at explaining their work, for understanding their work and teaching. Storytelling offers the opportunity to frame problems and questions under study in a different more accessible light and offers hope that future mathematical constructs might be more comprehensible to others both inside and outside the field. This conference shows that there is strong interest in the reestablishment of cordial relations between mathematics and storytelling.

This story begins with a split: a way of thinking that believes you can compartmentalize knowledge and parcel it out. Would the perception of this split between math and writing, or between science and art, or any other division between subjects be different for teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms? What happens in a class or school when separation of thinking and instruction, instead of integration of learning, takes place? Who is excluded, and why, from the subjects considered most valuable? What happens to those students who have been excluded from participation in the prized subjects of study? Do they dry up like raisins in the sun? What happens to students on either side of the divide? Can teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms take the sting out, at least temporarily, for the included and the excluded groups declared to be the “other” and those who label them as such? What might the experience of teachers be who set out to ease divisions in a classroom? What might the experience be for their students and for themselves? What would be the stories the teacher chooses to tell? What would the experience be if the teacher were confident enough and brave enough to have students tell their stories?

Susan Butcher’s study, *Narrative as a Teaching Tool* (2006), describes a program in which storytelling was used as a teaching strategy for incarcerated men in Wisconsin. It was seen as vital that this population develop new and more acceptable ways of coping in the short term, as well as for when they reentered society. Butcher’s first objective was “to provide information on the possible benefits of narrative, as a teaching strategy” (p. 196), and the second was having the educators at the Department of Corrections understand the benefits of incorporating storytelling to assist student learning. It was felt

that as a result of adding storytelling to curriculum, “Students may be better equipped to deal with daily life and problem solving” (p. 196).

In the study described by Butcher (2006) teachers, social workers, and parole officers were interviewed after storytelling to describe what they believed to be the benefits of storytelling for the prison population. This is an approach similar to that used by Reed (1987), who concentrated on teachers’ perceptions of benefits for students in their classrooms. The Butcher study focuses squarely on what storytelling offers the inmates; it validates their experiences, gives them a voice, and presents them with different alternatives to solving problems. Further results show that the inmates developed empathy for others, increased their critical thinking skills, and were able to view themselves in a different, more powerful light, as having some control over their own lives. What was the lived experience of these prisoners learning to use storytelling to give a voice to the issues they face? What must it have been like for prisoners to find a voice that validated their experiences?

One common theme uncovered in the above interviews is the connections between students and teachers. Those interviewed indicated storytelling showed the commonality of life experiences for both teacher and inmate, building rapport and trust. “Connections between teacher and student bond the two together” (Butcher, 2006, p. 202). What must it have been like for the instructors and prisoners to experience each other in a new way? Were the lines between “us and them” blurred by this experience? What differences will this experience make for them? In addition, storytelling was found to be an effective tool for learning, making it fun and exciting. Storytelling

provides role models and templates for helping inmates “to see solutions and alternatives where past thinking patterns offered no alternatives” (Butcher, 2004, p. 200).

This article presents remarkable results for storytelling in this population, including development of critical thinking, empathy and moral development, enhancing verbal and interpersonal communication, and alternate ways of solving problems. However, it has the same limitations that Reed’s (1987) study has: there are no voices telling us what the experience was like for the teachers. It is difficult for me to believe that this experiment was not equally powerful for those teachers and potentially transformative for their practice.

If storytelling has this influence on offenders, helping them to relate to others and themselves in more positive ways and to see the possibility of change, what impact might storytelling have in the school or with teachers? How might a teacher be changed, and what might that experience be like? Would their practice be transformed?

### ***Imagination’s Place in School***

From the magician’s or the phenomenologist’s perspective, that which we call imagination is from the first an attribute of the senses themselves; imagination is not a separate mental faculty ... but it is rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given in order to make tentative contact with the other side of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible. (Abram, 1996, p. 58)

When you think about it, everything that humankind has created or produced began as an exercise of imagination. For anything to be created or invented, someone had to realize that something was lacking, something did not exist, and then imagine how things would be if it did. Imagination is being able to think of the impossible; the creative ability of the mind; the act of forming a mental picture of something not present



to the senses. If your concept of imagination is some dreamy, impractical state, I refer you to Bill Gates, Alexander Graham Bell, Jonas Salk, and Madame C. J. Walker. Often imagination is called vision or having a dream. Wilma Rudolph must have had a powerful vision for herself in order to go from a little girl with polio to being the first woman to win three gold medals at the 1964 Rome Olympics. What must she have imagined for herself? Maxine Greene writes, “It takes imagination on the part of young people to perceive openings through which they can move” (1995, p. 14). Everything that has ever been accomplished started with imagination. The most pressing questions of our civilization require imagination to ask, let alone answer. How do we inspire the imaginations of teachers as well as students? What might the experience of telling stories contribute to the imagination of teachers?

Egan (1986) laments the lack of imagination in school curricula, recognizing that imagination may be a tricky thing to research, but he understands that the power of imagination is what we ultimately are attempting to teach:

What we call imagination is also a tool of learning – in the early years perhaps the most energetic and powerful one ... imagination is a powerful and neglected tool of learning, and that we need to rethink our teaching practices and curricula with a more balanced appreciation of children’s intellectual capacities. (p. 17-18)

One of the core elements that run through storytelling is that of imagination. One of the strongest aspects of storytelling is the strengthening of the imagination, or as many children have said, “I can see it in my head.” Maxine Greene, philosopher, social activist and teacher, believes strongly in the power of the imagination.

One of the reasons I have come to concentrate on imagination as a means through which we can assemble a coherent world is that imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross

the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through strangers’ eyes and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. (1995, p. 3)

What is it we say to children about imagination; use it, but not too much? What strikes me is not what Greene and Egan are saying about imagination, but what they are saying about children and the responsibility teachers/adults have in keeping the possibilities of the world open, accessible, and inviting. Both speak to possibilities missed and ones that exist in the present. What might the experience of teachers be who present the stranger through their storytelling? How might that happen?

### *Classroom Climate Change*

I remember fondly my first year teaching fifth grade; it was a dream year. My students were bright, willing, excited. They were lovely children, polite, considerate, and empathetic toward each other. This particular class brimmed over with all the wonderful qualities you could wish for. What a great teacher I was that year.

Ah, but the wheel of time, that great equalizer, rolled on and my second year was upon me. I tried hard to love them, honestly I did, but they were singularly unlovable, whiny toward me, petty and mean to each other. The life of the mind was left somewhere in the dust. Lessons that had previously soared now clunked. I discovered that maybe I wasn’t such a great teacher after all. What might my experience have been if I had known about Maxine Greene? How might her words have changed my perceptions? Anyone who has taught for several years knows that story well, those awful years when nothing works and you grit your teeth coming to work every day. When you have a difficult or troubled class, your life can be miserable. What if storytelling offers a way

for teachers to change an unfortunate classroom dynamic? How might teachers' lived experiences change and transform if they feel that their practice is more efficacious and could effect change?

One issue all teachers face is that of exclusivity versus inclusivity. Monika Hilder (2005) looks to storytelling as a way to foster inclusion and understanding of those students who are labeled as different. Hilder, whose study focuses on the students or listeners, believes that a point of view, bounded by linearity and rationality, cannot provide access to students' imaginations and emotional qualities necessary to confront this issue. Her hope of banishing exclusivity lies with a more subjective pedagogy, one in which the stories of all are nurtured and told. She attributes to storytelling the power of the imagination which will let students see the humanity of those who are different in some way, stating that our effectiveness in defeating exclusivity largely will depend on the stories we are willing to tell. Hilder sees the storytelling teachers in the forefront. How might teachers begin to use storytelling in this way? How might a teacher telling stories open up new ways of being for everyone in the class to examine beliefs?

I know that I keep returning to the pedagogical benefits of storytelling. I cannot ignore them, and it is my belief that these benefits will be important to teachers. Storytelling for me is a metaphor for possessing that magic carpet, and every time I travel, I find possibilities: it is my point of view that storytelling creates value in many ways. At this point I don't know why teachers use storytelling in their classrooms and I am wide open to discovery. Will the experience of beginning to use storytelling include these benefits I have mentioned? Will teachers experience the spiritual or the mundane?

### ***Experiencing the Telling***

All of a sudden all the eyes are on me and these eyes rob me of my taken-for-granted relation to my face and my body. They force me to be aware of my experience while I am experiencing it. The result is awkwardness. However as soon as I get involved in the debate and “forget” the presence of the audience, as it were, then I become involved again *immediately* and *naturally* in the activity. (van Manen, 2003, p. 35)

I get stage fright, knee locking, brain thumping stage fright. My breath gets all squeezed up to the back of my throat and my mind starts going faster than a Formula One race car. Do I know my story well enough? Did I rehearse my story enough? Is there a place I need to emphasize more or less? Why didn't I go over my story more? It is the last question that brings me back from the edge of the abyss, for I am nothing if not well prepared and I know that whatever story I am telling, I have it down cold. When I say that I am afraid that the audience won't like my story, what I am really saying is that I am afraid the audience won't like me.

Story is intimate and immediate; there is nothing between you and your listeners. My college students as storytellers knew this intuitively, and that is why they were so resistant to telling. You stand there and all these eyes are on you. They can see you sweat. It is a dizzying feeling; I am always slightly disoriented until I can pick out a face or two to ground myself. The audience waits for you to begin, and they wait and watch while you make a space for yourself on the stage. They are waiting and they are looking at *you*. I think it is worse if they have heard you before; now they have expectations. I do not know how it happens, but, suddenly a breath goes in and the story comes out. I am talking to you, just you. I am looking at you, just you. I am telling this story for you, just you. You and I know each other; we are bound together.

Some of the chapters written by storytelling teachers in Trousdale, Woestehoff and Schwartz's *Give a Listen* (1994), begin with an epiphany, one that occurred when the teacher heard a storyteller for the first time and was enchanted by what she heard. The teachers in this book realize, almost immediately, what storytelling offers to their students: a chance to give information, transmit values, or break down fears. In the words of Barbara Lipke:

I use storytelling in their classrooms to entertain, to teach, to build a community of sharing. I teach students to be storytellers to build their self-esteem, to give them new skills, and to reinforce skills they already have. Sharing stories helps them understand themselves and each other. Storytelling can be a key to understanding the other person's values, the values of different cultures and beliefs. (p. 69)

Gadamer (1960/2004) writes: "Thanks to the verbal nature of all interpretation, every interpretation includes the possibility of a relationship with others. There can be no speaking that does not bind the speaker and the person spoken to" (p. 397). This is why my kids are so connected to me. Setting aside the question of interpretation for the present, Gadamer's words present the possibility, actually the inevitability, of relationships between the storytelling teacher and the students. This relationship is not the fixed and formal one that exists because of the place of classrooms and the place of school. Rather, it is a relationship of questioning and the struggle of the individual to interpret and understand what has been heard. The storytelling teacher calls forth the questions the students may not have known they had. Bettelheim (1977) underscores the importance of the sense of safety in fairy tales, and the storytelling teacher offers that safety to students as they examine the truth of the story for themselves.

## ***Telling the Hard Story***

Adults like to shield children from hard stories, but it is not possible to do so. Children are surrounded by hard stories, especially in fairy tales. According to Bettelheim (1977), fairy tales are not primarily designed to entertain, but to teach, and they teach hard, hard lessons. In *The Little Mermaid*, a story so grim that only Disney could jolly it up, the mermaid falls in love with a prince after rescuing him from drowning; she falls in love with him because of his looks. Despising her own nature, her own being, she mutilates herself, literally loses her voice for a chance of winning this man's love and takes every step in excruciating pain from her hard bought feet. He marries another and our little mermaid is dashed to foam on the ocean. This is a hard story with cruel lessons. Life is full of hard stories and children's lives are no different; they face difficult stories every day. I tell the story of the student from Darfur whose stories still dwell in silence. The stories of children of illegal immigrants, of children whose parents are incarcerated, of children who have been abused: these are hard stories. They are the stories teachers must deal with whether or not they are spoken aloud.

One of the benefits of using storytelling in the classroom is building community with students. Moreover, creating safe spaces in which students can speak their experience can also foster a community of compassion in which differences and hurts can be understood and brought to light. There is no way to do that without having to hear and respond to difficult stories. (Niemi & Ellis, 2001, p. 13)

Years ago I told a hard story in a graduate class; the context for the story was education and immigration. My story, *Tom and Ernestine*, is a dark tale. It runs counter to many of the stories we like to tell ourselves about people who immigrate, and it does

not resolve itself the way we would wish. Until I told that story on that day I had not remembered just how dark a tale it is.

Truth be known, I did know it was a difficult tale. However, I had lived with it for years, knew all the people involved. Over time I begin to treat this saga of death, betrayal, and incompatibility of cultures as a story. I stepped back from it as I crafted it into a story that could be told, so its power was somewhat diffused for me. No one in that classroom was prepared for this story and, frankly, they were shocked and disturbed. I found out after the fact that my classmates had expected a “story,” you know, a nice, cozy story, and I was speaking things they did not want to hear. Again, I was rocking the boat. I knew I was in trouble early on as I looked at their faces. I could tell from frozen looks that this was not what they expected, let alone wanted. After the story was done, everyone sat frozen until finally the teacher cleared her throat. “Well, thank you for that very interesting story. I’m sure we all enjoyed it very much.” Right.

The power of that difficult story is brought home to me on a regular basis. A member of that class, himself an immigrant, speaks to me about that story whenever I see him. He tells me how much he liked the story, how powerful it was for him, what an impact it made on him, and what a great storyteller I am. This man teaches at the university and over the years, although I have repeatedly offered to use storytelling in his classroom, he has not once asked me to come tell stories for his class.

### **Landing at Last**

Our storytelling magic carpet has taken us on quite a journey: from neurobiology and neuroscience to the psychological foundation of the self; from etymology to personal tales; to chronicles of the ways people use storytelling in schools to aid instruction,

imagination, and empathy. It is almost an embarrassment of riches, storytelling casting its spell over so many realms of thinking. Each step on our journey has given something to us, some piece of the puzzle on which I can build. As I read my way to the understanding of storytelling, I keep in mind my question: **What is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?**

All through my research on storytelling, and storytelling in schools, there runs a deep reservoir of good will: storytelling is a *mitzvah*, something that is a blessing, a benefit to all. It is a manifestation of the care that van Manen (2003) states characterizes the conduct of phenomenological research, and produces the empathy Maxine Greene (1995) finds so essential. Over and over I have read about the advantages storytelling has for children in the cognitive and affective domains, and I am struck with my good fortune. I experience myself surrounded with such riches. But I also recognize the limited understandings we have of story from the perspective of the teacher and how these insights bring us into teaching in different ways. I am compelled to follow my question: **What is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?** Early in this paper I cited Goethe who wrote about the desire to know the beloved. This is what I love; this is my beloved. The next chapter addresses my philosophic grounding to pursue this study and the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology that I use.



**CHAPTER THREE**  
**THE JOURNEY INTO STORYTELLING:**  
**METHODOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL GROUNDING**

“It seems a proper day for questing, sir.

“It is a perfect day,” said Lancelot.

“Should I speak or must I keep silence, Uncle?”

“That depends. If your words reflect the quest as the day reflects it, if your speech is as proud as the stag, noble as the peacock, humble and unafraid as the coney there, then speak.” (Steinbeck, 1976, p. 260)

In traditional stories, such as fairy tales and folk tales, the hero or heroine must leave home, travel on a quest, and triumph over a challenge, perhaps slaying a dragon or winning a contest of wits. This journey leads to self-knowledge, and as a result, a happier, more fulfilling life. In this chapter I tell the story of the quest upon which I embark and the path by which I travel to discover the essence of my phenomenon; the path I have chosen is the one of hermeneutic phenomenology. Using hermeneutic phenomenology to research a teacher’s storytelling experience seems to be a natural fit—both create stories and both tell the stories of someone’s lived experience. The storyteller and the researcher travel down roads that may hold many surprises. The surprises become the basis for new interpretations and insights.

In Chapter One I tell the story of my turning to the phenomenon of the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. This story of my life includes experiences with a charismatic grandmother, a family with a love of learning, my rediscovery of storytelling with my son, and my own lived experience as a teacher and storyteller who tells stories to school age children. Chapter Two tells of my growing awareness of the power of storytelling for all ages and how that power called to me most forcibly with elementary age students. My phenomenon lies within the

question: **What is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?** My interest in teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms goes beyond the delivery of instruction, centering on the spirit and life of the teacher, how storytelling is lived by the teacher as stories are learned and told. I seek to understand what meaning this phenomenon has, what the lived experiences of teachers might uncover about the power of storytelling in teaching.

My task, my quest in this chapter, is to articulate my understanding of phenomenological inquiry by drawing upon hermeneutic phenomenologists: Bachelard, Gadamer, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and van Manen, who inform this methodology and ground my phenomenon of teachers learning and telling stories to their students. What I explore are the guiding ideas of these phenomenologists, the interpretive renderings that spring from those understandings, and the central constructs that support my understanding of teaching and storytelling. I must seek out the knowledge of these phenomenologists, each one of whom has a particular understanding of the lived experience that I may relate to my phenomenon.

### **The Quest to Make Meaning**

All research is prompted by a question, and the methodology chosen by the researcher is prompted by the nature of that question. To do research is to go on a quest to answer that question. The nature of my question, **what is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms**, is one that requires exploration into a complex narrative, one that requires a mindfulness into and consideration of the question. Phenomenology offers a path for my quest to see deeply into my phenomenon. In Chapter One I set off on my quest to uncover the meanings that

my question holds, and how those meanings and understandings might relate to storytelling conducted by teachers in their classrooms. In Chapter Two I expand my understanding of the opportunities storytelling offers to teachers. In this chapter I offer the methodological and philosophical groundings for my study.

### ***Phenomenology's Aim***

What we *can* say about phenomenology is that it is fundamentally descriptive, not explanatory. (Polt, 1999, p. 39)

Phenomenology is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophizing which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena.... Explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within. (Moran, 2000, p. 4)

Phenomenology is the branch of human science that attempts to understand and interpret the essential elements of phenomena. It is a philosophy that seeks to uncover these elements of a particular lived experience, and it makes a systematic attempt to discover the essence that lies beneath the surface of phenomena. Phenomenology is interpretive in nature, and as such it is an inquiry process based on methodological traditions that explore and seek to understand social or human questions. It is through phenomenological research that the essential elements of my phenomenon may be revealed.

Van Manen (2003) recognizes that “Some questions are related to the difficulty that hermeneutic phenomenological method does not offer a procedural system; rather its methods require an ability to be reflective, insightful, sensitive to language, and constantly open to experience” (p. xi). It is, according to van Manen, a science because it is systematic, explicit, self critical, and intersubjective. “Phenomenology is a *human* science (rather than a natural science) since the subject matter of phenomenological

research is always the structures of meaning of the lived human world” (p. 11). How will these elements of phenomenology help me to uncover what it means to be a teacher who tells stories in the classroom?

Phenomenology’s aim, according to van Manen, is to make clear and to understand what elements comprise the structures of our experience, what he calls “the lived structures of meaning” (2003, p. 4). The phenomenological desire to make meaning and its characteristic thoughtfulness will serve to guide my research.

***Searching for the essence.*** In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/1962), Merleau-Ponty defines phenomenology as the study of essences, discovering the essential nature of some phenomenon. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is concerned with the direct description of experience, “And all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world” (p. vii). Phenomenology is concerned with the world of experience as it is and with the essence underlying the exterior.

Heidegger (1927/1962) uses phenomenology in the search for being and to uncover the essence of a phenomenon, “Thus the meaning of the expression ‘phenomenon’ is *established as what shows itself in itself*, what is manifest” (p. 51). Although looking at a phenomenon that already seems fully disclosed to us may sound simple, or perhaps self evident, the difficulty in this task arises because, according to Heidegger, the phenomenon and its true nature are concealed from us. The aim of phenomenological research is to uncover the nature of the phenomenon. Heidegger directs us to search for what is necessary and explicit to a particular phenomenon: “We

must first bring forward the entities themselves if it is our aim that Beings should be laid bare.” (p. 61).

In phenomenology we look for what Heidegger (1926/1993a) calls the “distinctive sense” of the phenomenon, the Being of the beings involved (p. 82), and van Manen (2003) writes: “Phenomenology is, in a broad sense, a philosophy *of a theory of the unique*” (p. 7). It is concerned with the essence of things, which means it is a thoughtful process, one that uncovers or reveals the layers of meaning each phenomenon possesses. Phenomenology searches for the *sine qua non potest esse*: without which it is not possible to exist. It seeks the singularity, the particularity, and the distinctive features of a phenomenon. It seeks that which causes it to be unique, a some-“thing,” and lacking that distinctive feature it could not be what it is. Gadamer, in *Truth and Method* (1960/2004), also expresses this quest for the singular:

The individual case does not serve only to confirm a law from which practical predictions can be made. Its ideal is rather to understand the phenomenon itself in its unique and historical concreteness. However much experiential universals are involved, the aim is not to confirm and extend these universalized experiences in order to attain knowledge of a law, e.g., how men, peoples, and states evolve—but to understand how this man, this people, or this state is what it has become or, more generally, how it happened that it is so. (pp. 4-5)

The aim of phenomenology, according to van Manen (2003), is “gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 9).

Phenomenological research attempts to uncover, describe, bring to light, and open the meanings of our everyday lived experiences in the world that surrounds us, our life-world. “So phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the fulfillment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are” (van Manen, 2003, p. 12).

***Life-world.*** “What first of all characterizes phenomenological research is that it always begins in the lifeworld” (van Manen, 2003, p. 7). Phenomenologists have their laboratory in the natural setting of the real world of experience. They work and study in the empirical world, the everyday world, the world in which we live: “the life-world.” This life-world is the world of experience before we organize and analyze it. In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), Abram describes the life-world:

The life-world is the world of our immediate lived experience, as we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it. It is that which is present to us in our everyday tasks and enjoyments—reality as it engages us before being analyzed by our theories and our science. (p. 40)

“Hermeneutic phenomenological human science is interested in the human world *as we find it* in all its variegated aspects” (van Manen, 2003, p. 18). In my experience, I find the world in all its variegated aspects on the first day of every school year. There is nothing more rich in variety or more varied in scope than a first grade classroom where the children come with the stories that have shaped them. What would the experience of a teacher be who uses storytelling to discover the stories of the students?

“Phenomenology studies the conscious experiences as experienced, analyzing the structures—the types, intentional forms and meanings, dynamics, and (certain) enabling conditions—of perception, thought, imagination, emotion, and volition and action” (Smith, 2008, section 6). The teachers’ experiences in this regard are what I am seeking to understand.

Gadamer (1960/2004) brings forward another dimension of the life-world: “It is clear that the life-world is always at the same time a communal world that involves being with other people as well” (p. 247). Each year a teacher steps into the life-world of

school and encounters his or her class “in all its variegated aspects” and there begins the year-long, phenomenological process of uncovering the riches, the essences of what it means to be in that class, in that school, in that year. The process of discovery unfolds at its own pace. It is the aim of phenomenology to assist us in becoming more intimate with the life-world.

### ***Hermeneutic Phenomenology***

Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a *descriptive* (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is *interpretive* (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. (van Manen, 2003, p. 180)

Hermeneutic phenomenology offers me a path in my quest to make meaning of the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. I am well aware of the challenges this methodology holds.

To do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the world, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. The phenomenological reduction teaches us that complete reduction is impossible or final descriptions are unattainable. That rather than therefore giving up on human science altogether, we need to pursue its project with extra vigour. (van Manen, 2003, p. 18)

Hermeneutic phenomenology renders the interpretive understandings that develop from conversations and analysis of those conversations. It descriptively brings forward the meanings of the phenomenon. It is concerned with how we understand phenomena and how we are involved with the world around us. In *Researching Lived Experience*, van Manen gives a simple, straightforward definition: “Phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning of structures, of lived

experience” (2003, p. 10). Structures are composed of elements whose nature and arrangement go into creating the whole: the sights, the sounds, who was present, who was missing, what was the weather, along with countless other components. Efforts to understand these structures are what make up the science of hermeneutic phenomenology. What might the components be that make up a teacher’s experience of telling stories?

Van Manen’s definition of hermeneutic phenomenology reveals a down to earth, pragmatic methodology, interested in the variety and scope of human experience, one that looks for deeper understanding of our lives. This attention to the commonplace experiences of our lives is illustrated in Palmer’s *Gadamer in Conversation* (2001). Gadamer tells of Husserl’s emphasis on the ordinary, everyday occurrences of our lives: “I went to Husserl’s seminar, and when people spoke in a high-sounding manner he said, ‘Not always the big notes! Small change, gentlemen!’” (p. 105). Phenomenology is not necessarily concerned with the highly charged moments in life, for these moments are likely to be examined thoroughly. There is no pretension in phenomenology. It is the study of the everyday lived experiences that make up our lives.

In the *Being and Time: Introduction* (1927/1993a), Heidegger develops a broad orientation to the scope and intent of phenomenology. He writes that the word phenomenology denotes a methodology, the manner in which we will conduct our inquiry, and that phenomenology is not allied to any particular subject of study. “The expression ‘phenomenology’ signifies primarily a *concept of method*. It does not characterize the ‘what’ of the objects of philosophical research in terms of their content but the ‘how’ of such research” (p. 72). Heidegger understands that phenomena are the



primary sources for study and calls for the careful study of phenomena and for concrete questioning. How will Heidegger's understanding of phenomenology affect my own research?

Bachelard (1958/1994) echoes the importance of studying the human world: "I am moreover convinced that the human psyche contains nothing that is insignificant" (p. 135). The scope of phenomenology is, in a very real sense, limitless. Polt (1999) writes that phenomenology is capable of studying any experience that exists, a sentiment van Manen shares: "Anything that presents itself to consciousness is potentially of interest to phenomenology, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt" (van Manen, 2003, p. 9). This enormity of the scope of phenomenology can be somewhat daunting. How are we to choose which phenomenon to study? Van Manen writes that the phenomenon one chooses must be of strong and serious interest to us and that it must be one to which we are willing to commit. For me this was easy, as natural as breathing. Storytelling is my connection to my past with its glorious storytellers for whom language was a joy, and to the future I have created for myself by combining my teaching and the desire to contribute to the world in which I live. Gazing through a phenomenological lens allows me to see and understand more fully my phenomenon.

The work of phenomenology takes place in both the past and the present. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the meaning of phenomena that have already occurred; therefore, the phenomenological process is a reflective one. In his introduction to *The Poetics of Space* (1958/1994), Bachelard writes that we must be "receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears" (p. 1). Capturing and describing that moment, being

mindful, and paying attention at the moment is not something most of us can do. We are in the midst of experiencing that living moment rather than thinking about it. Reflection only happens after the moment has passed. So, how do we do this phenomenological research? How do we “transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (van Manen, 2003, p. 36)?

The careful study of phenomena described by Heidegger begins with the exploration of the fundamental existential themes that occur in the life-world of all human beings. These themes serve to guide a researcher’s reflection in the research process: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and human relations (relationality or communality) (van Manen, 2003). Van Manen’s systematic attempts to uncover the essence of our lived experiences give us the road to travel on this quest for understanding of the lived experience. Van Manen provides these guidelines for phenomenological research: (1) turning to a phenomenon that 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 that distinguish it from others; (4) describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting; (5) maintaining a pedagogical connection to the phenomenon; (6) balancing the parts and whole of the research (2003, p. 30-31). These methodological guidelines are more fully explicated later in this chapter.

What we see on the surface is not the essence of the phenomenon; it is only the appearance, and if we are content to stop there, we will glide like skaters on the surface of ice, oblivious to what is underneath us. We will never know the true nature of what shows itself to us. The essence of the phenomenon being studied does not necessarily

manifest or show itself on initial examination; it may be undiscovered, distorted, or buried over, or perhaps, shy. In September, the Being of the classroom has not yet come into being, and it has not manifested itself. Further along in the year for whatever reasons it may be covered over, undiscovered. It may be slow to come. The phenomenon of teachers learning and telling stories to their students unfolds and reveals itself over time, the surface giving way to the essence.

Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of some meaningful notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (van Manen, 2003, p. 36)

Studying the phenomenon of teachers telling stories is a perfect way to give expression to the understandings of phenomenology van Manen provides. Storytelling is our oldest form of communication and it is common to all cultures. It conveys a sense of belonging and passes on values and beliefs. For millennia, storytelling has been a way to know who we are; to connect with our humanity; to understand our community and our connection to it. Storytelling is a powerful way, as van Manen says, “to become more fully who we are” (2003, p. 12).

***The hermeneutic priority of the question.*** Within phenomenology and other human sciences, the study of hermeneutic interpretation has a lively, richly textured history and tradition. Historically, hermeneutics was the branch of knowledge dealing with the theory and art of the interpretation of sacred texts. Its scope has expanded over time to include all texts, written material, art, music, drama, and by extension, storytelling. “The hermeneutical task becomes itself a questioning of things” (Gadamer,

1960/2004, p. 269). Questions are a constituent part of hermeneutic thought. The purpose of these questions is not necessarily to supply answers, but is meant to move us closer to the heart of a phenomenon. Gadamer (1960/2004) writes, “The art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further—i.e. the art of thinking” (p. 367). I understand opening the possibilities, but keeping them open is new to me. How do I keep the question open while doing research? In my experience, questions get answered in a more or less straightforward process or they are ignored. Gadamer is letting me know otherwise. Coming from a tradition where *the answer* is highly prized, living in possibility and the question could be somewhat strenuous for teachers. By definition, teachers have the answers. What would the lived experience of teachers be who are open to the possibility that they do not have all the answers, and cannot provide answers to all the questions posed by a story? How might this change their practice?

“To ask a question means to bring into the open” (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 363). A question is a funny thing. Once asked, it can hang in the air like the odor of cooking. In my experience growing up, I was the one who always asked those awkward questions no one wanted to acknowledge they had heard, let alone answer. According to Gadamer, “In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know” (p. 363). In order to ask a question, we have to suspend our judgments, and, I think, some of our ego. We have to admit there is something that exists outside of our knowledge and experience. Gadamer tells us that asking means we must want to know, and if we acknowledge that we do not know when we ask the question, that makes us vulnerable. A question is like the crack of an egg against a bowl; it causes the essence of the matter at hand to be released. “When a question arises, it breaks open the being of the

object” (p. 362). What might the lived experience be of a teacher who engenders questions as a result of storytelling? How do Gadamer’s questions aid me in my pursuit of my phenomenon?

***Interpretation.*** A hermeneut is one who interprets. Interpretation is the heart of the storytelling process. To interpret means to explain to oneself the meaning of a particular thing, to unravel and disentangle the elements that make up a phenomenon. To interpret is to make meaning. “All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter’s own language” (Gadamer 1960/2004, p. 389).

A story is interpreted many times over, always through the lived experiences of the teller and listener. The teller interprets the story for the first time when reading the text or calling a familiar story to mind. As the storyteller lives with the story and learns the story, the interpretation may change as the story reveals itself and understanding of the story evolves and deepens. The telling of the story is another interpretation because, in the lived experience of the teller, in that particular place, at that particular time, and with that particular audience, the listeners will change the teller’s interpretation of the story. Each listener listens to the story differently and interprets the story differently, with each interpretation adding new understandings. Listeners bring their own lives to bear and contribute their experiences to the interpretation. What might the lived experience of teachers be who are receptive to students’ different interpretations? How might that impact their pedagogical practices?

Gadamer (1960/2004) reasons that art and drama, along with texts, are the subjects of interpretation. He maintains that because interpretation and understanding are

“indissolubly bound together” (p. 399), interpretation may rightly be applied to performance. He determined that, for the sake of interpretation, there is no essential difference between a work that is performed and one that is written for scholarly purposes. “When we are concerned with understanding and interpreting verbal texts, interpretation in the medium of language itself shows what understanding always is: assimilating what is said to the point that it becomes our own” (p. 398).

“Every interpretation can be called into question, every inquiry we can begin anew, every hermeneutic phenomenological conversation is unending” (van Manen, 2003, p. xv). This individual construction of meaning and quest for understanding lies at the heart of pedagogy. The phenomenon of storytelling by teachers provides opportunities for that questioning, that seeking for and working toward meaning about which van Manen writes. What might the lived experiences for teachers be learning to use storytelling, knowing that the students listening will construct their own meanings and understandings and will be engaged in a fundamental facet of the learning process?

### **The Essential Phenomenological Quests**

In the morning before the day the young knights heard Mass and confessed and were shriven so that their souls were as clean and shining as their swords, and they rode away from Camelot and eagerly entered a new world full of wonders. (Steinbeck, 1976, p. 156)

One of the ways in which I think of phenomenology is as a search or a journey; it is a quest to find the essence of a phenomenon. Many of us associate quest with tales of knightly valor; however, quests take all shapes, directions and sizes. The objects are equally varied. To go on a quest is to seek, to gain, and to ask, all of which I engage in as I strive to uncover the lived experiences of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their

classrooms. As part of my journey to understand phenomenology and how its methodology informs my quest to discover what it means to be a teacher who tells stories, I have undertaken four quests. These quests are not separate; they are tangled together like the threads of a story, intimately intertwined. Many of the distinctions I have made between the journeys are arbitrary. Even though the first phenomenological quest is the quest for language, it begins with a call for home and place. The quest for space becomes an understanding of home. The quest that reveals our understanding of place and space may be found in the language we use. Finally, in the quest for imagination, I begin to understand that we create the places, spaces and the homes for which we long.

### *The Quest for Language*

Story is a home place, a place of the heart for the teller and the told. The speaking of home, the listening of home and of what is real comes through from the pathways laid down by language. Heidegger (1971) recognizes the interconnection of language and home when he writes:

Language is—language, speech. If we let ourselves fall into the abyss denoted by this sentence, we do not go tumbling into emptiness. We fall upward, to a height. Its loftiness opens up a depth. The two span a realm to which we would like to become at home, so as to find a residence, a dwelling place for the life of man. (p. 189-190)

To look at language and uncover some of its significance in phenomenology I draw on the work of Heidegger, Abram, and Gadamer. Heidegger's engagement with and control of language is itself phenomenological as he builds layer upon layer of understanding for the meaning of the words he chooses. His discourses begin with careful attention to language, with careful construction of a language edifice, which is

positioned in the history and origin of language. Heidegger (1953/1993b) gives the role of language a prime place in the phenomenological process of uncovering, the “letting be seen,” calling language the “house of Being because, as the saying, it is appropriation’s mode” (p. 424). “It is language that tells us about the essence of a thing” (p. 348). It is through language that we uncover that which we seek. Language is the entry point, the place of embarkation for revealing and discovering the meanings of the language used by teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms through the dialogues in which we engage.

Richard Polt (1999) writes: “Language can never be just a tool that we control, because in a sense, we owe our own Being to language. Language plays a part in the fundamental revelation of the world; it is a part of what enables us to be someone and notice things in the first place” (p. 176). To uncover and reveal the essence of language as a whole, Heidegger (1959/1993c) begins his discussion with the German *die Sage*, translated into English as, *the saying*. Heidegger then translates *to say* as *to show* and proceeds to connect this *showing* to unfolding the essence of language. Language shows itself by being involved in every possibility of being and calls forth a response, an awareness and sensitivity to what is being shown.

Accordingly, we listen to language in such a way that we let it tell us its saying. No matter what other sorts of hearing we engage in, whenever we hear something we find ourselves caught up in a hearing that lets itself be told, a hearing that embraces all apprehending and representing.  
(Heidegger, 1959/1993c, p. 411)

In Abram’s book *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), Chapter Three is titled, “The Flesh of Language” (p. 73). These two words are not generally heard together. Flesh is usually used in very different contexts, flesh and blood, desires of the flesh, flesh wound,



and the way of all flesh. What is Abram telling us about language and our relationship to it by the use of this word, flesh? Flesh is our body, our form, and our skin. It is our kith and kin, our family. Flesh is alive; it is voluptuous and carnal. Flesh is our mortality, our touch, and our desire. When we partake of flesh it nourishes and sustains our lives. It is reality and substance. Abram tells us that language is all of these things and provides all of these things. Language is embodied, sensual. We learn our language through our flesh, through our bodies. Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Abram maintains that language is never far removed from its sensory element. “We appropriate new words ... through the way they feel in the mouth or roll off the tongue ... the taste of a word” (Abram, 1996, p. 75).

Hermeneutic phenomenology attends to lived language, and interpretative renderings are made possible through language. The teacher telling stories to the students, choosing words and speaking them, knows this sensuous delight: words that feel good in the mouth, words that nourish and give substance to the flesh of the story. A teacher who tells stories knows that the students will repeat these stories. As suggested by Abram and Heidegger, the listeners will have the opportunity to discover and savor for themselves the words that are just right and those that are not, while developing the power to find the words that will nourish and sustain them. Mastery of language, at whatever level, does many wondrous things, including nurturing a sense of control and autonomy. Teachers who strive to master their own language through storytelling and who make that work transparent to their students provide powerful role models. As a phenomenologist I am sensitive to Heidegger’s devotion to language, which he uses as

the means to reveal the essence of phenomena. His care with language is my model for the language I use in my conversations.

Gadamer (1960/2004) brings another dimension to the study of language. He writes that the true meaning of language comes from “*being in dialogue, in coming to an understanding*” (p. 446). For Gadamer the very nature of language lies in conversation, in dialogue, in listening, and in understanding. From Gadamer’s viewpoint, the conversations in which we engage, and the language that we use, are transformative. For Gadamer the participants in a successful conversation create a common, shared language. Into the conversation, “Something is placed in the center, as the Greeks say, which the partners in dialogue both share” (pp. 378-379). Gadamer continues: “To reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but by being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (p. 379). This is indeed a statement of the enormous power that Gadamer attributes to language and to our use of it.

“We gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves” (van Manen, 2003, p. 62). As I work with the teachers I “become more experienced” myself as their reflections on their own lived experiences enrich my understanding. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) writes that the quality of our thinking is enriched by our conversations with others when we attempt to place ourselves in their place and try to think as they do. He writes of “taking up of others’ thoughts through speech, a reflection in others, an ability to think according to others” (p. 179). When we are engaged in conversation we have the opportunity to enter into that dialogue that Gadamer so esteems. What would the lived experiences of teachers be who felt they

possessed this power in speech, to cross bridges and to build communities in their classrooms? What would the experience of teachers be who know that their storytelling with its carefully chosen language has the potential power to affect their students? Would they be afraid?

According to Gadamer (1960/2004) language is the means by which we are able to make interpretations and connections, and I turn again to his understanding that: “Thanks to the verbal nature of all interpretations, every interpretation includes the possibility of a relationship with others. There can be no speaking that does not bind the speaker and the person spoken to” (p. 397). How would teachers choose to interpret Gadamer’s understandings as they begin to use storytelling in their classrooms? Would this cause teachers to speak more carefully? What would the lived experiences of teachers be if they knew the richness and power contained in their language and their storytelling?

### ***The Quest for Dwelling and Home***

Beside the highway, a clamorous parasitic life signals for attention and halt: localities where generations have lived, bred, labored, and died, are flung through the windshield and out through the rear view mirror. Men on the move brutalize themselves and render the world they arrow through phantasmal. (Updike, 1989, p. 127)

Story is a home place, a place of the heart and a dwelling for the teller and the told. The act of dwelling, the speaking of home, the listening of home and what is real comes through the pathways laid down by language. Once again Heidegger (1971) calls our attention to the relationship of dwelling and language: “To reflect on language means—to reach the speaking of language in such a way that this speaking takes place as that which grants an abode for the being of mortals” (p. 190).

It is in language that we find the essence of a phenomenon, so it is natural that Heidegger begins his exploration of the meaning of dwelling with the German words *bauen* and *wunian*. In *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1953/1993b), Heidegger writes, “The Old High German word for building, *bauen*, means to dwell. This signifies to remain, to stay in a place.... The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth is *buan*, dwelling” (pp. 348-349). According to Heidegger we humans are dwellers; dwelling is the way we are on this earth. Our very existence is tied to dwelling. We stay in one place, and we preserve and protect, for *bauen* also means to protect and cherish. Our building is a manifestation of our dwelling. Our homes are where we dwell.

Heidegger (1953/1993b) continues his understanding of dwelling and home by examining the word *wunian*:

*Wunian* means to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means the free, *das Frye*: and *fry* means preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, as safeguarded. To free actually means to spare. (p. 351)

Dwelling is the human condition according to Heidegger, and when we stay in one place, we have the opportunity to care, to build, and to nurture. To be human is to dwell, and when we dwell, we are at peace. Being at peace means we are free and we have the ability to *spare*; that is, we have the power to safeguard and preserve others from harm. “To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 147). In our transient world we may have lost some of the way of being human that Heidegger claims belongs to staying in one place, dwelling in that place.

One place we dwell is in our classrooms. By my research question I am asking teachers to dwell, to recollect, to return and recreate their lived experience of storytelling. Teachers are charged with safeguarding children in general and with sparing or preserving their essence. Children come to school filled with stories of their lives, not all of them pleasant. Teachers are responsible for sparing and preserving the essence of those children with stories we might not wish to hear. Is it possible that the experience of telling stories might give teachers a way to fulfill those responsibilities, and at the same time assist children to tell their own stories? Storytelling by teachers can create a safe and peaceful place for children to resolve conflict, make moral choices, face ethical dilemmas, try out different options and roles, or provide alternate stories. What is the lived experience of teachers who know that storytelling may provide the solace or courage a student needs?

In my experience as a schoolteacher, children filter in and out of the school system at an alarming rate. How might storytelling aid a teacher in providing an oasis of dwelling? What would the lived experience be of a teacher if, even for a brief time, he or she could provide a home and a resting place through storytelling? How can I, as van Manen (2003) writes, “borrow” these teachers’ experiences to “better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance” (p. 62) of storytelling in the classroom. For whatever reason a teacher is using storytelling, advancing curricular objectives, building community, becoming acquainted with a class, or setting class standards, children must feel safe, must have the lived experience of *wunian*, the experience of being at peace, preserved from harm and danger.

An essential question that arises for me concerns Heidegger's concepts of dwelling, peace and learning. Is it possible for anyone to learn anything or risk anything in the absence of peace? Can anything truly be learned if there is no safeguard from harm? Children need to feel safe, to know that the story will resolve itself in the end. One of the important aims of school is to ensure that children are safe, physically and emotionally. What is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling with their students in relation to sharing safety? What is the lived experience of telling and learning stories, the connections made between them, the intimacy created? How do their reflections bring me closer to the essence of this phenomenon? Van Gelder (2008) writes:

A house is a dwelling, an eikos, a location, whereas a home is born in the marriage of imagination and place. In a world of constant motion and creation, homes are anchors of continuous possibility. Like wilderness and the wild, home is not simple or static but a system of dynamics moving in place, time, and memory, becoming a rich tapestry woven of location and movement, kinship, and tradition, exploration and explication. (p. 57)

Van Gelder calls home "the seat of the self, of dream, of our understanding of place" (pp. 57-58). This is the dwelling Heidegger describes, a place where we are in our own place and space. It is the place where our stories live, and if we lose our home, as Van Gelder tells us, it can cause our greatest sorrow.

Bachelard's (1958/1994) important concepts of home, center around the home providing safety and protection. The home protects the dreamer and gives the dreamer the peace to dream. Bachelard's writing about home evokes feelings of comfort and safety. "To curl up belongs to the phenomenology of the verb inhabit and only those who have learned to do so can inhabit with intensity" (p. xxxviii). Again, it is the language

that gives us a key to Bachelard's meaning. When you curl up you move down into yourself, something that cannot take place without a feeling of safety. When you curl up it is comforting and offers you solace from the world. For Bachelard (1958/1994) the house and home are more than shelter or comfort: they are the heart of daydreams. "The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (p. 6). How does the lived experience of home in the classroom influence the teacher as storyteller? Van Manen (1991) describes influence as "something that radiates or flows and may have very different consequences, effects, or significance. In a broad sense, influence connotes the openness of a human being to the presence of another" (p. 16). How might the influence and memories of daydreams shape the choice of stories to tell?

"The house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, the memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream" (Bachelard, 1958/1994, p. 6). In psychological terms, integration refers to the process of various elements of the personality becoming a harmonious whole. Bachelard writes that it is the house that is the agent of healthy personality development because the house is the site of daydreaming. Daydreaming is a process that uses the imagination and knows no restrictions. Storytelling in the classroom, which is an inhabited place bearing the traces of home, becomes a shelter, a haven for dreamers, and a safe harbor for the imagination. Teachers who use storytelling in their classrooms know that storytelling stretches the imagination and that this process happens in an atmosphere of trust and security.

Van Manen's (2003) concept of home as being connected with our identity adds resonance and fullness to Bachelard's association of home with the sense of well being and safety. Van Manen connects our home with who we are, the place where we are free. Home is ground for us, the place we feel protected.

The home reserves a very special space experience, which has something to do with the fundamental sense of our being.... We feel a special sorrow for the homeless because we sense there is a deeper tragedy than merely not having a roof over one's head. (van Manen, p. 102)

The patterns of home and dwelling seen with Heidegger and Bachelard are once again apparent in Casey's *Getting Back Into Place* (1993). He writes that we identify ourselves in large part with our homes. Casey understands that home is not defined by the physicality of dwelling places. "Homes, then, are not physical locations but situations for living" (p. 300). They are situations that provide us with a place of safety, nurturance, and protection from harm.

Having to go home is having to go back to where you will be taken in—in a place in which you can move about with ease and familiarity. To be taken in you don't have to have proved yourself in any particular way or have gained merit in the world at large. (Casey, 1993, p. 300)

This is the reality of home, as Casey sees it, neither positive nor negative. What Casey writes about home may be applied to school. If you live within the district boundary, the school has to take you in. A classroom is a diverse population with all those "taken in" children. How is a teacher to provide a means for these children to dwell in peace, to create the climate for them to thrive? Will a teacher who tells stories provide a home in the classroom for students?

This quest for dwelling and home has taught me one thing: Home is where the heart is. When we remain in one place long enough to grow our hearts, we become



dwellers and are heir to all the benefits Heidegger shows us. If we lose our homes and become displaced, Casey and Van Gelder give us the assurance that we carry our homes within us. Bachelard reminds us of the primacy of our home and the comfort, security, and nurture it has provided for us. Bachelard, Casey, and Van Gelder write of home and place as both a physical place and a place of the heart. It is a paradox, a place we never truly leave, yet a place that gives us the strength to leave.

### ***The Quest for Space and Place***

In my lived experience of telling stories to children, story is a place, not just the physical space defined by a rug in the back of a classroom or by a group of chairs, but a place and space of the mind and the heart. In my embodied experience there is a line of demarcation that exists between a storytelling place and space and that place and space which is not storytelling. This storytelling place is a sacred place, created by the teller and the listener, by the breath going in and out. It pushes out the walls, creating a home or a safe resting place, an oasis. It is a place built to house dwelling, daydreams, imagination and freedom.

Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958/1994) is an inquiry into, an exploration and celebration of the spaces people inhabit. It is a poem, a love sonnet, to the house and home and our human nature. *The Poetics of Space* is an examination of the houses we occupy, the attachments we have to them, and the significances we give to them. Bachelard reflects on the way in which our spaces, especially our houses, contribute to our humanity, and bring us happiness, good fortune, and prosperity. I seek to make meaning of how teachers with whom I work experience space and place. How do their understandings affect their practice?

Bachelard wants to know what meaningful space represents for us as human beings. The space that is home embodies shelter, comfort and intimacy for us. It provides us with protection. Bachelard places great emphasis on the homes of our childhood, believing that the home we first knew invariably shapes our later understanding of what constitutes home. He declares, “All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (Bachelard, 1958/1994, p. 5). School is an inhabited place and therefore must bear traces of home. Heidegger tells us that to inhabit a home or any other space is to dwell in, or live in that space. Storytelling teachers have an opportunity to create that dwelling and that protection from the first encounter with students. What would the lived experience be of a teacher who fosters feelings of home and a homelike space in the classroom by telling stories?

In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Abram (1996) provides another aspect or dimension in the illumination and discussion of space, one that is intimately connected to that of time and to the people who have an oral tradition. For those with an oral tradition the power inherent in spoken tales and stories is inextricably woven into the fabric of space: “The power of spoken tales was rooted in the potency of the particular places where their events unfolded” (p. 183).

Van Manen writes of four fundamental existential themes that occur in the life-world of all human beings and that serve to guide reflection in the research process: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relations (relationality or communality) (2003). Lived space is felt space. According to van Manen the experience of lived space “is more difficult to put into words.” (van Manen, p. 102). While we may not be consciously aware of lived space, “we may say that

we become the space we are in” (p.102). The lived space our bodies occupy, externally and internally, changes our lived experience. What would the lived experience be of a teacher who makes the space for storytelling? Would that changed space create opportunities for more space to be changed?

In Casey’s *Getting Back into Place* (1993), he puts forth the premise that place is “*primus inter pares*, prior to all things” (p. 13). Casey bases his argument on the classical philosopher, Aristotle, to demonstrate that place, where we are, is indispensable for all things that exist. To exist is to be in some place. Heidegger calls us dwellers, and for Casey that dwelling always occurs in a place. “To exist at all as a (material or mental) object or as (an experienced or observed) event is to have a place – *to be implaced*, however minimally or imperfectly or temporarily” (p. 13).

Casey (1993) maintains that where we are largely determines who and what we are. If we are in school, that place determines what we do and determines who we are in that situation, that particular place. Think of how differently we act and how differently we are when we are placed in church than when we are placed in a party.

To be *here* in this room ... is not only not to be in the room down the hall or in a room in the next building. It is to be *somewhere in particular*... The power a place such as a mere room possesses, determines not only *where* I am in the limited sense of cartographic location but *how* I am together with others and even *who* we shall become together. (Casey, p. 23)

Van Manen (2003) writes that we invariably respond to lived space and that it greatly impacts the way we experience and interact with our life-world. Casey (1993) elaborates that sentiment when he writes that space

Is felt: felt bodily first of all. For we feel the presence of places by and in our bodies even more than we see or think or recollect them. Places are

not so much the direct objects of sight or thought or recollection as what we feel *with* and *around*, *under* and *above*, *before* and *behind* our lived bodies. (p. 313)

School children generally remain in one room with brief periods outside during the day, rooms that exert powerful influences on how they perceive themselves and how they behave. What might the lived experiences of the teacher and students be if they could change or add to that felt space for a time?

Casey, Aristotle, and Newtonian physics tell us that we cannot be in two places at once. What if we looked at place in a different way? Perhaps storytelling affords us the ability to be in two places at once. Places serve to anchor, identify, and ground us. Storytelling takes place in a place, and then transports you to another place. The listeners and teller remain safely implaced or anchored in a classroom; no one leaves their place, yet, they have the ability to be in another place. Story transcends the limits of place. If as Casey says, we are who we are because of our place, then a storytelling teacher, by creating different places, helps the students expand who they are. How might a teacher react to participating in such storytelling events? As a result of storytelling what might a teacher decide about his or her efficacy? What is it like for a teacher to be in such a place bound environment?

As humans, we are beings who move from place to place. As Casey (1993) tells us this mobility carries risks, the chief of which is being out of place. To be displaced is the phenomenon of not being at home, of being disconnected from our home. If we are displaced we have no anchor, no connections, and no ground. Children can feel displaced as well as teachers. What would it mean to be a teacher who was displaced

from the home of the classroom? Would being a storyteller ease feelings of displacement?

### ***The Quest for Imagination***

Imagination is the act of forming pictures of objects that are not present; it is “the faculty of fanciful thought; the creative faculty of the mind, the ability to form new and striking concepts.” The study of imagination has a long pedigree in phenomenology. Many phenomenologists, including Husserl, Heidegger, Bachelard, and Casey have contributed a great deal of thought to the study of imagination. According to McCleary in *Imagination’s Body* (1986), phenomenology has recognized that the use of our imagination reveals the structures, the essential elements of our minds. In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), Abram writes that from a phenomenologist’s perspective:

That which we call imagination is from the first an attribute of the senses themselves; imagination is not a separate mental faculty (as we so often assume) but is rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible. (p. 58)

Bachelard (1958/1994) calls for a “phenomenology of the imagination” in order to explain the poetic image which springs from imagination (p. xviii). He considers “the imagination as a major power of human nature” and declares that the imagination “separates us from the past as well as from reality; it faces the future” (p. xxxiv). These writings all point to the importance phenomenology places on the use of imagination and how it uncovers the workings of the mind. Phenomenology places value on our ability to conceive of novel ways of thinking.

In *Imagining* (2000), Casey writes that phenomenology is especially suited for the study of imagination due to its thematic nature, emphasis on first hand descriptions of phenomena as they present themselves, and the use of selected samples. Casey describes imagining as an autonomous mental activity, one in which we all engage frequently and one in which we are all successful. Imagining is a self directed, autonomous, and volitional phenomenon that gives “rise to multiple options, directions, and routes ... it is the primary way in which the mind diversifies itself and its contents. Mind is free—it is indeed most free—in imagining” (pp. 200-201). What would be the experience of a teacher who believes that through storytelling the benefits Casey writes about could be available to students? And, in what manner might their own imaginations be nourished?

Casey and others tell us that, as human beings, we all imagine, and that unlike other mental processes, we are all successful practitioners. Storytelling can give teachers the opportunity to provide a banquet instead of fast food, and provide direction and encouragement for students’ imaginative lives as well as their own. Storytelling teachers provide fuel for that imagination by providing access to topics, by modeling and valuing the time spent “daydreaming.” In turn, they can engage in such “daydreaming” with their students.

Casey writes that imagination is pure possibility. For me, that is a staggering statement. Isn’t school about possibilities? Don’t we tell children that they can be anything they can imagine? Aren’t we to teach children to discover options and different ways of approaching problems? What might the lived experience of teachers be who believe that through storytelling, they are offering pure possibility to their students? How might that understanding permeate and inform their practice?

You cannot see a problem if you have no imagination. You cannot conceive of a solution to a problem without imagination. You cannot know anything about others without imagination. You cannot engage in hermeneutical phenomenological activities, searching for the truth, without imagination. Maxine Greene (1995) makes a strong statement about the power of imagination:

One of the reasons I have come to concentrate on imagination as a means through which we can assemble a coherent world is that imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through strangers’ eyes and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions. (p. 3)

O’Donohue calls imagination “the creative force in the individual” and names it as “the great friend of possibility” (1998, p. 145). Imagination runs on the ridge between two modes of thinking and being. As a researcher I travel that ridge. My research question, what is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms, came from my imagination. Imagination creates the possibility of an answer. Stories and storytelling provide us with the means to imagine the possibility of those alternative realities for which Greene searches, and to recognize them when we encounter them. What if teachers were able to recognize the clues students were giving through the process of storytelling? Is it possible that a storytelling teacher would have the experience of being more empathic? What would the lived experience of a teacher be who tells stories in the classroom?

## **How the Story Gets Told**

The process of creating and telling a story has method and structure to it, something that it shares with phenomenological research. I know how to make and tell a story, and I now turn to phenomenological guidelines that will enable me to tell the story of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. My quest is to help those stories to be told. Heidegger does not provide a particular method for phenomenological research. Gadamer offers a clue when he speaks of the concrete nature of his phenomenological writing and research. If you are going on a quest, it behooves you to be as prepared as you can be; therefore, I turn to van Manen. In Chapter One I write of van Manen's guidelines for phenomenological research. I now return to those guidelines to show how they relate to my phenomenon. Van Manen (2003) provides six methodological components that supply the phenomenological researcher with a program of action in following the path to phenomenological understandings:

- (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.
- (pp. 30-31)

### ***Assumption and Prejudice***

Phenomenology is concerned with uncovering the meanings, the essence, of everyday experiences in our lives, so any researcher is bound to have experiences and



convictions about the ways in which the phenomenon should reveal itself. The problem, as van Manen notes, is not that we do not know about a phenomenon, but that the phenomenon is all too familiar to us (2003). A part of being a phenomenological researcher looking to uncover the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms is the experience of recognizing and ‘*owning*’ my prejudices and assumptions of the way things ‘*ought*’ to be. It is clear that storytelling has been a rich and meaningful experience in my life, but my quest is not to validate or confirm my experiences, but to uncover the meanings for my participants in the study. The experiences of my *participants* hold what is unknown to me. Van Manen furnishes a way to deal with the problem of knowing:

If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already “know” we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections. It is better to make explicit our understanding, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories. (2003, 47)

Gadamer (1960/2004) recognizes the difficulty of fore-knowings and recommends that being open to the meanings of other people and being aware of our own biases is the way to cope with all of our beliefs and assumptions. To be aware of the structure of one’s own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon, and thus, to all the other aspects of phenomenological work (van Manen, 2003). It is important to examine these attitudes at the beginning of the journey, but it is more important to continue to examine them, as they continue to manifest themselves along the way.

In *The Listening Self* (1989), Levin speaks to a different level of listening. “In learning *Gelassenheit*, the art of “just listening”, listening without getting entangled in the

ego's stories and preoccupations, one learns a different way of channeling, focusing, attending" (p. 48). Several times throughout the book Levin also describes listening that is "spacious." Something spacious is expansive, vast or indefinite, and covers a considerable distance or area. It is a comprehensiveness of view or sympathies. This is the listening to which I aspire. I must strive to create this listening in myself and so I must be aware that my assumptions will make themselves known. However, the more I am able to put them aside and clear a space for "just listening," the more I am able to uncover and learn. I also have the written record of my conversations with my participants to remind me of what they have actually said, rather than what I might have anticipated.

### ***Turning to the Phenomenon***

To truly question something is to interrogate it from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being. (van Manen, 2003, p. 43)

Two of the abiding passions in my life are teaching and storytelling. In the first two chapters I tell the story of being surrounded by the stories of my grandmother and her sisters. By being there and listening to the stories, I felt that I was part of something that I could not really define; but it was wonderful, it was like being home. I also tell the story of my life as a teacher, a life that resonates with me to this day. Finally, I tell the story of my disability and how I came to be a storyteller as an unexpected, but deeply welcomed outgrowth of that experience. My phenomenon reflects van Manen's (2003) statement, "A phenomenological question must not only be made clear, understood, but also 'lived' by the researcher" (2003, p. 44). Van Manen also tells us that our choice of phenomenon reveals a strong interest or a vantage point that we take in life. As I look to

answer the question of how I turned to my phenomenon of the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms, I get the sense that it was waiting for me all the time, hovering just outside my line of vision, waiting to reveal itself when I was ready. Perhaps, as Heidegger might say, it was covered up because I had not yet discovered it.

### ***Investigating the Experience as We Live It***

Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence. (van Manen, 2003, p. 36)

Transforming lived experiences into that “textual expression” is my quest. In Chapters One and Two I began the process of uncovering my own experiences with teaching and storytelling, knowing that “It is to the extent that *my* experiences could be *our* experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings” (van Manen, 2003, p. 57). My lived experiences provide a grounding for me and offer a way to find my direction for this research. A person who is living through an experience cannot reflect on that particular experience at that point. Time must elapse before it is possible to reflect on any experience.

“Thus, phenomenological research is not *introspective* but retrospective. Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through” (van Manen, 2003, p. 10). I am offered many different ways to gather the lived experience stories that help me to uncover my phenomenon, such as gathering experiential descriptions, searching for etymological sources, and through conversation. Van Manen brings home the salient point of the research, “The deeper goal, which is always the thrust of phenomenological research, remains oriented to asking

the question of what is the nature of this phenomenon as an essentially human experience” (p. 62).

In storytelling, words are what you have to work with; they are the coin of the realm. Each word is chosen with care: do I want to use small, tiny, microscopic, meager, little, paltry? Whatever I choose, it makes a difference in my story. In phenomenology, attention is paid and thought is given to the words used as well. Language is chosen with an eye to resonance of meaning that will best convey something of the essence of the phenomenon. Phenomenological researchers use etymological searches to uncover original derivations of words that often reveal insights about the meanings that may have been lost or weakened over time. Etymological searches, such as the one I did for the word “psyche,” can add enormous value to the understanding of lived experience. Phenomenological researchers also look to ordinary, daily language, the quirks of idiomatic expressions, the connotation and denotation to mine the riches of the way in which we express ourselves.

Obtaining experiential descriptions through conversation causes me to think of Gadamer (1960/2004) and the richness he ascribes to conversation, the relationship developed by conversation, and the process of coming to understanding. Van Manen (2003) writes that we gather descriptions of lived experience from others through conversation, and then analyze them for meaning. He also writes that these methods are not mutually exclusive, but overlap as we gather information to give our rendering of the lived experience the detail that it deserves

### *Reflecting on the Essential Themes*

The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience. (van Manen, 2003, p. 77)

As an aid to reflecting on the essential themes of our phenomenon, van Manen brings forth the four life-world existentials of lived place, time, body, and relation. These are experienced by all humans and are present over the many concurrent worlds we all inhabit. These existentials form the basis or ground by which we all experience the world. In Chapters One and Two I began to explore how each of these four existentials affected my lived experiences, in particular as a storyteller.

#### XCVII

How like a winter hath my absence been  
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!  
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!  
What old December's bareness everywhere!  
And yet this time removed was summer's time;  
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,  
Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime.  
Like widowed wombs after their lords' decrease:  
Yet this abundant seem'd to me  
But hope of orphans and unfathered fruit;  
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,  
And, thou away, the very birds are mute;  
Or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer  
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near  
(Shakespeare, 1936, p. 1416)

Sonnet 97 certainly expresses how van Manen's existentials are intertwined to make up the lived experience. Shakespeare's lived experience is shaped by the absence of his beloved, his relationship, which has caused each other existential, lived time, lived space, and felt body, to be experienced in a different and distinctly unpleasant manner.

Phenomenology dwells in lived time. “Lived time is subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time” (van Manen, 2003, 104), the lived time of anticipation, pleasant or unpleasant, waiting for the beloved or waiting for the storyteller, the time spent caught up in the story where there is no time. What is the lived time of a story? What is the teller’s experience of lived time?

“Lived space is felt space” (van Manen, 2003, p. 102). What is the lived space created by storytelling? How does my audience create space around me? How does it happen that even though the physical space is the same, the lived space has morphed into the space made for storytelling? My felt space changes radically when I tell a story. When I told stories in the juvenile detention center, we changed the institutional space to something beautiful. Our lived space existed far from the detention center.

“Lived body refers to the phenomenological fact we are always bodily in the world” (van Manen, 2003, p. 103). Everything we experience comes through our bodies. What happens to our bodies when we stand before a group? How do teachers experience their bodies as they begin to use storytelling in their classrooms, and what does that mean to them? We share space with others; we interact with and build community with them, and we experience our lives in communion with others. This is how we build our world. What part might storytelling play in the building of community? What might storytelling open up for us about others? How do these four existentials come to exist separately and together in teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?

The quest is to come as close as possible to the understanding of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. Themes help broaden and deepen our understandings, make meaning, using the elements that make up our experiences. When I

spend time reflecting on my lived experiences, I uncover themes that I had not seen at first glance and had not realized were there, which make for a much richer understanding. “Ultimately the project of phenomenological reflection and explication is to effect a more direct contact with the experience as lived” (van Manen, 2003, p. 78). Access to that direct contact is effected through the use of themes by which we may understand the essence of the phenomenon. According to van Manen, “Theme analysis refers then to the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (2003, p. 78). Van Manen offers many definitions of theme for our use; each is akin to a prism reflecting different facets of the core. He also tells us that we look for themes knowing full well that we cannot capture the “full mystery” of the phenomenon. I work to uncover the essential themes of my phenomenon and continually ask myself the question whether the deletion or inclusion of a particular theme changes the essence of the phenomenon.

### ***Describing the Phenomenon Through the Art of Writing and Rewriting***

Writing fixes thought on paper. It externalizes what in some sense is internal; it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things of the world. As we stare at the paper, and stare at what we have written, our objectified thinking now stares back at us. Thus writing creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterizes the theoretic attitude in the social sciences. (van Manen, 2003, p.125)

My quest is to create a phenomenological text of the lived experiences of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms and this path lies through writing and rewriting. Van Manen (2003) points out that writing is a paradoxical process in that it both separates and unites us, it distances us and draws us closer; it is the measure of our mindfulness toward our phenomenon; it gives us perspective and focuses us on that

which interests us. “Writing is the method. And to ask what method is in human science is to ask for the nature of writing” (van Manen, 2003, p. 126). It is in our writing that we open up and reveal the essence of the phenomenon. Writing my way to understanding involves rewriting, a process van Manen (2003) likens to a painter revisiting, reworking, and re-imagining the work done previously. At the risk of sounding obvious, this is work that takes reflection. As van Manen writes, “Writing and rewriting is the thing” (2003, p. 132).

Van Manen writes at length about the anecdote, those short, personal accounts of an event. An anecdote may be humorous or not, but it is always a pithy way of providing meaningful insights. An anecdote is an oblique way of conveying essential knowledge, and it fleshes out phenomenological research by illustrating and illuminating aspects of the lived experience that we may wish to reveal. Van Manen (2003) records one anecdote that reveals an aspect of Alexander the Great. It is reported that Alexander said that if he were not Alexander, he would be Diogenes, the philosopher. This anecdote gives us an insight into the value Alexander placed on the life of the mind and the freedom Diogenes enjoyed.

### ***Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Pedagogical Relation***

In any adult-child situation we should ask what is pedagogically the responsible or right thing to do for the children entrusted to our personal care. (van Manen, 2003, p. 155)

How do we create a strong pedagogical orientation to children? Despite the obstacles placed in the way of answering that question, it is incumbent on the thoughtful and reflective researcher to search for the meanings of pedagogy as they manifest themselves. What is pedagogy? In a technical sense of the term, the word pedagogy is



used to describe curriculum, goals and objectives, educational stance the list goes on.

Van Manen's concept of pedagogy is quite different.

Parenting and teaching derive from the same fundamental experience of pedagogy: the human charge of protecting and teaching the young to live in this world and to take responsibility for themselves, for others, and for the continuance of the world. (van Manen, 1991, pp. 6-7)

Van Manen (1991) writes that pedagogy is, "in short a relationship of practical action between an adult and a young person who is on the way to adulthood" (p. 31).

Earlier in this chapter I wrote about the power that Gadamer (1960/2004) attributes to conversation, and the ability it has to bring people together. In true conversation participants come away changed. I believe that this conversation underlies van Manen's understanding that all the various aspects of pedagogy are embodied in that power of conversation. "All our pedagogical being with children is a form of speaking with them" (1991, p. 31).

Van Manen writes of the goal of intimacy between knowledge and action in pedagogy and how it will move us toward competence and the tactful pedagogy that follows from it. Since I am a storyteller, I have a story to tell you, an anecdote about my definition of pedagogy. When I taught first grade, times would come when I let go and *let* children learn, when I stepped out of their way, when I created a space for their understanding. I could see them as they thought, watch the tumblers in their minds realigning, creating new thinking. The most significant aspect for me was my six-year-old students realizing that they did it themselves, and they possessed power to do it again—that is pedagogy, at least in my eyes. My students had taken a step toward

independence. It was a loosening of control and a bonding of trust. Being present, being at one in those moments, is to know that anything was possible for either of us.

In my mind pedagogy is like a performance or a dance. The magic is something that cannot be fully analyzed; it must be felt. It happens in relationship to another. Perhaps, as van Manen in *Researching Lived Experience* (2003) writes, pedagogy is truly ineffable, something that eludes us, something incapable of being expressed, something that cannot be taught in a direct manner. Our best hope is to come ever closer to a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of pedagogy.

“Phenomenology is a philosophy of action especially in a pedagogic context. Pedagogy itself is a mode of life that always and by definition deals with practical action” (van Manen, 2003, p. 154). I believe that teachers who use storytelling in their classrooms are engaged in pedagogy. They are engaged in an intimate action directed to each individual in their classes. They are doing a great service for their children along with developing a depth of practice and understanding that is not available through other modalities. My involvement with teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms is phenomenological action. It is grounded in teachers’ daily lives and structures, informs us both, and is a personal engagement for us both.

### ***Balancing the Research***

A balance is a weighing device, a state of equilibrium, or the power or means to decide. In the sixth guideline van Manen gives us a methodology to insure that we do keep a balance within the context of the study. He acknowledges that phenomenology differs from more traditional research, as does its methodology. “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). The definition of balance coupled with van Manen’s statement shows me that phenomenological research must be done with care for the ethics and context of the research. Phenomenological research takes place in the life-world, which changes, and the research must be sensitive to those changes. I am looking for a balance within which I may operate, a balance that provides the power to decide, and a balance to keep things in equilibrium. Van Manen (2003) proposes that we take an evolving part-whole approach to organize study because the structure of the phenomenon may not show itself at the outset, which can lead to great frustration, even halting the writing. My plan for engagement in this research, this quest, follows.

### **Slaying the Dragon/Rescuing the Princess**

A messenger was sent around the country to read a proclamation. “Hear ye, hear ye! The king offers his kingdom and Princess Wanda’s hand in marriage to the brave nobleman who can rid Krakow of its dragon.” Many brave knights came forward, eager to slay the dragon and marry the princess. But the dragon ate them, bones and all, spitting out their shields and helmets like cherry pits. (Pirota, 2007, pp. 82-83)

My quest is to answer the question that calls to me: **What is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?** On this quest I traveled with five teachers who wished to explore using storytelling in their classrooms. These participants were gathered from my professional contacts, the recommendations from teachers I have met in my phenomenology classes and from teachers with whom I have worked and whose judgment I respect. The criteria for selection of the participants were: (1) each participant must be over eighteen years of age; (2) each must be a classroom teacher in grades one through eight; and (3) each must be interested in telling stories in

the classroom. After gathering a list of possible participants, I sent out a letter of invitation (see Appendix A) to each and followed up with a telephone call and an email. It was important to me to gather a group of teachers with different backgrounds and teaching experiences in order to provide multifaceted perspectives on the experience of storytelling in the classroom. As part of this study teachers were asked to use storytelling in their classrooms, engage in individual conversations about their storytelling, and meet with the other study participants as a group to discuss and practice storytelling. While teachers were free to tell as many stories as they wished, for the purposes of this study each participant was asked to tell stories in their classrooms a minimum of four times, two before our first conversation and two before our second conversation. Each participant was mailed a Consent Form (Appendix B) to be signed and returned at the initial meeting.

I asked participants to attend an initial meeting and bring a story that they might like to tell in their classrooms that we can discuss. At this meeting I outlined the elements of storytelling, along with effective ways to use storytelling in their classrooms. We explored the ways in which the participants may already be using storytelling in their classrooms, how accessible stories are to teachers, and how storytelling and teaching are related. I modeled telling stories, and then described how I choose and prepare to tell a story, using a story familiar to teachers, such as *The Three Little Pigs*. The participants were welcome to tell a story at this meeting if they wished to do so. The study was open to teachers with various levels of storytelling experience, from the novice storyteller to teachers with more practice in storytelling. I recognized that beginning storytellers might require more support than teachers who have told stories previously. At this first meeting

we discussed scheduling practice sessions that participants would wish to have, so that I may provide support for their storytelling. A final meeting of the group was suggested to provide a chance for reflection on our journey together. I provided two additional resources for the participants. Each participant received a copy of *The Storyteller's Start Up Book: Finding, Learning, and Performing Folktales* (1993) by Margaret Read McDonald, a book I have found to be an invaluable guide for both new and experienced storytellers. It builds on skills teachers have, provides instruction on storytelling, and contains easily learned stories. More importantly, the book makes storytelling accessible and provides encouragement for anyone venturing into storytelling. I also provided a reference list of materials on storytelling (see Appendix D), and while this list is by no means an exhaustive one, it gave the teachers a representative sample of sources available to them.

In the first of the two individual meetings, which took place after the conversant had completed telling two stories, the conversation centered on the experience of the teacher using storytelling in the classroom. I had developed a list of possible questions (Appendix C) that might be asked in these conversations. As the conversations unfolded, additional questions arose in light of the experiences with storytelling related by the teachers. During the second individual conversation both the original questions and any additional questions engendered by the teachers' previous conversations were used to open up the phenomenon. At the end of the study all participants took part in a group conversation to reflect on and share the experiences of telling stories in their classrooms. I audiotaped all the discussions and conversations I had with the participants. Each

individual conversation was transcribed and a copy of the transcript given to the conversant prior to the next conversation.

After the conversations were finished, I conducted thematic analysis to discover the essential and incidental themes. In this stage my intent was to seek the meanings and understandings in the conversations of my participants, search for the *sine qua non potest esse*, without which something cannot be, and isolate essential thematic statements using van Manen's (2003) three approaches to uncovering the essential themes. These approaches are the wholistic or sententious approach, the selective reading approach, and the detailed reading approach. The wholistic or sententious approach is one in which the researcher looks for a pithy and energetic wording that captures fundamental meanings. The selective or highlighting approach looks for phrases or sentences that appear to represent themes, and the detailed reading approach reviews each sentence to determine what each reveals. I used all three approaches to uncover themes. After analyzing the themes uncovered in our conversations, I moved to the writing and rewriting that is central to phenomenology in order to render and articulate the meanings of this study in a textual interpretation. These are the processes that uncover and reveal the essence of the phenomenon.

The timeline of my research took into account the structure of the school year. I began to recruit teachers in late August and early September 2010. To provide time for my participants to organize their classrooms and settle into the new school year, my study began after the first three weeks of school had passed. The configuration of my study provided my participants with the support and encouragement they needed to be successful in their storytelling.

### *The Participants in the Quest*

But only someone who is ready for everything, who excludes  
Nothing, not even the most enigmatical, will live the relation  
To another as something alive and will himself draw exhaustively  
From his own existence. For if we think of this existence of  
The individual as a larger or smaller room, it appears evident  
That most people learn to know only a corner of their room, a  
Place by the window, a strip of floor on which they walk up and  
Down. (Rilke, 1934)

I am extremely fortunate to have as my companions on this quest a remarkable group of teachers willing to take the time necessary to participate in this study. The teachers who joined me in this endeavor used storytelling to name, uncover, and make meaning of their experiences as teachers. All of my traveling companions were women who differed in age, race, ethnic background and years of teaching. Although only one of my companions had any experience with storytelling in her classroom, all who joined my quest were willing to take on this challenge because they saw it as a way to learn something new, improve and expand their practice. They also saw a benefit for their students, and contributing to the body of their pedagogical knowledge. My participants are all extraordinary teachers and I am indebted to them and am grateful to have had these women as my companions. My companions wished to use their own names for this research and I have chosen to honor their choice; however, the names of any students have been changed.

**Bekki** graduated with a Bachelor of Music degree. She has been teaching elementary general music for 32 years. In addition, she directed an Elementary Honors Chorus for five years and has also been the guest conductor of a nearby Elementary

Honors Chorus. She has contributed to the “Music and You” textbook series for her school district and has assisted in writing Elementary Integrated Curriculum.

**Renna** has been a teacher for over ten years. Prior to teaching she worked in theatre stage-managing and ushering. Renna uses her arts and theater background to create a classroom in which every student is able to learn. She uses theatre in the classroom “to help students who do not understand what was being taught because it was not being taught a way they could understand.”

**Julia** has a Masters in Elementary Education and has taught two years of pre-K and one year of first grade. Prior to teaching she studied political science as an undergraduate and “was inspired to become an urban schoolteacher because of an education policy course I took there.”

**Karen** graduated with a B.A. in history and a Certification in Early Childhood Education, and began teaching first grade. Five years later she received a M.Ed. in TESOL and began her teaching career in ESOL. “From 2007-2008 I worked as an Instructional Specialist developing ESOL curriculum for my school system. During the 2008 school year I returned and continue to work at my true vocation, teaching ESOL.

**Tracy** has a B.S. in Education, a Masters in Reading, and is certified as a special education teacher. She has taught for sixteen years in various school districts. Tracy is the only one of my participants who previously had the experience of using storytelling in her classroom.

In Chapter One I told the story of my two great loves, teaching and storytelling, and the joy combining the two has given me, and in Chapter Two I developed the connections between storytelling and education. In this chapter I explored the



phenomenological foundations for my research. As I embarked on the quest to discover what meanings this phenomenon might have for others, I was eager to step into the life-world of teachers who begin to use storytelling, to “borrow other peoples’ experiences and reflections.” This process has enabled me to become aware and understand the phenomenon of storytelling more deeply, and this understanding may offer insights to teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. The next chapter brings us into the thematic renderings uncovered I their experiences of storytelling.

## CHAPTER FOUR STORYTELLING: PEBBLES IN THE POND

Mechanical waves—such as water waves, waves on a rope, waves in a spring and sound waves—have two general characteristics: A disturbance is in some identifiable medium, and energy is transmitted from place to place, but the medium does not travel between two places. (*Physics: Wave Motion*, n.d.)

When you drop a pebble into a pool of still water, the energy released from that initial event causes the water particles to vibrate. This disturbance results in ripples or waves that travel in a circular fashion out from the point where the pebble hit the water. From this one localized event other waves emanate, expand and travel through the medium and gradually dissipate, creating something beautiful in the process. In the quest to find the meanings that lie behind the phenomenon of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms, storytelling became like pebbles dropped into water, and it indeed caused waves, released energy and ‘disturbed’ its medium. Unlike the dissipation of energy in wave theory, storytelling seems to gather and generate energy as it goes on. Each storytelling became like another pebble causing new waves to overlap and intersect with one another, creating new patterns and understandings. Storytelling became a transformative agent, enabling my participants to achieve greater insight into the meaning of their teaching practice. As this energy traveled through the teaching lives of the participants, it created space for them to experience their teaching in ways unlike they had in the past.

In *Researching Lived Experience* van Manen writes, “The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something” (2003, p. 77). In choosing to do phenomenological research I am charged with searching out those essential meanings of lived experience; however, it is not quite as easy as it first

appears. The process of uncovering the themes that make up the essence of the experiences of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms reminds me of my grandmother's stories: intricate, complicated, sometimes convoluted, but connected and whole. This work has made me feel a little like Ali Baba standing in the entranceway to the cave of the forty thieves, dazzled by the riches surrounding me.

The focus of this research is on understanding the power of storytelling to affect the lives and pedagogical understandings of my five companions. Storytelling reveals the essence of teaching as a call to authenticity from the teachers to themselves, and to their students who are their partners, as well as the understandings of the reciprocal nature of teaching. In Chapter Three I set out on a quest, a quest to find out the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms. In this chapter I explore the power of storytelling using the motifs of *revelation* and *transformation* to tell the story of how that journey unfolded, the roads we traveled together, and the discoveries we made as we explored the meaning of the question for each of the teachers who joined the quest. I also explore the meanings and understandings of the transformative waves that storytelling creates, allowing space for my participants to explore and uncover aspects of their teaching lives that had been hidden.

### **Storytelling As Revelation**

The experience of telling stories in the classroom has been a revelatory one for my participants, and given that the words *reveal* and *revelation* occur and reoccur in this text, I begin with etymological engagement. The word reveal comes from Latin: *re* which means the opposite of, and *velare* which means to cover or veil. To reveal is to “make known by discourse or communication, divulge, display, show, make clear or

visible.” A revelation is further defined as a “striking disclosure of something previously unknown or not realized.” The waves storytelling creates provide the teachers in my study with the means to make visible what was hidden or undiscovered about their pedagogical practice prior to this experience. The waves storytelling causes enable them to look closely at their practice and develop deeper understandings of what is possible in their teaching.

There is also a concept that is necessary to look into closely, the concept of *being reciprocal*, for this concept holds the key to understanding the participants’ experiences. A reciprocal relationship is one in which something is exchanged or given by the participants. Something is “performed, experienced, or felt by both sides.” A reciprocal relationship is circular, interchangeable, mutual and complementary. To reciprocate means “to give or take mutually, to interchange, to move back and forth, to be complementary or equivalent, to make a return for something given or done.” The teachers’ revelations allow them to become more fully aware and to understand the reciprocal nature of teaching.

The revelations that I explore in this chapter are not separate ones. They are like the waves caused by the pebbles tossed into the water. Each pebble causes waves that intersect, overlap and come together to create new patterns. The waves caused by storytelling that started out as small circles, have spread out through the teaching lives of my participants. Each instance of storytelling causes new points of convergence. Each revelation opens up another space, another dimension for exploration into the meanings of their lived experience. Each “disturbance in the medium” reveals more interconnection with others. These concepts are reciprocal; they are complementary and

woven together, with diverse and particular shades of meaning, each enriching the meanings and essences of the experiences of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms.

### ***Being Attended To***

When something is new to us, we notice, we experience it in an attentive way. We notice how shiny it is, how deep the color, how fluid the lines, how pleasing the proportions. It is visible and present to us. However, in time it becomes what calls “pre-reflective—seen but unnoticed” (Saevi, 2011, Seeing but unthinking para. 1). It is in our sight, but not in our attention; we are no longer reflective, thoughtful, or mindful with regard to it. Perhaps it is the fact that we see something everyday, and it is the aspect of “dailiness” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005, p. 72) that contributes to this phenomenon. It may be too strong to say that familiarity breeds contempt, but familiarity may bring an un-noticed quality to our relationships.

To attend is to give one’s attention, effort, or presence. Storytelling provides these teachers with a way of being attended to and a way of engaging their students that they had not experienced before, a way that amazed and gratified them. They experience themselves as the complete focus of students’ attention. For Bekki, “It was very rewarding because you could see them really just hanging on every word, wanting to know what happens next.” Karen tells me, “As a matter of fact, not only are they listening, but their attention is exactly where you want it.” Tracy describes being attended to this way, “They were captured the whole time. They are not moving, they are trying to figure it out.” Julia shares, “It was really rewarding because they were definitely, definitely focused, so that was great. It felt successful again. I felt very, very much like I

had captured their attention.” Renna describes the attention she receives from her students, “They are right there.”

What is it that we long to capture? We seek to capture something of value, something we prize. What is it that has been captured here? The capture, the prize is the shimmering sense of connection, the type of connection that occurs when we are truly seen, truly heard. In the storytelling experience, my participants were as captured as their listeners. Capture has many meanings, one of which is being “put into a relatively permanently accessible form.” That form implies a relationship that is stable and trustworthy, one where each party is approachable and present to the other. During storytelling the being of the teachers and their students are placed into that “relatively permanently accessible form,” the teachers and their students are present for each other.

### ***Being There***

A way in which my participants describe being present with their students is to speak of “being right there.” Renna tells me, “Oh, it’s incredible, it’s incredible and they hook in and they are there.” The word *there* is defined as: “In or at that place or position, indicating the fact, existence or occurrence of something being pointed out as present to the sight or perception.” We are familiar with *there* as an indication of position, “The book is there,” or “I was there.” The lived experience of storytelling by these teachers leads us to the second definition of *there*, the phenomenon Heidegger calls characteristic of our Being, “Being-in-the-world *is* in every case its ‘there’” (1926/1962, p. 171). What is being pointed out to my participants? What becomes present to their sight or perception? The waves created by these two questions resonate and travel throughout this research.

The experience of being attended to manifested itself through teachers' experiences of being seen and heard.

Visual metaphors encouraging standing at a distance to get a proper view, removing—it is believed—subject and object from a sphere of possible intercourse. Unlike the eye, the ear operates by registering subtle change. Unlike the eye, the ear requires closeness between subject and object. Unlike seeing, speaking and listening suggest dialogue and interaction. (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, & Tarule, 1997, p. 18)

The visual and oral are convergent aspects of being attended to, separate but intersecting ripples. I first attend to the phenomenon of being seen as experienced by my participants and then explore how they experienced being heard.

### ***Being Seen***

Moments of eye contact evolve as a natural part of character and narration development. The story belongs to the audience, after all. The teller uses eye contact to assure the audience of that ownership and it brings the audience into the story. (Livo & Rietz, 1986, pp. 121-122)

In our everyday life we are not always attentive, and we do not always see or register on a conscious level that which is around us. When something is new to us, it is easy to see it in a thoughtful way. Being seen is a manifestation of being attended to, being in contact. Being in contact means coming together, being connected, and being in touch. We are able to contact others in a variety of ways: we text, email, call, or write, but it is the immediate, proximate human contact that is of interest here.

Eye contact is not merely a storytelling technique; it is one of the ways in which we make contact with another. Eye contact implies intimacy; we look deeply into the eyes of the beloved to see who they truly are. In the language of lovers, eye contact stands for the meeting of the soul. We touch through our eyes. Van Manen explores the concept of eye contact, "There is little doubt that we experience the presence of the other

person most strikingly by way of the eyes. Through the eyes we may sense the innermost being of the other person, his or her soul” (van Manen, 1991, p. 179). There is little doubt that we enter into relationships with others, however briefly, by looking into their eyes; that looking in the eyes of another makes possible encounters between people. “Eye-to-eye contact is being-to-being contact” (van Manen, 1991, p. 180). What does it mean when we look into another’s eyes? Do we look to see them or to see ourselves?

One of Renna’s most vivid impressions after telling two stories is having the children’s eyes focused on her, and becoming acutely aware that her students were looking at her, and having the experience of seeing herself reflected in their eyes.

The biggest difference between reading the book where your face is down and you look up every now and then to make sure your kids aren’t poking at each other and to put it down and to look at them and have them look back at you.

Having the experience of being seen by her pupils has caused Renna to look back at them; “I think it has made me a better teacher because I’m stopping to notice them more.” Bekki speaks about having all eyes on her:

You are looking right at them. You’re not looking at a book, you’re not watching them do something, you’re actually speaking directly to them, that was one thing about storytelling, it’s a very direct connection. It’s different than teaching. It’s different than telling somebody something. There is a real connection. They do look at you and they watch very carefully to see what you say and how you say it and how you look when you say it.

What is the experience of knowing that others are looking at you? Sartre (1956) observes that when we are looked at, we are opened up and exposed to the appraisals and judgments of the one who looks at us, and we begin to wonder how we appear to them. We become conscious of ourselves. When we are looked at, we are in a vulnerable



position, in particular if we are not sure what the look means. Could it be that we are more worried about being open and exposed to those who see us everyday?

If we happen to appear “in public” to act in a play or to give a lecture, we never lose sight of the fact that we are looked at, and we execute the ensemble of acts which we have come to perform *in the presence of the look*. (Sartre, 1956, p. 281)

Sartre’s observation is akin to van Manen’s statement, “All of a sudden all the eyes are on me and these eyes rob me of my taken-for-granted relations to my voice and my body. They force me to be aware of my experience while I am experiencing it” (van Manen 2003, p. 35). Storytelling provides a means for my participants to be able to see themselves and experience themselves in the moment. Bekki sees her students “really, just hanging on every word, wanting to know what happens next.” This brings us back to the sense of “capture” that Renna and Julia experience. From their students’ reactions all three teachers experience themselves as someone who can command attention and mesmerize her audience.

Tracy’s story illustrates the power that being looked at holds over us when we do not understand what it could mean. During her Halloween story, the first story of the year, parents were present:

I felt my parents were just scoping me out, looking at me strange like I really didn’t have any classroom management, like it was not going right and the kids were all crazy. But then the parents were saying, “No, you’re fine,” but it was the way that they were looking at me that was really scaring me.

Tracy realizes later that “They weren’t paying me any attention,” and as Bekki says, “They were watching the kids.” Tracy jokingly calls this “storytelling gone bad.”

However, she uses that experience of discomfort of those parents’ eyes to her advantage.

“But, it did not stop me, cause, I’m not going to be conquered by them. And so I said, I’ve got to make up another one, I’ve gotta go back again.”

To be looked at, and to experience oneself becoming an object to someone else (and thus to oneself), makes the person aware of his or her “whatness.” This conscious “whatness” somehow brings about a certain vulnerability, and a profound sense of being in default of a personal defense or possible escape from the look. (Saevi, 2011, The disabling look section, para. 1)

The “whatness” these teachers experience is the new role of storyteller, and they were not sure how *they* would be received. Storytelling is so intimate and can be so revealing, that this mutual eye contact opened up a new awareness on the part of the teachers that being seen can be risky business. Bekki states that she was nervous, “because I really didn’t know how it would go.” Saevi writes, “The glance has an effect that seems to be experienced even more powerfully by the person being seen, than by the person seeing” (2011, The other’s look as self-seeing section, para. 1). It seems as though these teachers are used to being looked at, but *being seen* is somewhat unsettling, in part because they have little experience of taking the time to be seen and to “look back” at their students; they are not used to being looked into by their students. “The meaningful look seems to create a feeling of sameness, togetherness. It reminds us of the common understanding that we share with someone else” (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 82). The lived look, the reciprocal seeing, seems to unfold from the desire to open oneself and to meet with the other’s inner self.

Tracy speaks of her student John, whom she believes to be autistic, and the effect it had on her when John finally makes eye contact.

He is high functioning, but John has no eye contact with you. He normally plays with his hands so the whole time we’re on the carpet, he’s doing this, he’s doing this [gestures] to the rug, because he loves the

texture of the rug. I guess he was just waiting for that milestone and then, yes, he did look up at me. And I said, “Ah, now I have John with me.” And then I put him into the story. It felt good to me because ... at first, I thought he wasn't paying attention. John was not with me at all. And then once when I was finished the story, John asked me a question about the story.

John's look is what makes Tracy aware that he is indeed present to her and she is quick to take advantage of it by putting him into the story, hoping to strengthen that contact. Tracy has the sense that she has made a breakthrough with John by storytelling, and she knows this because he feels safe enough not only to make eye contact, but also to ask a question, and she is exultant. Van Manen writes, “To receive recognition literally means to be known. Someone who recognizes me thereby acknowledges my existence, my very being .... Recognition, and the feeling it produces—a positive sense of self—are public phenomena. It is something that unfolds in the space of relationships” (n. d., p. 23).

Julia, who has a challenging class this year, describes her concern with the way she is perceived at school and the feeling of being seen and recognized for her storytelling by the principal:

She was really impressed. It was right before our Christmas party, our whole school Christmas party and I drove her home that night after it because we live a house apart. I drove her home and she [said] “I have to tell you, we're not supposed to talk about work, but I was so impressed.” So, that's good.

Julia is happy to have validation from her principal. “That was great. It was really, really good. It was really nice to have her be super impressed.” The recognition the teachers receive while telling stories is purposeful and directed, unlike the usual, casual, taken for granted recognition of themselves as teachers. Storytelling allows them to become known and to give recognition to themselves; they were allowing themselves to acknowledge their own existence and efficacy. Awareness of how powerful that

recognition can be come through watching the children watch them. As Renna says, “They’re watching my every move. They are trying to figure it out. They drift off and that’s when I do a movement that will bring them back to me.” This back and forth is part of the play between storyteller and audience. The teachers get their immediate feedback from seeing the gaze of their students on them.

“A good teacher can read a child’s face” (van Manen, 1991, p. 179). Karen tells me, “You’re actually having to go and look at children’s faces, look at what they are doing, look at the response that you are getting.” The teachers in the study are looking at their audience, returning and reflecting their look, and this has the result of causing the teachers to see how deftly and smoothly they adjust to the mood of their students while they were doing something that stands apart from their usual practice.

### ***Being Heard***

Hearing is intimate, participatory, communicative: we are always *affected* by what we are given to hear. (Levin, 1989, p. 32)

Being heard, being listened to, is a distinctive experience from that of being seen, although it is intimately connected to it, and connects to the attending that the teachers experience. We learn to hear before we learn to see. In utero the sound of our mother’s heartbeat is our constant companion, and we learn to listen to and recognize her voice long before we set eyes on her. Yet, in our culture, the eyes have it. “Do you see what I mean?” “I can see your problem.” “Let’s see this through.” “See here, young woman!” “Seeing is believing.” Aoki writes that we have relied on the visual metaphor to the virtual exclusion of the metaphor of orality. Concentrating on the visual is “diminishing the place of other ways of being” (2005a, p. 373). In *The Listening Self* (1989) Levin echoes this sentiment, urging a shift to our capacity for listening. In the search for the

essence of phenomena we speak of “letting be seen.” I would include “letting be heard.” Being heard by their students is often manifested in their being seen by their students.

For my participants being heard manifested in several ways. Karen’s insights into the normal exchange between her and her students point up the difference in being heard in the conversation that occurs during storytelling and the communication teachers have with their students in the normal course of events.

Oh, I have seen when both myself and the teacher have given them a direction and it’s [as if] I really did have a conversation with the wall because absolutely nobody heard me. You know that feeling. Never heard that, right? Well, you couldn’t hear that telling the story. They weren’t just there physically, they were there emotionally, they were there intellectually.

How might this experience of Karen’s affect the ways in which she speaks or gives directions to her students? Might she choose to expand storytelling as a means of connecting with her students in other ways? One way of knowing that they have been heard is having the experience of the students repeating your story. Renna says: “I can hear them, they are storytelling. They’re re-enacting the story. They are telling it the way I told it with their twist.” She understands that this experience of listening to her students means “it went in.” Her students heard her so profoundly that they were able to tell the story on their own. For Renna the best indicator of being heard is this:

But I think that the true measure of the success was after Goldilocks and the Three Bears, to have them incorporate in their play. There’s nothing better than that because nobody’s saying “You gotta do this or draw me a picture about that.” Nobody’s directing their play. And I think that is the highest, well, the highest would be if they went home and told the story to their parents.

Karen tells of having her students listening closely to her story.

They told it to each other. I told it on a Friday, they told it on a Monday. So they had to wait two whole days to tell it to each other, and they had

pretty much no problem remembering it. Straight up, no problem. And you know what else? I found it fascinating. Not only did they remember it, they even got all the inflections right, it was such, you can see the language, it was almost visual.

“Unlike the eye, the ear requires closeness between subject and object. Unlike seeing, speaking and listening suggest dialogue” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 18). These teachers are listening to their own speaking as they hear students echo back their stories. On the playground Julia hears her students repeating a story exactly as she told it, and she describes the sense of being heard by her students.

Well, the things that are coming out of my mouth are reaching their brains. Because some of them of course, focus well and can really absorb words, but mostly I don't feel like first graders ... I feel I'm reaching maybe a third of them and they really hear what I'm saying and really absorb it and understand what's happening. But, when I'm telling a story, I really feel like, I can tell that they're taking it in because I hear them later on talking about “magic tummy, magic tummy.”

Renna, Karen and Julia have also had the experience of being asked to tell more stories. “Three times in the last three days in succession. Are you going to tell us another story? Please tell another story today. Are we going to hear a story today?” Julia says, “I finished the story and [a student] asked if I would tell another.” They knew they were being heard. What might it do to teachers' practices if they knew that what they are saying to students is heard and listened to the first time?

Bekki tells about her experience of being listened to. “I made up a little melody and of course the kids would immediately begin to sing that every time it came into the story, they would sing this little refrain.” Julia asks her class if they wanted a story, “I asked them what they wanted to hear and they all wanted the *Turkey Sultan* and they all made the chicken sound, ‘Baaaack!’ They were really happy about that.”

Karen ties being heard with being attended to, “As a matter of fact, not only are they listening, but their attention is exactly where you want it. They are learning something, they are participating.”

In *The Tone of Teaching* (1986), van Manen writes of the importance of atmosphere or mood the teacher creates in the classroom. My participants had an opportunity to focus on their voices and to hear how they sound. How might teachers react to hearing themselves speaking? Karen tells a story about supplying background information for a history lesson and her desire to overcome how she senses she can be heard, or not heard, by her students.

I wanted to do it in a way that wasn't *wah, wah, wah, wah*, that's what I really wanted to do. So that is what I did. I was excited about it and I thought a lot about it, and I was scared. I didn't even know how to start.

Julia hears herself as repetitive and boring most of the time, but experiences storytelling as running counter to the sort of listening on the part of her students to which she has become accustomed.

There are the levels of being heard by others and the level of being heard by oneself. Storytelling provides these teachers with the understanding that they are worthy of being heard, of being listened to by their students, and by themselves. Their lived experience in the classroom does not always give them that sense of being entitled to having their voice heard. Elbaz-Luwisch (2005) writes that when we develop our own discourse, a way to be heard that expresses our own ideas, we, therefore, express our own being. The teachers did not realize how much being heard was integral to their well being. Storytelling gives them the opportunity to develop their own voice and permits

them to experience not just everyday conversations, but the deeper pathways of hearing: the “second pathway to apprehended learning and art,” and the third pathway that “exist[s] so the soul itself might hear guidance and gain knowledge while here on earth” (Estes, 1995, p. 24). What could happen in the classroom if teachers communicated with their students in such a way that the guidance and knowledge of which Estes writes was mutual?

“Rightly or wrongly much school time is filled by the teacher’s voice. And, of course, the voice is a primary means of contact between human beings” (van Manen 1991, p. 174). Through remarks such as Karen’s and Julia’s it becomes clear they experience their voices as somehow different when they tell stories. They are heard when they tell stories. In *The Tact of Teaching* van Manen writes, “Children need to be listened to without critical or negative judgment” (1991, p. 86), and goes on to say that this non-judgmental or pedagogical listening can foster self-awareness and self understanding. What about adults? These teachers never dreamed that they would be on the receiving end of listening to themselves. This storytelling experience gives the teachers a chance to be listened to without judgment.

### ***Being Honored***

Who is it that we honor? To honor is to respect, as for special merit, to give glory or recognition, to hold in respect. Honor is given; it cannot be obtained any other way. We do not usually associate the concept of honor with the everyday world of teachers, and yet, here it is. The word honor emerges in our conversations through the expression of deep caring and competence of these teachers. Tracy shares “I felt honored” when prospective parents heard her telling stories and chose to send their child to Tracy’s



school. During the group conversation Karen discovers that the word “honor” is what describes a moment in her storytelling:

It was the most beautiful moment because I realized at that moment ... I didn't know to call it honoring, but it was, it was. That was the communication I was getting from them, immediately, but it was also, they respected the story and they wanted to hear it the way it should be.

Renna knows that honor in her class is reciprocal. “You are going back and forth and that you are feeling, honored, you are honoring them.” Tracy speaks of the recognition and pleasure she feels when a boy in her class pays attention during storytelling.

But once Nathan turned and gave me his attention, he was not rubbing on the carpet, he was not fiddling, he was not playing with another student's ear, I felt like, “Oh, my goodness, I got somebody.” He was honoring me with his attention, because normally he does not honor anyone, but himself and the sky.

Karen adds, “As far as honoring my students ... it was definitely honoring.” Again, the question: To whom do you give honor? You give honor to someone you respect, hold in high regard and who is deserving of recognition. Through storytelling my participants get to experience respect and recognition in mutual, reciprocal ways. Through storytelling and the experiences of being attended to, the teachers realize that they are worthy of being honored.

What lies behind their experiences of being attended to, being seen, heard, and honored? The experiences of being attended to stand out so clearly for these teachers, suggesting that outside of the storytelling experience, they do not experience themselves in this way. The question becomes by whom are they unseen and unheard and conversely, who is it that *they* are not seeing and hearing? To whom are *they* not attending? Through storytelling it became clear that the answer is themselves. In the process of telling stories, the teachers are attending to themselves. It is their being as

teachers that they are allowing themselves to see, hear, and honor. Standing in the gaze of their students enables them to see and become aware of their own seeing. Hearing themselves speaking purposefully and with focused intent allows their hearing to be audible to themselves. Honoring the worth of their students allows them to give honor to themselves. Through storytelling the teachers experienced attending to themselves as a revelation.

### **The Physicality of Being-In Stories**

Storytelling is a physical activity, grounded in the body, and occurring in a particular space and time. Storytellers use their breath, their voices, eyes, ears, and their entire bodies to tell the story. The storytellers' breath controls the voice and word flow. Their eyes are watching to see the effect of the story, ears are listening to and monitoring their own voice along with the sounds the audience makes; the position of the storyteller's body tells part of the story. The storyteller is always in some place and some time telling the story and is mindful of the physical dimensions of the storytelling venue.

### ***Being Out of Time/Storytelling Time is Now***

The second hand on a watch may complete the same circuit each time to indicate the passing of a minute, but our *experience* of the time it takes is variable. (Ellis, 2008, p. 108)

If there is one profession that lives and dies by the clock, it is teaching. Schools still operate on the industrial revolution's factory model, designed by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the early 20th century, with its hallmarks of standardization and synchronization of time. Each job has the right procedure, the right tool, and the right amount of time in which to accomplish it (Toffler, 1980). Kreisberg tells us that schools operate on the machine metaphor. "The organization of time in schools into neat and

equal blocks is another manifestation of this world view” (1992, p. 50). From the minute a teacher walks into the school in the morning until the time the teacher leaves for the day, time is parceled out in discrete, definite measurements. Instruction is designed to fit into the time allotted for particular subjects. Time is divided and subdivided, and yet, there is rarely enough time in the day. Bekki gives voice to the problem:

I just feel like I can hardly spare the time [for storytelling] away from my curriculum. I love the creative part of it. I wish I had more time to do it, but I feel as though, there are things that I would have to leave out, because I can't do everything now, as it is, you know, I just can't.

Karen's comment, “I gotta get through things. I gotta get to things,” reflects the sense of urgency teachers feel about time and the demands placed upon them to get through the curriculum in the time allotted. The entire school runs on synchronized time, each teacher's timeliness, or lack thereof, impacting on another's. Teachers are always conscious of the clock, always watching their time. What happens to instruction when this emphasis on time is of such importance? Reading is over, time for math. Might that cut off an idea, a conversation inspired by a subject? What about the student who wants to dwell with something from the previous instruction? We may be giving our children the notion that pursuing an interest in a subject is only acceptable in a scheduled time frame and that sustained thought and exploration of a concept is not valued.

One of the fascinating revelations of this research concerns teachers' storytelling time. It is to be expected that the participants worry about having the time to tell a story during the day. However, in our conversations, once they begin to relate their experiences about telling stories, time is rarely mentioned. The only instance Renna mentions time relating to storytelling is when she worries about being able to fit a story into her day. From what they *didn't* say, it is clear that when they actually begin to tell

stories, time seems to disappear. There is no sense of time, and no sense of time passing. Time, the ruler of teachers' lives, seems to vanish from their lived experience. Storytelling exists outside of time; the story takes as long as it takes to tell. There is time before it, time after it, and around it. But during the lived time of storytelling, the teachers shed their preoccupation with time. What is it about storytelling that is so engrossing? What happens to the sense of time?

The concepts surrounding the lived experience of time that Anton (2001), Flaherty (1999), and Csikszentmihalyi (1997) describe come together and form a pattern of intersecting ripples that describe and inform what my participants experience as they tell stories. Lived time is not clock time, and the key words to describe lived time are variable, subjective and paradoxical. Our lived experience of time can be protracted or compressed when compared to clock time. In *The Watched Pot* (1999) Flaherty writes that the experience of time is subjective, and we each interpret lived time in our own fashion. For some people time filled with activity seems to pass slowly; conversely, for others, the same time is experienced as moving quickly. High involvement with an event, for example, can cause time to speed up for some, and slow down for others. By the same token low involvement may cause the same paradoxical reaction to time.

Novelty also has a role to play in the perception of time. Storytelling is a new experience for everyone but Tracy, and this may help to explain a part of the participants' lack of remarking on their lived time. Flaherty also writes that our life experience has a role in our understanding of the passage of time. "It may be that, unlike their jaded elders, time seems to pass slowly for young people simply because so much of their

experience is new, striking and memorable” (1999, p. 79). It may be that my participants shed being “jaded elders” as they explored the experience of storytelling.

Concentrating or becoming engrossed in an activity can have the effect of slowing down the way we perceive the passing of time. Anton writes that temporality is easy for us to forget:

We prereflectively forget about temporality; we go about our business by being absorbed in the activities and involvements at hand. Temporality...remains for the most part far and away. It is pushed to the periphery of awareness as our attention is directed to the involvements in and through which entities are concernfully drawn near. (Anton, 2001, p. 121)

Bekki explains it this way:

It’s like what they call flow, where you’ve lost all sense of time and it just moves; it just goes along by itself. You’re so in the moment and they’re so in the moment that it’s not school anymore and it’s not just you anymore, it’s just sort of transcendent. It doesn’t happen that often.

***Experiencing flow.*** Csikszentmihalyi writes of a phenomenon he terms “flow experience.” These flow experiences are characterized by the “serenity that comes when the heart, will, and mind are on the same page” (1997, p. 28). “Flow tends to occur when a person faces a clear set of goals” (p. 29). These goals and the person’s skills must be closely matched for the sense of flow to be experienced. It is the “just right” phenomenon. If the goal is either too high or too low, we are apt to disengage. Teachers certainly have clear sets of goals, but how often are the “heart, will, and mind” on the same page?” Storytelling seems to have created that lived experience for my participants. Is it possible to increase the time spent in that state, and what might happen if teachers found ways to attain this flow experience more frequently throughout the school day?

Another aspect of the “flow” experience is that of immediate feedback, also a characteristic of the mutual give and take of storytelling. The characteristics of the flow phenomenon seem to explain the absence of comments regarding time. It may well be that for the period spent in storytelling time is irrelevant. As Karen says, “A lot of times, it’s just perfect. It’s like a perfect moment. You could stop and freeze it, you could just stop and freeze them.” What goes into a perfect moment may ultimately be ineffable.

Aoki writes:

Why is this particular story of a single moment worth a remarking? Could it be that that which is remarkable is the indwelling presence of the shimmering being of teaching that is open to those whose listening is attuned aright? (Aoki, 2005b, p. 195)

When our “listening is attuned aright” we are present for the other person; we bring forward and manifest the authentic self. As the authentic self listens, “Our listening becomes properly tuned, properly thoughtful: it becomes an authentic hearing” (Levin, 1989, p. 207). Once again, the ripples storytelling causes intersect, creating complex, overlapping patterns that speak to time, listening and the authentic self.

***Energy returned.*** Karen expresses the fear that she might be exhausted after telling stories and is delighted that her fears were unfounded:

I might not be exhausted at the end of an hour session [of storytelling] and I wasn’t. I was exhilarated. That’s what it gave me, exhilaration. When you do a lesson, sometimes you feel like it’s all sucked out of you. When you tell a story, it’s brought into you. I feel rejuvenated.

Bekki notices her voice was “more fatigued...but I wasn’t worn out myself.” Tracy realizes that the students “gave you more energy. Oh, yeah, that’s it.” Renna thinks storytelling “will keep energy in teaching because I have something I like to do. And it’s fun for me to do.” Tracy says that she “was having a ball.” The experiences of these

teachers were that storytelling energy was given to them. This reflects the aspects of the “flow” experience, the sense that “the heart, will, and mind” are working as one. How would teachers’ experiences change if they were involved in activities that energized and rejuvenated them?

After storytelling Bekki feels elated:

I was, especially with the kindergarteners, I really was, because they had such a good time. I always like that, being about to send them out knowing that they’re going to go home and tell mom and dad, “We did this story today and we got to blah, blah, blah.” And I know they do because I hear from parents off and on, “Oh, what was that story you read, you told those kids?” So, I was pleased with that. Because I really knew that they would remember it, that they would be excited about it.

Bekki’s enjoyment in her teaching and knowing that her teaching will be extended beyond the classroom sheds light on something with which teachers struggle. How will I know I make a difference? The lived experience of telling stories in their classrooms provides these teachers with the immediate feedback that characterizes the “flow” experience, an embodied sense of knowing that what they have said matters to their students.

### ***Being Out of Space/Storytelling Place***

The storyteller tells the audience into another time and place, and the ritual of the storytelling releases the audience from the binding of present time. The members of the audience must agree to enter into the play or the “other” reality that the storyteller brings with the story or telling cannot come to exist. The audience cannot watch from the perspective of present time while the teller moves into another reality. (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 185)

We all occupy space, and at any one time, our embodied self occupies a particular space (Anton, 2001; Casey, 1993), and that space exerts a powerful influence on us.

Heidegger writes that we as humans are dwellers, and that means we are called upon to

“cherish and protect, to preserve and care for” (1971, p. 379). It may be said that teachers take up this charge of cherishing and protecting as they strive to create safe places for their students to dwell. As Casey writes, dwelling places come in myriad shapes and sizes, and that “how we are, our bodily being, reflects how we reside in built places” (1993, p. 120). Van Manen (2003) uses the term “lived space” referring to our varied responses to particular places. Lived space is not merely where we are, but how we are in that space. The lived place of storytelling elicits a particular response of its own. These teachers are in a particular place, a classroom, where the life of the class is conducted. This physical place does not expand or contract; yet these teachers are able to convert the place of the classroom to include a storytelling space. The physical realities of school have no impact on the storytelling space the teachers create, which is a space of intimacy and closeness. Creating that alternate time and space is an innate characteristic of storytelling. Might that “release from the binding of present time” provide teachers with a way to transport their students to realms unreachable by other means?

“Schoolchildren at the feet of a storyteller sat mesmerized and remembered the stories till the storyteller came again” (National Council of Teachers of English, 1992). Each of my participants makes storytelling a special event that, even though it shares the same place, the storytelling place is somehow separated from the rest of the day and they go about creating that space in their own way. It is noteworthy that my participants made a storytelling space as a matter of course. How is it that my participants know how to do this? Could it be a reflection of the soundness of their professional instincts, an understanding of our narrative brain or an innate understanding of storytelling? They seem to know instinctively what storytelling space should be. As Renna tells it:



We use the storytelling position and they circle, move a certain way on the rug, and I sit in my chair and I pull out the hat and, I have a fabric that I put around my legs that matches the hat, and it comes out with a flourish.

Tracy puts on hats and takes time to set the stage for the story with ritualized behavior, and other times by simply declaring the storytelling space to be. However each teacher creates the space, they want their students as close to them as possible. No matter where Tracy physically sits, “Sometimes I sit on a stool or I have a chair or I just do different things,” the children are always close to her. Julia keeps her students on the carpet in front of her and doesn’t believe “storytelling would be nearly as effective if they were sitting far away.” The reason Julia gives for this is that she wants them to be able to see her facial expressions; she wants them to see her. Bekki tells me:

If they’re too far away, and you are not an actor who can convey expression, at a distance easily, well, they don’t get it. It doesn’t sink in, it doesn’t have the immediacy. Doesn’t have the effect. So, I agree. I think for me, I have to have them right there. I’ll have them sit close to me at the front of the room; that feels comfortable to me and I do feel I have a lot more...I can get my arms around them.

Tracy says she brings her students into her own little world. “We all just get into this little bubble.” Storytelling is intimate, the teller speaking to each member of the audience. Van Manen and Levering writes, “In favorable situations, physical closeness tends to create or stimulate intimacy” (1996, p. 67). Karen describes how necessary she thinks physical closeness is:

I think it mattered. I think their proximity to each other and to myself mattered and when they all got up to look at the map, I just pulled them right around, told them, just sit on ... I don’t care if they sat behind me...so they sat behind me, on the ledge, wherever was comfortable. It was a closeness, it was that physical, you’re part of something bigger than yourself kind of moment. All children need to know that.

Physical closeness is a manifestation of another kind of closeness. Intimate space is vital for these teachers because it enables them to be seen and heard. Lived space is

felt space and “the experience of lived space is largely pre-verbal; we don’t ordinarily reflect on it and yet we know that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel” (van Manen, 2003, p. 102). When teachers feel the need to draw their students to themselves they are acting on the intimacy engendered by the storytelling experience; the lived space reflects the essence of the experience.

### ***Community***

One of the ways we create community is through our physical proximity, being in the same space. We also create community by being in a group of people who have common interests, who share, interact, and participate in the same activities. In *The Storyteller’s Start-Up Book*, MacDonald writes, “Story bonds a group together. The story becomes a shared experience. Sharing the story’s joys or grief bonds us” (1993, p. 102). MacDonald goes on to write that the community benefits from storytelling in that the morals and norms of the community are shared, traditions preserved, and history remembered. Bruner (1986) and MacDonald both point to the ability of storytelling to help normalize the behavior of members of the community. In the following remark, Karen reflects on the physical component of community.

But when you sit independently, you kind of feel ... I think we all were a unit when they’re all scrunched together, and all of a sudden there’s just like this flow, this movement. It was a community. When you are all there, you almost start to breathe together.

Karen’s students have now become more than a group of children. Renna has the same insight. “You get your community.” Tracy says, “When I say they are becoming me, it means that they are stepping into my world.” Renna shares the experience of having her class join her in a communal telling.

Where all of us rolled our shoulders up, put the one eye scrunched up. So I'm doing this but they're all doing it. That was the big difference today ... they all became the storyteller. I barely was telling this story today. I started to lead it, but it was a group phenomenon.

What might it be like to have the ability to bind people in so intimate a connection? How does one make sense of that idea in the mind and heart? Would it be a frightening experience? Would it force teachers to suspend their usual role and would all teachers be comfortable with that power?

### ***Being Safe in the "Risk"***

It is in the attempt to walk (and live) on the rickety bridge between self and other—and not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other—that we discover real hope. (Phelan, 1993, p. 174)

In order to engage in the eye contact that allows us to reveal ourselves to others, and in order to engender a sense of community, there must be an atmosphere of safety and trust. "Safety from 'story'-time consequences impinging upon the real-time real lives of members of the audience is established and maintained when the audience joins the play" (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 185). A classroom should be a protected place for children to learn, to take chances, and make mistakes, a place with the echoes of the comfort and security of home (Bachelard. (1958/1994). As part of the care for their students, teachers strive to create an environment that is safe for them. Through storytelling my participants discover that the safety and trust they create for their students extends to them. "We may say that this is the pedagogical look—it is the look that strengthens and builds the student's confidence, trust and competence" (Saevi, 2011, Enabling seeing of disability section, para. 2). In the case of storytelling, it is the students who give their teachers a pedagogical look. What could that approbation, that

understanding mean for pedagogical practice? Would teachers be more willing to take risks with implementing new ideas, knowing that they are safe?

Storytelling, at least initially, is somewhat nerve wracking for these teachers, and as they walk out on that tightrope, they find a safety net of support from their students. Bekki chooses a particular class with which to begin storytelling because she feels safe and comfortable with her audience.

I may, if I'm brave enough, do something with that group, with those two groups, because they're creative enough and they are very accepting. They are not the kind of group where there's always somebody jumping all over you if you make a mistake or you know if something doesn't work right. They're not the ones just falling all over the place laughing.

Through these experiences teachers discover that in creating a safe haven for their students, they had created an environment for themselves in which to experiment with storytelling. How might that make a difference in the way teachers understand their students, knowing that the students care for them? The students extend to them the same freedom to make mistakes as they try something new. The atmosphere and trust turns out to be a reciprocal one. Like the ripples spreading over the water this leads to the understanding that, indeed, my participants are successful in creating this environment, a place in which their students were more gracious, more giving, more forgiving, than they realized. This leads to the teachers' revelation and understanding that their students are co-creators of the being of the classroom. As previously noted, Karen feels confident enough to start telling stories, even though she says, "I didn't even know how to start." She feels safe enough to take the risk. Renna makes up a story on the spur of the moment, and although it was a "little scary," she feels it went "went all right. I'm in a

safe environment.” Is it possible this safety and trust comes from being seen and heard? Does this flow from the revelations stemming from that knowledge?

Tracy, the experienced storyteller, is not immune to feeling that she takes risks. “It is risky because I don’t know if they are going to like my story.” Tracy speaks of a story that did not go well, a Halloween story. “One kid raised her hand, if I’m not mistaken, from memory, and said, ‘Is it almost time for the Halloween party?’” Tracy builds the mutual trust in her classroom from the beginning of the school year, so she feels safe enough to continue her storytelling even after her disastrous debut. “Remember now, it took me months to get them there. I mean I couldn’t just start in September, jumping in front of those kids and saying, ‘Okay, I’m going to be a storyteller.’” The trust and safety in Tracy’s room runs both ways. She tells personal stories: “I’m constantly telling them about how I was retained in first grade and how I couldn’t read.”

Karen tells a story to her third graders about intervening in a confrontation with a gang who was intent on hurting one boy. Telling that story involves being vulnerable and risking her status as the all-knowing teacher. “I didn’t want to cry, because I wanted them to hear the story...they were really upset because I did cry when I told it.” Karen reveals, “To be able to give a part of yourself to somebody else. I mean that’s a part I don’t share with everybody.” Karen acknowledges, “It was a big risk. They could have misunderstood that story easily.” However, Karen shares, “I was with kids I actually trusted. Or I wouldn’t have told it.” She also says, “Certain stories even though you’re not sure you should tell them, you should probably try it at least once.” Who do you become after sharing a hidden aspect of yourself? What does that change about you? I

think of my grandmother and how my being and sense of self would expand under her eyes of care. How are we when we are cared for and have permission to risk?

Bekki's experiences with trust and safety point up the importance relationships have with regard to taking risks. Despite the fact that Bekki only sees her students once a week, and feels unsure of taking risks with them because "my relationship with them is so tenuous," she expresses the sentiment that nothing is perfect the first time you try it:

I mean if it does, it's a surprise. It's a miracle. So I've kind of looked at it like that. What's the worst thing that can happen? I mean, you throw it out. You don't do it again, or you fix it so it works better the next time.

Bekki's remark exemplifies the sense of safety, and competence, that makes it possible for these teachers to attempt something out of their ordinary routine. This is the reciprocal sense of safety they create for themselves. What are the lessons teachers might be imparting to their students as they walk out on the storytelling tightrope without a net?

### ***The Call of the Authentic Self in Relation***

A child calls upon me for help and I feel I must act responsively and responsibly to the child. "Feeling called upon" is therefore the deepened significance, the life-meaning of being an educator, a parent, a pedagogue. (van Manen, 1991, p. 97)

We live immersed in a culture with its customs, mores, norms, and values. Our particular culture "provides a 'world-taken-for-granted' that most people accept most of the time" (Bryjak and Soroka, 1997, p. 43). We are surrounded by predetermined interpretations, what 'they' say is proper behavior. For the most part we don't think that much about how to navigate the social fabric of our daily lives. We just *know*, courtesy of our being members of a particular culture. This is the way in which we do things, this

is the way we have always done things. If we had to make conscious choices for each and every aspect of our lives, we would be paralyzed. A “they-world” is necessary for we live with others.

#### No Man is an Island

No man is an island, entire of itself  
Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were,  
As well as if a manor of the friends or of thine own were  
Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind  
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls  
It tolls for thee.  
(John Donne, 1624)

Donne’s poem illustrates Heidegger’s understanding that we live and understand our lives in relationship to others. We are, to use Heidegger’s expression, thrown into a world where ‘they’ make decisions for us. Heidegger (1926/1962, p. 150) writes that *Dasein*, “an entity which in each case myself” exists lost in this cultural milieu with decisions made for it by the larger society. “Dasein makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity” (1926/1962, p. 312). When we are lost in the clamor of the ‘they-world,’ we fail to listen to our own being. However, we always have the possibility of choosing a course that runs counter to the inauthentic ways of acting. To move from the inauthentic, Heidegger informs us that we must make amends for our previously being lost. It is in the choosing for oneself that makes possible our authentic being.

But “making up” for not choosing signifies *choosing to make this choice*—deciding for a potentiality-for-Being, and making this decision from one’s own Self. In choosing to make this choice, *Dasein makes possible*, first and foremost, its authentic potentiality-for-Being. (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 313)

Storytelling is a choice these teachers made, and that choice led to bringing themselves back from the state of being lost. Storytelling prompts the teachers to pay attention to the call for authentic teaching, amplifying the volume of the call to authenticity. Does this attention to the call from their own being stem from being attended to by their students? This experience of storytelling seems to have aided the teachers in discovering their authentic teaching selves. Tracy talks about “holding herself in” before her experiences with storytelling. Bekki discovers:

I liked it because I think I tend to be a creature of habit, and I think when kids are expecting to do the usual thing, or the way they are used to having music class, and you do something different, it's kind of, I think the spice of life.

“On occasion, however, some unusual event may challenge our background assumptions. This makes our assumptions more visible to us, and, if we are fortunate, it even makes us aware of how arbitrary they are” (Henslin, 2001, p. 72). For these teachers, storytelling was that unusual event, the one that caused them to examine their practices. Julia is surprised at how quickly her students understand the nature of a dilemma. She now begins to reassess her opinions of their capabilities. Karen is surprised at how deeply her stories have affected some of her students, especially the ones she finds hard to reach by other methods, and Tracy shares her experiences of reaching difficult students through storytelling.

Heidegger (1993, p. 143) translates saying as showing. The teachers feel that through the ‘saying’ of the story, they have shown themselves and let themselves be seen and heard. As it turns out, they are part of the Being of the classroom that has been undiscovered and hidden. It is easy to focus on the students in a class and for teachers to



pay little attention to themselves. However, the teacher and the students are inextricably bound together to create the being of the class, so what happens to that sense of being when a key member in that creation is unaware of what they need to fully join in the life of the classroom?

The teachers are assured of being seen and heard by experiencing the attention given to them by their students. Being heard also means being attended to, in answer to a summons or call, to be present at, or go to. Storytelling is a call. The storyteller issues a summons and the students willingly answer it. “A child who calls upon me may claim me in a way that leaves me no choice” (van Manen, 2003, p. 6). This is a call to which these teachers are keenly attuned. Through storytelling they realize that they, too, may issue a call. Once again, the reciprocal nature of teaching is revealed. Being heard is also a calling, calling from one being to another. When Heidegger speaks of the call of conscience, he means this call as a summons, a summons from our self, our being. These revelations, occurring when teachers became aware of the call, were “neither planned or prepared for” (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 320). They happened in part because these teachers opened themselves to their own being and made space in which they can exist. All of this is part of the being of the classroom. Through storytelling these teachers feel free to reveal more of themselves—to themselves and to their students. What is it that lies behind this call that surprises my participants? Might it be the clarity and strength of the call, or perhaps as Henslin, (2001) writes it is the opportunity to look at our standard operating assumptions.

In writing on authenticity Anton (2001) tells us that “We depend on particular others to free us for our possibilities, to enable us to become who we are, and they

depend on us for their projects and their self-becoming” (p. 156). Usually, we think of the teacher engaging the students, assisting them in the project of their growth, not the teachers becoming who they are in the classroom, a way of being that is formed and shaped by the interaction with students. We depend on our mutual passionate responses to each other to become who we truly are, our authentic selves. Through storytelling it was revealed that teachers depend on their students in ways and in greater depth than they realized. There is a reciprocal phenomenon that “enables others to be free for their possibilities” (Anton, 2001, p. 158). Might teachers who are open to their possibilities create an environment for this to happen for their students?

The return to the authentic teaching self reveals itself in the high level of involvement the teachers have and the pleasure the experience of storytelling brings them. The principle of reciprocity is at work here, also. The teachers were constantly speaking of how involved with storytelling their students were, and they did not immediately realize that the students’ involvement was a reflection of their own. Storytelling provides them with something they have generated, created, something of their own, something that corresponds to practices closer to their understanding of what it means to teach. What might happen if teachers were able to exercise more control over their own practice? Could that lead to the involvement these teachers experienced, and would that sense of autonomy and involvement lead to greater satisfaction with teaching? What might happen if teachers worked in schools that operated on the model of allowing teachers to be more in charge of their practice?

Tracy and Renna know that they respond to the energy in the room. Renna remarks that “A friend of mine once referred to me, positively, as a vampire. The more excited the room is,” and Tracy chimes in, “There you go.” Renna adds:

I find it very positive. I find that incorporating it into the classroom, the kids are getting something off it, hearing them tell the stories to each other, after I’ve told them, knowing they are going to go home and tell it to somebody at home, that’s kind of a homework assignment but the kids are saying to me, “I’m going to go tell the story to my little sister.” And I’m like, “I love that and I bet you she loves it too.” The whole idea, of incorporating it. I find it very affirming. Is it *much* different than what I do? Yes, but hopefully not next year.

The safety and trust the teachers felt with their students shows itself in how caught up they are in the storytelling experience. Tracy says, “I was having a ball.” For Karen, “I’m jazzed. It is the best tool a teacher can learn.” The level of her students’ involvement and attention surprises Renna:

I didn’t foresee the students themselves becoming the characters. They were 100% in it. When I said I have another tale, they instantly sat down crossed their legs and looked up. They were ready for the second tale. And they could not believe that we got two stories in a row.

It was a revelation to my participants how much they enjoyed telling stories; it was almost a vacation for them. They express themselves as feeling freer and more joyful, more connected to their students and themselves. What would a school look like where the teachers experienced themselves truly enjoying more of what they do? It might lend a sense of lightness and of color to the school experience. Would it be so difficult to create an environment that would nurture teachers, and to have the will to do so?

### ***From Revelation to Transformation***

At the outset of our journey together my participants and I had no way of knowing how profound and deeply felt the experiences of storytelling in the classroom

would be. Through storytelling, the teachers came to a greater understanding of themselves and their practice. All of the revelations and discoveries made in this research emanate from the experience of these teachers with storytelling. They are intimately connected with their students, and storytelling allowed them to see that. In the following section I “tell” how the teachers in this study use those revelations to transform their practice.

### **Storytelling As Transformation**

The storytelling experience is filled with both revelations and transformations. The pebbles released into the pond, the storytelling done by my participants, caused waves of revelations that disturbed their pedagogical lives. These revelations caused still other waves, which in turn resulted in transformations of their pedagogical practice. Revelation and transformation come from the openness to new experiences the teachers display throughout the course of this study, and their willingness to look and see what might lie beyond their everyday practice. As in the last section, I begin with an etymological engagement.

The word “transform” comes from two Latin roots, *trans* meaning “across, beyond, to go beyond” and *formare*, meaning “to form, contour, shape.” To transform means to change the shape, appearance or character of something. Storytelling proved to be the transformative element that enabled these teachers to go beyond the contours and character of their everyday practice. Whatever inspires transformation, the process involves a crossing, a going beyond, and a leaving of familiar terrain. To transform oneself, there must be a willingness to go beyond the bounds of beliefs and practices, to stand at the horizon and to know that there is something past our vision. To transform

oneself there must first be awareness and uncovering of something previously unknown. There must be a revelation that something needs to be changed.

The experience of telling stories made visible to my participants various elements of their teaching lives that lay undiscovered, and those revelations serve to guide them as they transform their perceptions of themselves and their practice. What Witherell and Noddings write about teaching applies equally to storytelling: “Teaching [and storytelling] can deepen our understanding of and respect for both persons and communities in ways that render the familiar strange and the strange familiar” (1991, p. 9). Joseph Campbell in the *Power of Myth* writes we are transformed by “either the trials themselves or by illuminating revelations. Trials and revelations are what it’s all about” (Campbell, 1988, p. 155). In fairy tales the hero must undergo a transformation, one that causes a discovery of the essential qualities for living a good life which enables the hero to live that kind of life. What changes would occur if teachers felt themselves to be heroes? Would the structure of school be altered?

### ***Transformational Nature of Performance***

The arts in all their manifestations are close in attitude to play.  
Constraints on the imagination are loosened. (Eisner, 2002, p. 4)

Benson describes performance as a “transformation of ideas and dreams and all those other little understood human impulses into outward action” (2006, para. 4). A measure of the power of storytelling lies in the fact that it is a performance art, and as such, has the power to transform how we experience time, space and relationships. Gadamer (1960/2004) writes that art has its “true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it” (p. 102). A performance, such as storytelling, takes place in the here and now; it is immediate and unique. Each time a

story is told, it assumes a unique character, so the exact performance cannot be recreated. “Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward” (Phelan, 1993, p. 149).

It is situation dependent, or context imbedded. That is, the exact circumstances of each storytelling are different, characterized as they are by the nature of the setting, time of day, composition of the audience, immediate needs or concerns of the audience, agenda of the program, and a host of other factors. (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 8)

Storytelling is not a solitary exercise. Performance creates a community, however briefly, by bringing together people for a common purpose. What might be the impact of frequent storytelling? Could the sense of the “relatively permanently accessible form” that is a part of the definition of capture, be extended and strengthened? Telling a story evokes a response from the teller and the audience, and that is what gives it power and intimacy. Just as there is no teacher without those being taught, there is no storyteller without those who listen. Storytellers engage their audience, and both the teller and audience join in a dance to co-create the story. Once again, being attended to comes to the fore. Underlying the revelations lived by my participants is the transformative nature of performance. The teachers were able to take those revelations and transform them into new ways of understanding themselves, their practices and their ways of being with their students.

### ***Play: The Call and Response of Story***

A performance draws us in; puts into play collaboration among the story, the teller and the audience. Renna shares, “I had the experience a little while ago where I

didn't rehearse my stories and found myself being corrected by my students, but [was able to] use that.”

The nature of performance leads to an exploration of Gadamer's (1960/2004) concept of play, an element he describes as essential to the understanding of art and performance. Grondin writes that Gadamer, “makes evident that the observer of an artwork is interwoven into an event” (2001, p. 43). Storytelling is a performance and has at its heart the give and take; the reciprocal nature that Gadamer tells us is a main component of the concept of play. Bekki shares her experience of the play between her and the students:

I was going to say, what I noticed was, if there was some element of humor, something funny, and they laugh, it's like...and I can see now why comedians get such a high from doing what they do because you don't always get that when you are teaching the lesson.

When writing of the nature of play, Gadamer stresses the aspect of “flow,” the forward and backward interchange between players, in this case the teller and audience. “The movement backward and forward is obviously so central to the definition of play that it makes no difference who or what performs this movement” (p. 103). Play is interactive and this is true of the reciprocal nature of storytelling, the co-creation of the experience.

And so it's often the whole room telling the story. And this last time I told the story, not very well, I said, “You know what, let's do it again!” And we did it again and we just added a little more zip and a little more zing and then I was really in my element. (Renna)

The nature of play shares elements with the flow experiences described by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) in which we concentrate our mind and body totally on our activity. Gadamer writes that “play absorbs the player” (p. 105), and in play we are drawn into something larger than ourselves over which we do not have control. This

again, reminds me of the interplay between the storyteller and the audience. Play is a “process that takes place in-between” (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 109), and this may be said of the “in-between” that occurs during the storytelling process in which it is the call and response between the teller and the audience that creates the experience. Karen’s students call her back to her story when she strays from it. Tracy incorporates the space for reactions from her students, “When I say I am opening doors, that’s when I give them time to respond to stories and when I let them share.”

Casey (1993) writes that we are always placed somewhere in space, a particular space that determines who we are. For Gadamer, play “sets off the sphere of play as a closed world, one without transition and mediation to the world of aims” (1960/2004, p. 107). The play of storytelling is far removed from the regular, everyday experience of school, set off on a separate playing field. This idea of the separate realm of play reflects what my participants have said about creating a special space and place for storytelling. Julia talks about creating a world with storytelling, “You can sort of forget what’s the next thing you’re going to do and you’re just in a space that’s independent of the classroom. Just in a story time.”

My participants recognize that for them to be able to tell stories in their classrooms, storytelling must be connected to the “world of aims.” That does not prevent the storytelling place from being separate in spirit, if not in physical space. While the “world of aims” is never far away for very long, storytelling gives these teachers a respite from that world, a playing field. Storytelling provides a place, that Casey (1993) and van Manen (2003) contend greatly influences who we are. We have already seen how this notion of “closed world” manifests itself for these teachers in the way in which they go



about creating the safe haven for themselves and their students. How restful and calming it is to have a place to turn to when “the world of aims” is too intrusive. Would teachers return more energized and more willing to engage once again?

The ease of play—which naturally does not mean that there is any real absence of effort but refers phenomenologically only to the absence of strain—is experienced subjectively as relaxation. The structure of play absorbs the player into itself. (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 105)

The teachers are seeing themselves in their students’ eyes, seeing themselves as compelling storytellers who command attention. The nature of play brings together the reciprocal nature of storytelling described by Gadamar (1960/2004) and Sarason (1999), and the experience of flow described by Csikszentmihalyi (1997). The teachers watch their students, modify and adapt their storytelling by looking at the faces, watching for cues. The play of storytelling, the give and take between storyteller and audience makes the connection possible.

### ***Transforming Self***

That’s the basic motif of the universal hero’s journey—leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring you forth into a richer or mature condition. (Campbell, 1988, p. 152)

The first transformation that began to be revealed took place during my conversations with my participants. During our conversations suddenly my teacher participant would disappear, fade from my sight, and a storyteller, animated and alive, emerged and revealed herself. The teacher talking to me about her experiences telling a story would change into a storyteller *telling me a story*. I became the audience. They “turned” to the being-ness of the storyteller and “returned” to the storytelling place, sharing the sights, the sounds, and the lived experience of being a storyteller. As they spoke, their posture and their bodies would change, becoming more fluid and loose.

Their bodies became bigger, their gestures more expansive. Their voices and rhythm of speech changed as they took on the various characters they were describing to me. They would lean across the table and bring themselves nearer to me, look me in the eye, and, if there had been hundreds of people in the room, I would have known with certainty that they were speaking to me. They wanted to be sure that I could see and hear them. At first I did not notice this phenomenon, for I was transfixed, and as caught up in the story they were telling as they were. It wasn't until I listened to my recorded conversations that I realized they had transformed themselves before my eyes and ears. They had assumed another persona. The teacher self would reappear to speak of schedules, curriculum, and other practical matters. But, the storyteller was the one to speak about the experience, as the excerpts below reveal.

### *A New Persona*

Sarason writes, “The artist has adopted the requirement of which is to instill in the audience thoughts and feelings which temporarily blur or even erase the distinction between the artist as performer and the artist as person” (1999, p. 9). These teachers had the experience of evoking this dual persona, transforming themselves, and they quite enjoyed assuming the role of performer, shedding the role of teacher, if only for a while. What lies behind the lived experience of changing/altering regular ways of acting? Do we change our way of being when we change one persona for another? Does this indicate a sense of relief that teachers can leave their teaching self for a time and experience an enjoyment that does not come from their traditional role? When we are young we try on diverse roles during our play and explore what it might be like to be a new person. Is the new persona of my participants an echo of that?

Storytelling provides a space for teachers to leave their regular role, from their everyday teaching self, to take a chance on a new persona, creating an opportunity for teachers to step away from the conventional ways of being a teacher. During one conversation Julia tells me how she made the sounds of an animal character to illustrate a point during her storytelling. When Renna shares her experience of telling *Strega Nona*, she becomes Big Anthony; she hunches over, her voice becoming lower. She demonstrates for me what she does in the story:

I had them all do Big Anthony ... arms standing like a gorilla, so they all flipped their arms. I said Big Anthony has a big strong back. Let me see if you have a big strong back. They all flung their arms around and held themselves straight and so we had Big Anthony.

Aoki writes, “The teacher in becoming involved with his [or her] students, enters into their world as he [or she] allows them to enter his and engages himself with students mutually in action-reflection activities” (2005c, p. 131). Tracy embraces the change in status from teacher to storyteller:

When it’s time for storytelling everything about me changes, it’s kind of like a new person coming out. I change totally, the persona of who I am. My voice changes, everything changes about me. And then, that’s my kids’ cue to know to jump into my world. And they say, “We’re getting ready to get into her world!” And that’s the announcement that is made, “We’re getting ready to get into her world.” When I put on my hat ... they know that’s time.

Bekki was surprised at how different she felt telling stories:

This is so outside the realm of the way I usually teach a music lesson that it means I step away almost completely from the role of teacher and it’s—you’re more of an actor. It’s a completely different role for me than it is when I’m teaching a regular lesson.

For these teachers storytelling provided an outlet for both their creativity and the exercise of their professionalism. This “stepping away” was the first pebble to drop into the pond

that would change the ways in which they felt that they are seen and heard, the ways in which they saw and listened, and the ways of being with their students.

The persona of the storyteller was one the teachers described as more colorful and fun. They felt as though they had discovered a new talent and a new way to express it. They were able to immerse themselves in the story and wanted their students to be immersed along with them. They felt closer to their students and were pleased that they could demonstrate that they had other aspects of their personality, and their students got to see that they were not one-dimensional. They wanted the students to see more of them as persons. Bekki describes the pleasure she takes in surprising her students:

I always have fun with them, but it was because it was fun for me to do something different. I think the fact that they were surprised, that I was telling a story, because it's not the usual thing that we do, and I like that feeling of, "I can still keep them guessing." They don't always know what we are going to do. So, that was fun. And it surprised me.

### ***Teacher as Performer***

Picture this, if you will: The house lights go dim and the rustle of the audience is stilled. The focus of attention is the spotlight on the stage. Waiting in the wings, then walking toward that spotlight you are unseen. You step into that light and you know all attention is on you—you are conscious of the exhalant and terrifying knowledge that you are truly seen and heard and the force of it moves through you. The connection is made, the message delivered and received: I will not fail you. We will travel this road together. We are safe to be.

Teaching is a performance art, and the teacher as the performer assumes a new role. My participants have the experience of evoking this dual persona, transforming themselves, and judging, by their conversations, relishing their new role. Renna shares:

“It must be, it must be the same, I don’t know, for a musician on stage or an actor on stage to have that relationship with the audience. It must be very similar.” Sarason writes, “I am not the first to say that teaching is a performing art. Over the years of my close work with teachers more than a few of them said, ‘Teachers are actors. We perform’” (1999, p. xi). Renna relishes the opportunity to bring her theatrical training and flair to storytelling:

And I took out the fabric and I snapped it and I laid it on my lap and I said, “Long ago, before television, before movies, people spent a lot of time telling stories. I have a leopard skin witch’s hat that goes along with the fabric. And I put that on and I prefaced the Three Billy Goats Gruff, “It’s an old tale but a good tale.” And I introduced the characters with their voices.

Sarason (1999) writes that the audience at a performance has an expectation that they will be “transported, not to remain in their accustomed selves” (p. 14). Along with the audience, it becomes clear that it is the *teachers*, while not necessarily expecting it, who are transported out of their accustomed selves. The disinhibition the teachers display reflects the safe and trusting atmosphere that exists in the classrooms of my participants.

Karen points out:

Their attention, their attention was where I wanted it to go. I could take them where I wanted it to go. Anywhere, and they were with me. They were following the story, they understood it, and they went with me.

Karen leaves her teacher self behind and becomes the storyteller, the performer that Sarason (1999) describes. When these children “went with” Karen, where were they going? These teachers and their students are implaced in a school building and a classroom that Casey (1993) writes determines, more than anything else, who they are and how they are, and the teacher and students are certainly not leaving that physical place. Karen’s being and behavior illustrate this paradox. As the performer, the

storyteller, Karen takes her students with her on her intellectual, imaginative journey. Karen is the one who is “going.” She has the power to transport her students from their physical surroundings to another realm, and transport and transform herself as well.

It is daunting to have to leave the safety and authority of a written page. Telling the story rather than reading it is an altogether different experience; there is no safety net when you forget what comes next, no pictures to support your telling, only your voice and your body language, only eye contact with your audience. (Grugeon & Gardner, 2000, p. 1)

All of this leads us back to the issue of trust and safety. The revelations about the reciprocal environment of safety, the willingness to leave the printed page, lead to a transformation of practice. For Julia, storytelling gives her a chance to feel more sure of herself. “Let’s see, I felt, well I felt really confident telling the *Turkey Sultan* story, and I was really in voices and things like that, and so that was really good.” They truly are on a tightrope, the “rackety bridge between self and other” as Phelan (1993, p. 179) terms it. They do have a net underneath them, however. The attention the class gives these teachers enables them to transform themselves in front of their students’ eyes into someone, not only one who stands apart from a familiar teacher, but someone who is willing to take risks. Storytelling gave my participants the structural form, which Eisner (2002) writes is required in order for transformation to occur.

### ***Transforming the Conversation/Transforming the Relationship***

The playfulness in which “just listening” delights is reciprocated, for the soundful beings that are just released will correspondingly give themselves to our hearing. (Levin 1988, p. 233)

It is impossible to speak of the teachers transforming their pedagogical conversations and relationships as separate, sequential issues. Each slight alteration in conversation causes change in relationships, and the reciprocal is true. The

transformation in their conversations and relationships occur concurrently. They are intersecting ripples in the pond. With whom do we have conversations? How does having a conversation with students deviate from the usual teacher talk? We have conversations with those we respect or deem worthy of engagement, and whose opinion and thinking we find of interest or of value. Gadamer tells us that conversation always admits to a relationship between those who are a part of it, and that something is transformed by conversation, “and thus are bound to one another in a new community” (1960/2004, p. 379).

Karen senses that even though she is doing most of the talking during storytelling, she is still having a conversation with her class.

I had all the control at that point. And it was fun, and they would have gone with me and we could've had a conversation, to me it is a conversation. Story telling isn't just a one way even though they are doing most of the listening. There's a lot of feedback involved.

Storytelling is a conversation, and relationships are formed from that experience. The transformation in conversation is the result of the teachers' experiences of being heard, being listened to. “The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us” (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 367). That this condition is met is apparent in the conversations the teachers have about being attended to, being drawn in.

Bekki's observation about conversation reflects not only the safety she feels, but also the confidence she feels because of being seen and heard by her students:

It feels more comfortable, it feels like a partnership between me and the kids rather than “us versus them,” not as much issue with how to manage behavior and things like that. It doesn't seem to require me to always be on guard kind of alert. I guess I can relax a little more and feel as though I am in a conversation.

A conversation is defined as, “The action of living or having one’s being *in, among*, the action of consorting with, intimacy, behavior, mode of life.” This definition brings us closer to the concept of conversation put forth by Gadamer, that true conversation achieves an understanding that changes and transforms us. Being in conversation with another means that we “come to an understanding” (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 385). In what directions might this transformation take teachers? If we are indeed changed by engaging in conversation, and storytelling is a conversation, it is possible that the ripples of this phenomenon could spread throughout a school, transforming our understandings of ourselves, and the others with whom we have relationships.

Van Manen writes, “How and what we see depends on who and how we are in the world. How and what we see in a child is dependent on our relationship to that child” (1986, p. 16). Karen believes that storytelling has the possibility of remaking the dynamic between teacher and students:

Not only would it change the interpersonal between you and the kids and the kids and the kids; it changes their view of each other, it changes their view. I’m thinking that there would be so much less nonsense that we deal with if there were more stories. And they could handle it. They want it, and we don’t do it.

Teachers were talking “with” their students, not at them, and through this conversation they were able to drop the controlling nature of the usual teacher/student relationship. Storytelling creates a space that is no longer what Kreisberg (1992) calls “power-over,” in which one party is dominant and imposes control upon the other. Instead, during storytelling the power dynamic shifts to one of “power-with,” each party sharing a measure of power and bringing novel insights into play. As Tracy shares, “I got to let the real me out.” Bekki likes revealing a humorous, more light-hearted side of her personality to her students using the “humor that playfully uses the pedagogue’s deep trust in his or



her value for children's lives that benefits both the pedagogue and the child" (van Manen, 1991, p. 204). She shares:

I think that I have more of a sense of humor than they think I do. That I really do think some things are funny and that I'm not always serious about everything. Because sometimes they don't see that when I'm teaching. I'm a woman of mystery.

This is an outcome of the teachers describing how they are able to look at their students with new eyes, new respect for their abilities, and having the sense that they are engaged in developing a new depth in their relationship with one another. What might it be about school culture that stifles the appearance of the authentic self? Is there an underlying fear connected to moving from the power-over position (Kreisberg, 1992)? Might there be concern that a new model would cause too many ripples in the pond?

Julia relates a conversation with her students that takes place after a storytelling in which she has to reassess her ideas about her students' ability to draw conclusions from a story.

I mean, we talked right after the story and they held their attention pretty well but like about what the point was. I told them about the word and what that meant. "What do you think the meaning of this story is?" And they got it, they really understood it.

Having a conversation with someone engages you in a singular mode of communicating and different modes of relation to someone. "Listening is much more than hearing words. To truly listen one must acknowledge the value of that person and that person's ideas, feelings, and experiences" (Kreisberg, 1992, p. 177). What implications could an emphasis on listening have for teacher education? How might teachers learn to listen before they venture into the classroom? What does listening imply about the relationships in the classroom and school? In their conversations with their students my

participants found richer, more varied conversations, and thus relationships, than they thought possible. It is possible that what the teachers describe is an alternate way of being with their students, and different ways of being around children that may lead to new ways of teaching. They wanted their students to be as fully engaged as they, themselves, were. Julia's surprise at how quickly her students grasped the moral of a story illustrates how previous assumptions are being questioned. These teachers seem to have developed more faith in their students and in themselves.

### ***Community Revisited***

As the teachers begin to realize how closely they are intertwined with their students, transformations begin to occur in their relationships and conversations begin. In the beginning of this chapter, I told the story of watching my participants change before my eyes as we had our conversations; however, I did not realize how profound the changes would be. "Storytelling is a personal art that makes public what is private and makes private what is public. By choosing this or that story to tell, I reveal much about myself" (Yolen, 1986, p. 13). Through storytelling teachers discovered a new way of being with themselves and their students and transformed their sense of time and space, their listening and hearing, their conversations with their students, their pedagogical practice and ultimately their understandings of themselves as teachers. Karen makes a powerful statement about her experiences of being connected to her students through storytelling and the power of storytelling to create community:

It gave me a moment, a long moment where I was actually, just sharing and it gave me a peaceful feeling and a powerful feeling. Dear God, they're actually listening, and I'm not sounding like a banshee. Oh isn't this nice, and I might not be exhausted at the end of this class period. And I wasn't. As a matter of fact, I was exhilarated, that's what it gave me, it gave me exhilaration. It gave me a connection to 24 people who I try to

connect with but ... it was an instantaneous connection with all 24 of them, at one time.

MacDonald (1993) writes that one of the values of telling stories is that we begin to develop greater understanding of ourselves. Karen begins to realize the cost to her of “sounding like a banshee,” and recognizes that storytelling is something that bonds teachers and students. As part of that bond, storytelling creates an obligation on the part of the teller, and as MacDonald writes, “You have carried them into this realm of story. They are *your* responsibility. Watch them, respond to them” (1993, p. 25). Teachers already carry that sense of responsibility and watchfulness for their students and this care manifests in how they tell stories.

“As always, the way we speak teaches us about ourselves” (Aoki, 2005d, p. 446). Storytelling causes more of the essence of both teller and listener to be revealed. In *The Power of Story* (1997) Collins and Cooper write, “Indeed, when we tell stories, we do give a gift. Storytelling creates for our listeners a sense of mystery, of wonder, of reverence for life. Perhaps most important, storytelling creates a relationship” (p. 1). What might the life of school be like if teaching were based on “a sense of mystery, of wonder, of reverence for life?” Would we choose to teach the same way, or would we replace our current way of instructing our children? Would we lose the urgency to complete that measurable objective in favor of a more organic approach?

Relationships are transformed through the teachers’ development of their understandings of the power of story, each understanding leading to another deeper knowing. The transformation these teachers experience evolved throughout the research, each story told opening up new horizons, new meanings. Gadamer defines horizon as “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage

point ... to have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it” (1960/2004, p. 302). Merleau-Ponty brings us back to the connection between language and our relationship with others:

As soon as man used language to establish a living relation with himself or with his fellows, language is no longer an instrument, *no longer a means; it is a manifestation, a revelation of intimate being and of the psychic link which unites us to the world and our fellow men.* (1945/1962, p. 196)

Each story, each pebble tossed into the pond, binds the teachers and their students into a closer community, one that creates new possibilities for these teachers to expand their “range of vision.” Once that vision is expanded for a teacher, what might change for them and how far reaching could those changes be?

For these teachers storytelling provides opportunities for conversations with others in their schools. It gives them a chance to share with colleagues a practice about which they are excited and feel has great possibilities. It gives them something of value to bring to their peers and enables them to speak to their colleagues of a model of teaching they feel offers, “a further contribution to teaching that can come from drawing on the story form and is a more balanced appeal to children’s learning capacities” (Egan, 1986, p. 29). Karen describes an exchange between another teacher and herself concerning storytelling:

Because I work with other colleagues, that I’m in their classrooms, I even had conversations with them about it, and how I want to do this, and let’s try this and, actually after the first time, it was that fifth grade classroom. After the first time I did that with her [the teacher], she’s, “let’s do it again.” Even she said, “That was awesome, let’s do it again.”

Using storytelling, Karen is able to establish a more collaborative relationship with a fifth grade teacher who previously has not made the time to plan with her, which is time Karen feels is necessary in order to make the best use of their time and talents. “The end of

September, I've been there every single day. We have done some pretty good activities and she's never emailed me. When did she email me? When I told a story. Even she liked the story." There is something in the storytelling experience that caused the classroom teacher to feel connected enough to reach out to Karen. It gives them a new basis upon which to develop their relationship.

Tracy has the experience of using storytelling during her observation by her principal:

And so my principal said, "I really got confused. I didn't know where we were going with this." I said, "That was the point." She was, "They were really into it Tracy." I said, "I know." But I said, "but I'm always doing storytelling in my class. I'm always breaking out a story."

Tracy's principal is faced with something out of the ordinary observation of a teacher. The confusion experienced by Tracy's principal may be an opportunity for change in her understanding of Tracy's teaching. It would be intriguing to follow how Tracy and her principal might change their perceptions of each other. Might the principal be moved to have more conversation with Tracy or to question standard evaluations? The ripples created by storytelling are evident in an email Renna sends to me in which she shares what she has written to her fellow teachers:

When you read a story to children, you want them to look at the book and enjoy the story. Your focus is on the book and the words. When you tell a story, your focus is on the children and it is on you. Put the book down and make eye contact and get them hooked into the story. (Renna, personal communication, 2010)

Karen talks about the discoveries she makes during her conversations with students after storytelling:

You find little pieces of your students that you didn't know, especially afterward when they have more conversations with you. Like a little girl in fifth grade came up to me cause I teach everything from kindergarten to fifth grade, she came up to me and said, "Are you going to tell more of those stories?"

In this remarkable “finding of little pieces of your students” unknown to you, Karen expresses the crux of the teaching experience that storytelling reveals and transforms. Karen’s experience of discovering aspects of her students is an echo of the reciprocal experiences of my participants who feel that storytelling enables them to reveal more of themselves. These are the experiences of those who are in conversation and know themselves as being valued by those with whom they are engaged.

Renna connects eye contact with conversation. “The eye contact is, I think, the conversation part. The conversation is going. They’re interested. So it’s like the non-verbal conversation.” For her being seen is part and parcel of being in conversation with her students. “You are getting all, in my class all 20 pairs of eyes on you, all looking at you and all focusing in.” This remark linking conversation and eye contact cause ripples that intersect with the phenomenon of being seen, and also to the phenomenon of being safe, two things that are significant pieces of the revelations storytelling provides. In *The Pedagogical Significance of the Look*, Paradis writes, “We can now understand eye contact to mean a shared looking that allows two people to touch each other, to ‘be’ together in an intimate way” (2011, Eye contact section, para. 7). This intimacy is what is made possible, according to Sartre (1956), by seeing and being seen.

Julia has a different experience in this area. It is interesting to hear Julia speak of storytelling as a way to separate her from a difficult and stressful classroom situation.

She describes storytelling as a peaceful time, the only peaceful time in her day:

I feel like a performer. Or like I’m on stage. Which is fun, and I’ve always loved to do that. So, they are an audience more than they are my class. You know what I mean? Rather than I’m telling them these certain words and I don’t even get caught up like, like I can sort of pretend they are not there, a little bit, almost as if ... not that they are not there but that

they're not my class you know what I mean? Like they're almost just an audience and not so much individuals.

Levin writes, "Our listening often functions defensively; as a way of coping with anxiety" (1989, p.78), and this appears to be what Julia has done with her storytelling. In a sense Julia disengages from her role as teacher and creates some distance between her and her students. She is able to see them as a group and does not have to deal with individual student issues or behavior while she tells stories.

Each time my participants speak about *their* conversations with students, I hear the echoes of all *our* previous conversations. I wonder if any of the conversations with students or other teacher transformations would be possible had my participants not experienced the power of storytelling. It is through storytelling that they now feel they are being heard.

### ***Don't Smile Until December***

Implicit in this advice is the assumption that if you smile, and in effect appear friendly, your class may take advantage of you and not allow you to teach. If on the other hand, rigid discipline is enforced during the first few months, a set of rules and a tone will be set for the class, and the students will be "whipped into shape." (Ryan, 1970, p. x)

What kind of relationship requires one party in the relationship to "whip into shape" the other party? What is being said about the interaction of these teachers and students? What surreal tone is being set for the conduct of the class? What might be possible if teachers changed their perceptions of students as their adversaries? When something or someone is transformed, its nature is changed. It results in alterations that manifest themselves in many ways, exchanging one way of being, one way of acting, for another. Through storytelling teachers are able to transform the ways in which they perceive themselves and forge new teaching identities. They were no longer what Aoki

(2005e) terms “ installers of the curriculum” (p. 160). As a result of storytelling these teachers began to be with their students in an unfamiliar way, and this change began to manifest itself in changes in practice. The differences the teachers describe experiencing, the transformation in experiences during storytelling, leads to a difference in how they perceive their students and how they generally expect their students to behave in class.

A portion of any teacher’s life is taken up with administrative duties; attendance must be taken, homework collected, reports delivered, procedures instituted and maintained. This ability to engage in these administrative requirements while delivering instruction has morphed into the dreaded “classroom management,” as the classic book by Ryan above reveals. Every society, every community, every classroom has rules in place to govern the behavior of its citizens and ensure smooth operations as it pursues its goals. Bruner (2002) and MacDonald (1993) write of the regulatory and community building properties of storytelling. However, during storytelling the rules that my participants normally apply are relaxed, standards of behavior are softened, and interactions between teachers and students that are usually tightly scripted and controlled, such as raising your hand and being recognized by the teacher before speaking, give way to a freer, more relaxed conversation.

During storytelling my participants discover that they leave behind the necessity of continually focusing and refocusing students’ attention. The ease with which they get and keep attention enables teachers to take a breath and “see” what their students are saying to them. The teachers discover that their expectations for their students stand apart from their usual classroom model during the storytelling sessions. Renna describes one aspect of this phenomenon:



When I am reading a story or am teaching a lesson, they need to raise their hand to respond. They need to sit a certain way and be focused a certain way so I know they are getting it. I do not feel that way with this. But when I storytell [sic], I wanted them to feel like a Billy Goat. I wanted them to want to be up on their knees, I wanted them to participate, I wanted them to yell out. I wanted that to happen, to be a part of the experience of the storytelling.

Renna and the other participants want their students to participate fully in the story. Gone are the strictures to raise your hand and be recognized before you speak. Gone is the need to get attention because the attention is already there. There is some tension and some trepidation, however, about changing the rules of the road. Renna expresses the competing needs presented by her regular practice and her desire to honor what she knows to be valuable for her students:

See, that's what I mean about the difference of being the teacher in the room or being the storyteller. Because it takes something to not have them sit correctly on the rug during a tale. I have to let that go so they can have the experience, I'm letting that go.

Renna is keenly aware of her responsibilities to provide that safe environment and gives a caveat to the losing of her expectations:

Right, I'm letting that go. To a point. There's things you cannot let happen, there wasn't, if I [had no limits and] was to take the Biggest Billy Goat Gruff into being a more violent ending with the troll, I could not have had people collide.

Bekki has a similar attitude:

You try to do things that are fun; you don't want them to get so carried away, so that they aren't learning. So this is, I guess this is a change for me to let them sort of get carried away, and really laugh, and see me laugh, without losing control of the group, or without feeling like, they didn't learn something that I wanted them to learn.

What seems to be underneath these remarks is a longing for another type of interaction, another way to be, with students. When Julia tells stories she doesn't want to concentrate on behavior: she is looking forward to the relief she feels storytelling provides from her

struggle to maintain order. She changes her focus in order to create a different climate in her classroom

When I tell stories I want them to have fun. I think, like I said the other day, when I did the interview, I need to bring more fun into the classroom and I want that to be an opportunity for that. So I don't want to have to lay down the law in terms of behavior, which is a lot of, I have to do a lot of the day. And I don't tend to have to when I'm doing storytelling.

Renna sums up her feelings by saying, "It makes it possible to teach better than you've ever taught because your whole focus isn't behavior." The unspoken concern appears: Why is so much of our attention spent on managing the behavior of our students? No one reported any incidences of concern during these times when the rules of the classroom were modified or relaxed. Instead, as Karen puts it, behavior issues were not in the forefront of her mind, "because they were so right with me. And there wasn't a kid who didn't go with me, down the road." My participants did get a chance to experience what their classrooms might be like when the focus was not on behavior and the possibilities storytelling might create when they choose to connect with their students in a way that fosters a more cooperative atmosphere. If they decided to incorporate this path into their practice on a regular basis what transformations might be possible pedagogically? The teachers in this study, while somewhat surprised, were able to handle what would seem to be divergent standards, but would that be difficult for other teachers to do, and what would be needed to facilitate the change in attitudes that would be necessary?

### ***Transforming Listening***

It is easier to shut our eyes than close our ears. It is easier for us to remain untouched and unmoved by what we see than by what we hear; what we see is kept at a distance but what we hear penetrates our entire body. . . . Hearing is intimate, participatory, communicative, we are always *affected* by what we are given to hear. (Levin, 1989 p. 32)

The revelation these teachers experience around being heard transforms their own listening. Being heard makes space for a transformation in their type of listening, into what Levin calls “Self’s more ‘spacious’ ways of hearkening” (1989, p. 56). This “spacious” listening is a listening that allows the conversation of the sort Gadamer writes about to emerge, the conversation that he tells us has the power to transform us (1960/2004). The attending to, being seen and heard opens up the possibility of conversation. By virtue of being seen and heard, the teachers transformed the way they perceived themselves and this led to a transformation in how they were able to see and hear.

“The echo has much to teach us. If we listen for echoes and listen to them, our listening can grow in its wisdom. The echo is a precious gift to hearing” (Levin, 1988, p. 237). These teachers are fortunate, for the echoes of the storytelling sit right in front of them. The storytelling teacher learns to listen for those echoes, looking into the embodied responses of the audience. A teacher who experiences being heard is able to attend to what students are *saying* to them, and what those students *show* them by their saying. Listening to our audience leads to a greater understanding of what might be discovered. Julia tells me, “They were telling parts of that story for days and days afterwards.” The reports of the teachers that their students repeat the stories over and over, and in the teacher’s own voice, provide an invaluable source of echo. They are able to hear themselves being echoed back to themselves.

Levin (1988) writes that teachers who are involved in a conversation are both speaking and listening. We listen as we speak. To whom do we listen? With whom do we have meaningful conversations? We listen to those whom we value. Storytelling

makes it possible for my participants to transform the relationships in the classroom to ones of even greater value.

### **Storytelling as Pedagogical Autonomy and Power**

As educators, we all know that the very word “curriculum” was coined as an administrative category, sponsored by management interests. (Aoki, 2005a, p. 369)

Teachers have a great deal to do and no lack of people to tell them how to do it. They are under pressure to produce results, and this has led to more prescriptions and tighter controls over the practice of teaching. In some school systems curriculum ‘guidelines’ in reading give explicit lessons for each day of the week, and grade level pacing meetings are held to ensure all teachers are at the same place in the math textbook. In each conversation with my participants, the theme of curricular constraints comes to the fore. Palmer writes the pain of this control “is felt throughout education today as we glorify the method *du jour*, leaving people who teach differently feeling devalued, forcing them to measure up to norms not their own” (2007, p. 12). This research reveals the teachers in this study as committed and competent professionals who struggle with the confines of current practices. They want to have the latitude to create and control their own practice and to exercise their pedagogical judgment. They wish to be free from methods of teaching that ignore their years of knowledge, skill, experience, instincts and their pride in their professional abilities.

Participating in this study gave these teachers an opportunity to exercise a measure of autonomy and gave them renewed understanding of how proficient they truly are, a realization that is not always in the forefront of their lived experience. Storytelling gave them an opening to use their creative energy, renewed their sense of agency and

gave them the satisfaction that comes from being self directed, rather than having to slavishly follow the dictates of an outside entity. Above all, this research reveals the care and compassion these teachers have for their students, sentiments that permeate all their actions.

### ***Professional Life/Professional Knowledge***

I begin this section by referring to a classic text by Shulman written in 1987. Writing in the *Harvard Educational Review*, Shulman addresses the extensive knowledge base of teaching. He writes that it is so wide ranging and comprehensive, he is amazed that teachers can master all they need to know. Shulman gives a great deal of credit to classroom teachers. “Practitioners simply know a great deal that they have never even tried to articulate” (p. 12). Eighteen years after Shulman, Elbas-Luwisch writes:

Over the years, teachers develop a store of practical knowledge that is personal and unique, yet in part held in common with other teachers. It is shaped by the particular biography and life experience of the individual teacher and the way that she undergoes and interprets her work as a teacher. ( 2005, p. xi)

Telling stories in their classrooms gave the teachers a rare chance to articulate to me, to each other, and to themselves, just how extensive their knowledge base is. They gave themselves credit for being professionals with a depth and breadth of pedagogical knowledge and skill, something Renna says teachers do not do often enough. Why is that so? What might happen if teachers had the time to give themselves recognition for jobs well done?

My participants continuously amend their practice to accommodate student interest and learning styles. As professionals they are constantly relating and reacting to their audience and have spent their careers learning the art and craft of teaching. Yet,

Bekki reflects the dominant feeling of the group when she says, “I think it shows that they don’t really think we are professionals who can get a task accomplished in myriad ways.” Bekki’s reflection casts a light on the “de-skilling” of teachers written about by van Manen: “Teachers’ tasks have become ‘rationalized.’ The result is that the teacher as professional has become increasingly deskilled as the curriculum has become more and more prescriptive and dictated by centralized control” (1991, p. 99).

These remarks on deskilling lead me to look at the differences in the words artist, craftsperson and technician. An artist is someone who is a master of a pursuit, a skilled performer. A craftsperson is involved in a profession or an art requiring special skills. A technician is someone skilled in the mechanical part of an art or science, someone qualified to make practical applications. If we could have teachers who are proficient at the craft of teaching that enables them to pursue the artistry of teaching, why would we wish to have teachers operating only at the technical level?

Shulman refers to the “heart of teaching, the capacity for intelligent and adaptive action” (2007, p. 263). This “adaptive action” is shown all through my participants’ conversations. As Tracy succinctly puts it, “Sometimes you’ve got to move away from the book.” She knows that good teaching requires changing your practice to meet the needs of your population. After Renna describes a particular way of doing things, Tracy replies:

Just to piggyback on what you’re saying, that is your way of stepping outside the curriculum. That’s probably not part of your curriculum. They [administration] are probably saying, you’re not supposed to have 15 minutes, you’re probably only supposed to have 10, but you’re going to let your kids do what they need to do. In my class they say DEAR [Drop Everything and Read] is from 8:00 to 8:10, and then reflection time is from 8:10 to 8:15, so instruction is supposed to start at 8:15. But I’m saying, what can a first grader write in 5 minutes?

Aoki describes the tension that teachers face daily as they navigate between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived-experience, an experience he refers to as “dwelling in the zone of between” (2005e, p. 161). This calls us back to the nature of play and performance, both of which dwell in the spaces in between. It is in those in between spaces that my participants make their judgment calls, moving away from the text, honoring the time children need to reflect and write. Giroux describes a climate in educational reforms that “displays little confidence in the ability of public school teachers to provide intellectual and moral leadership for our nation’s youth” (1988, p. 121). This climate is reflected in teachers’ comments throughout this study. Bekki feels that teachers are not considered professionals who are able to evaluate and to use professional judgment. “There are so many ways to get to the same point. But they don’t believe it; they don’t believe that most teachers are able to do that.” What would it mean for teachers to know that using the “many ways to get to the same point” would be honored as good practice?

When policy and educational theorists define a curriculum for a school or a classroom, they are also defining the forms of thinking that are likely to be promoted in the school. They are, in effect, laying out an agenda for the development of the mind. (Eisner, 2002, p. 148)

What happens to a teacher who disagrees with the path laid out for the “developments of the mind?” Classroom teachers have little role in the development of the curriculum and are no more than “installers of the curriculum” (Aoki, 2005e, p. 160). What does this say about our view of classroom teachers, and what might this mean for their morale and self-esteem?

Verloop, Van Driel & Meijer define the knowledge base of teaching as “all profession-related insights that are potentially relevant to teacher’s activities” (2001. p.

443). The authors go on to write, “in the mind of the teacher components of knowledge, beliefs, conceptions, and intuitions are inextricably intertwined” (p. 446). It is not possible to tease out every possible origin of teacher’s knowledge. What I find is that a great deal of what my participants describe to me is a synthesis of years of teaching experiences. They just *know* what they do.

### ***Curriculum Constraints: Storytelling as Subversion***

Overlooked in these analyses are the fundamental ways in which test taking cultures reconstruct relationships with students. Who is the student in the life of the school? How is it that, in a high stakes accountability environment, students come to be known by data rather than by face? (Valli, Croninger, Chambliss, Graeber & Buese, 2008, p. 44)

Under No Child Left Behind, schools are changing into what Valli et al. term a “test taking culture” where learning is “supplanted rather than supported by assessments” (2008, p. 25). This culture of test taking undermines the knowledge base teachers have as a basis for their practice. However, I am aware of and heartened by all my participants have said regarding the transformative changes in their sense of being in relationships with their students and I wonder if storytelling could counter the deleterious effects described by Valli et al.

Although only Karen’s students are tested for Adequate Yearly Progress, each of the other teachers feels the effects of high stakes testing. Each describes feeling hampered in using her understanding that each student has different needs and learns using particular modalities. The one-size-fits-all approach to teaching frustrates all of my participants. They realize that current practice, imposed at the system level, does not take into account the needs of the individual children in their classes. According to Renna, the system does not honor the fact of alternate means of learning. They know that the script



does not work for all. The cry goes up, “They don’t know my kids.” Renna expresses a sentiment that is affirmed by all members during the group conversation:

And so here we have this framework that you are supposed to follow and I do believe that if you are scheduled you find wiggle room. But you’ve gotta know your population. You have to find the way your population is going to learn. And that script, and the fact that it hasn’t been updated for years because there’s no money, that script doesn’t know your children.

Renna is calling forth the concept of the “in-between,” the wiggle room that is a vital element of play and performance where these teachers dwell. The teachers feel that they are forced to conform to a way of teaching they find restrictive and counterproductive. Tracy feels that the “power-over” (Kreisberg, 1992) model is imposed:

Because they want us to stay on the curriculum and they [don’t] want us to be creative anymore now. Everything is based on testing, getting them prepared for the test, doing the skills that they need us to prepare them for these tests. So basically to me, that feels like they are taking the fun out of teaching.

Renna adds, “They are taking the fun out of being a student,” and Tracy agrees. “Right, they are taking the fun out of it.” What lies unspoken beneath the complaints about the curriculum is the passionate commitment to do the best for their students, the worry that they are not able to give what their students need to be successful—what they *know* their students need to be successful. It comes down to the care that is the nature of teaching and how the demands of the current curriculum force them to move on to the next objective even if their students are left behind.

As Renna expresses it:

If we could jump back to that curriculum framework—being like the bible—is that you have teachers that come with a different bag of tricks, a different set of skills and to have them all have to teach this one way, you’re getting rid of what we are best at.

Before her observation Tracy feels she must warn her principal how she will be conducting her class because her lesson will not conform to the expected form:

It's not like a lesson that's showing the five straight "E's" [components of an effective lesson]. I had to let her know that I did part of the "E" at 8:00, I did another part of the "E" at 10:00, so it was different parts of the five "E's" throughout the day. That's what I had to let her know.

Even though Renna is delighted with storytelling, she is looking for "legal" ways of using it. Bekki knows that she is fortunate to "have the freedom to do it [storytelling] at my school, whereas there are people who don't and I have to take advantage of that while it's true." Bekki laughs when she says this but feels a sense that her freedom may be coming to an end. I hear the echoes of time and the sense of racing against the clock. The sense that their time of teaching independence is drawing to a close pervades the interactions I have with my participants. I cannot help but wonder what it must be like to labor with that knowledge. Do my participants feel that they must squeeze every ounce of autonomy while they can? Does it make them feel as if the sword of Damocles is hanging over them? How might this color their perceptions of their future in education?

Renna tells a story that causes the group to react strongly:

I had worked with another teacher, young, very interested in getting everything right, a teacher who would say, "What are you doing today, what are you doing on Tuesday?" and I loved [going] over my lesson plans with her and every time, at least four or five times, she would say, "Are we allowed to do that?" And I'd look at her and I'd say, "I don't know. I know it's going to work." Are we allowed to do that? And I didn't know how to help. I didn't know what to do ... Are we allowed to do that?

Karen sums up the group's reaction, "That's terrifying."

Apple writes, "Under growing conditions of regulated autonomy, teachers' actions are now subject to much greater scrutiny in terms of process and outcomes"

(2001, p. 51). He believes that we are “deskilling” our teachers, something with which Valli et al. (2008) and van Manen (1991) agree. Aoki writes:

Ignored are the teachers’ own skills that emerge from reflection on their experiences of teaching, and, more seriously there is a forgetfulness that what matters deeply in the situated world of the classroom is how the teachers’ “doings” flow from who they are, their beings. That is, there is a forgetfulness that teaching is fundamentally a mode of being. (2005e, p. 160)

What is unspoken and terrifying to Karen and the rest of the group is the sense that their professional acumen will be subordinated and no longer valued, that they will become technicians instead of teachers. They fear they will become the “installers of the curriculum ... in the fashion of plumbers who install their wares” (Aoki, 2005e, p. 160). What is the “mode of being” that is valued by imposing a tightly monitored script on teachers? I wonder what effects that would have on teachers who are like my participants; will they want to stay in the teaching profession when it is no longer a place that offers joy in what they do?

“So, instead of reading the curriculum book we are supposed to be reading now, I play a song, and we listen to the song, so I’m already pushing the boundaries.” This remark of Renna’s echoes what she says earlier when she tells the story of having to close her door when she is doing something other than strictly adhering to the “script.” Rather, to be more accurate, she tells that a student in her class was concerned enough to *ask* if the door should be closed:

We were so scripted that every time I would go off at all ... we were reading a story called *Jalapeños Bagels* and I had a very large ESOL population that year and they knew what jalapeños were, but they did not know what bagels were and I brought in the bagels and one of my students said, “Should we shut the door?” And my response was, “absolutely.” This is the class when whenever we did anything that varied from the script their first response was to hide it.

Renna relishes the freedom she feels storytelling gives her, “I do a little improv up there with the storytelling. I’m not stuck to a script, not like reading the story from the book, there is a little play.” Renna ruefully says, “Often it seems like you want the answer so you can move on to the next part of the lesson. Give me the answer, good, give me the answer, good.” What I hear from Renna is the old issue of time and I wonder again what would change if the timelessness teachers experience with storytelling extended into other parts of their day.

### *Effective Teaching*

Working definitions of teacher effectiveness are often elusive or so politically charged that they are unusable. However, the urgent need for highly effective teachers in every classroom calls for a clear definition of effectiveness and action toward creating the conditions for it. (Varlas, 2009)

The word effective keeps recurring in our conversations and the waves created here intersect with those created by our understandings of teacher’s knowledge and how we see teachers as professionals. Julia is worried that she is not perceived as effective, but feels that storytelling is helping her feel more successful. These participants feel themselves to be effective when they are telling stories, and this is important as Bekki tells us:

That’s because it comes up in your evaluations and it comes up in every curriculum and it’s part of the whole move to make teachers accountable, that’s all you hear about, whether someone’s effective. Measuring effectiveness is difficult.

One difficulty with judging teacher effectiveness stems from the differing opinions in the educational community as to what exactly makes a teacher effective and exactly how to measure those qualities. There are lists of qualities that effective teachers seem to possess. For instance, The Stanford University Center for Teaching and

Learning lists what it has determined are the main criteria: (1) organization and clarity, (2) analytic/synthetic approach, (3) dynamism and enthusiasm, and (4) instructor-group interaction (n. d.). The Board for Professional Teaching Standards' list consists of five core propositions which include: (1) commitment to students and their learning, (2) subject knowledge and teaching skills, (3) responsibility for managing and monitoring student learning, (4) systematical thinking, and (5) membership in learning communities (2012). However, a grocery store checklist cannot define teachers. The Center for Public Education (2009) found that in the 1980s effective teachers were ones that added value to student learning. However, the Center for Public Education in 2005 describes an effective teacher as one who “makes a substantial difference in student achievement.” But studies reviewed were “silent on what the question of what characterizes an ‘effective teacher’ and that no single indicator ‘trumps all the others.’” Another problem with judging the effectiveness of teachers has to do with what van Manen calls a positivistic orientation that “tends to confuse pedagogy with what teachers or parents *do*. It tends to judge teachers almost entirely in terms of the ability to demonstrate certain productivity, effectiveness, or the competencies (2003, p. 145).

An etymological search reveals the Latin root *efficere*, meaning “work out or accomplish” is the root for both effect and effective. Effect comes from the Latin *efficitvus* meaning “accomplishment or performance,” and the word effective comes from *effectus* meaning “productive.” In both words there is a sense of effort, the work put into achieving, and this study reveals the efforts and the work these teachers bring to their pedagogical practice. Effect is defined as, “something that is brought about by a cause or an agent; the power to produce an outcome or achieve a result: influence.”

Effective is defined, “having an intended or expected effect; producing a strong impression or response, striking.” These definitions expand the meanings of effect and effective to include a purposeful direction. These teachers show purposeful direction every time they speak of their practice. Not only are they concerned with the delivery of instruction; they are concerned with the well being of their students. Their actions are always directed toward accomplishment.

### ***Personal Effectiveness***

Let us return to the earlier statement that teachers *feel* themselves to be effective when they are telling stories. In the group conversation the teachers agree with Bekki that being effective is part of their professional assessment; they have an alternative view of what it means to be effective. They do not necessarily see effectiveness solely as an external evaluation of their pedagogical practice; it is viewed as an internal sense that is recognized through the engagement of their students. Karen feels she is effective when Her students are paying attention to her and her comments show the interconnectedness, the intersecting ripples, of the impact that eye contact makes, the power of storytelling makes and being effective:

The part of effective that I notice is that a lot of the times when you are in a lesson, you actually have to do that [make eye contact]. You’re actually having to go and, looking at children’s faces, looking at what they are doing, looking at the response that you are getting. But when you are telling a story, I don’t turn that part off, because I keep looking up to make sure that they’re [with me], but I swear, every single time I looked up and looked at eyes when I was in a middle of a story or whatever, even at the beginning of a story, they were absolutely riveted. It was like, I could do no wrong.

The conversation continues with Tracy, “They gave you more energy, I had it, I could keep going.” Karen responds:

That's right, and it was like that. It was almost, instead of being, when you do a lesson, sometimes you feel like it's all sucked out of you. When you tell a story it's sort of like, brought into you. It's a different, for me, it's a different experience. I feel like I get rejuvenated just like you said.

Tracy says "It's like, 'oh, yeah, that's it.' That was my point about being effective."

Bekki joins in, "You had them in the palm of your hand." Karen is thrilled with the experience, "Yeah, and how effective is that!" For Renna, "you know if it works, if it feels good. If they are responding, if the light bulb has gone off, then you've got it, then it's effective." Tracy knows her daylong lesson on winter is effective because "the kids were captured the whole time. They are not moving, they are trying to figure it out."

What is unspoken is the underlying sense of professional pride my participants take in their work. Their rewards are intrinsic and they are confident in their ability to teach in a way that results in student learning. The lived experience of telling stories enhanced that sense of accomplishment. How might that intrinsic sense be altered due to the deskilling of teachers? While it may not affect the participants in this study with their years of teaching experience, the question is, what will it do to the internal sense of accomplishment for those who come after them in the classroom?

"The audience, from the first moment of listening, squints, stares, smiles, leans forward or falls asleep, letting the teller know whether to slow down, speed up, elaborate, or just finish" (National Council of Teachers of English, 1992). When they are telling stories these teachers feel effective in part due to of the immediate feedback and response they receive from their students that are inherent in the play and nature of performance. Being seen and being heard create avenues for them to understand in the present how effective they are. Talking about her storytelling Tracy shares, "It makes me feel happy. I'm seeing that I'm making a little person really happy. They're able to take a step out

and see that there are other things than just sitting in the classroom with paper and pencil. So, when they beam and laugh at me, it makes me feel good. But, I'm teaching the whole time.”

### ***Integration into Curriculum***

Bruner writes that imaginary language functions as the “means whereby we create possible worlds and go beyond the immediately referential” (1986, p. 125). In our conversations each teacher shares, almost immediately, the importance of thinking and imagining, how storytelling would help them in the delivery of instruction, help them solve problems, aid them to reach children, and help them improve their pedagogical practice. They use their professional competence to find ways to circumvent obstacles that might hinder them from putting storytelling into play. Their castles in the air, their possible worlds were grounded firmly in their mission to be better teachers. The “world of aims” described by Gadamer (1960/2004) engages them in the question, “How can I use this new tool for the betterment of my students?” As they began to see the possibilities of storytelling, they began to plan. Renna sees possibilities for integrating storytelling: “My class, half of it is an ESOL [English as a Second Language] group of kids and now I feel like [using] the storytelling to fill background and knowledge.”

Although storytelling is a new experience for everyone but Tracy, once they started to tell stories there appeared to be little difficulty integrating stories into the classroom. In *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book*, MacDonald writes:

It always amazes me when teachers insist they have no time to fit storytelling into their curriculum. Most stories take less than ten minutes to tell. And stories can fit easily into many areas of the curriculum. Use nature tales to enhance science. Select tales from the cultures in your social studies units. Use singing tales in the music class. Match math



puzzle tales to the math curriculum. And use *any* tale to language arts. (1993, p. 43)

However, this is not the case with my participants. Renna conducts an experiment, “My intent was to tell the spaghetti [story] and read the porridge [story] and have them compare and contrast.” She is using storytelling to teach what is a basic reading skill. Renna discovers that storytelling was a more interactive experience. “The kids are going to repeat [the chant] every time. And the kids got that chant. The kids were doing the chant. The kids were doing the chants, they’re blowing the kisses, and they’re making Big Anthony.” Julia states:

I’ve been finding more and more ways to bring in stories and literature to these lessons that I’m teaching. And just like integrating stories, I think that if they can remember the stories so well, I think it could really help those, the two-thirds or a third, the half of the class that don’t tend to absorb things well.

Karen finds that storytelling fits right into her curriculum and offers her a new way to bring language alive:

Well, you know, I need to teach language. I have taught for so long by what they say in these journals and these guides. I’ve always thrown in my own little thing. But you know for the most part I follow pretty much what I’m supposed to do. And in order to build language you’ve got to use it. They’ve got to explore it, and *that’s* the new dimension. It’s this *exploration* of it. Exploration of the English language.

It may be that Karen’s exploration goes deeper and wider than she realizes. Her remarks reveal who she is as a teacher, the excitement and care that lie below her daily practice and how willing she is to embrace something new that will benefit her students. Bekki knows that storytelling “should work beautifully” with her curriculum, and it does work, “with the one [story] I do with the second graders, where they were allowed to use instruments for the characters in the story. That’s becoming more aware of the tone color, the specific sound an instrument makes, which is definitely part of the curriculum.”

Bekki touches again on the idea of effectiveness as she shares that she has more work to do as she incorporates storytelling into her curriculum:

I would like to get more comfortable with using stories and having the kids still incorporate music into the storytelling but starting just with the story. I noticed that it was very effective to have told the whole story first and then to retell it and to have them move. So that they knew what the story was and they could think ahead of time about, “This is what happens next, and we’re going to move, we’re going to use this instrument.” But I would like to do more with incorporating literature because it’s something I love anyway.

Tracy credits attending the Maryland Arts Teacher Institute and being exposed to storytelling for her ease in integrating curriculum areas: “I always had the problem with integrating the different subject areas; now it’s time for social studies...now it’s time for reading. But it did not have to be that way.” She shares that sometimes her whole day is related to storytelling. Again, we see the participants skillfully blending the interactive nature of storytelling, the understandings of their pedagogical practice, and the needs of their students.

### ***Living in the World***

What we’re learning in our schools is not the wisdom of life. We are learning technologies; we’re getting information. There’s a curious reluctance on the part of faculties to indicate the life values of their subjects. (Campbell, 1988, p. 11)

Aristotle believed education must be concerned with how to develop virtue, moral behavior, and what character traits are necessary for the development of good citizens (Davidson, 1892; Verbke, 1990). In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1692), John Locke wrote in section 70, “Tis virtue, direct virtue, which is the hard and valuable part to be aimed at in education.” He adds in section 134, “That which every gentleman (that takes any care of his education) desires for his son, besides the estate he leaves him, is contain’d (I suppose) in these four things, *virtue, wisdom, breeding and learning*”

[emphasis added] (n. d.) For Aristotle and Locke virtue is of paramount importance in education. However, the questions that lie underneath this teaching of virtues in school concern exactly how we are to do this and what are the virtues we wish to teach. Who should determine such virtues? Do we assume that teachers are being prepared to teach the virtues we value? “Even teachers who feel no qualms, about the idea of moral education may still feel they are not prepared, in practice to take on that role” (Haydon, 2006, p. 13).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes:

We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. The broad education, will, therefore, transmit to one not only the accumulated knowledge of the race but also the accumulated experience of social living. (King, 1947)

What is the “accumulated experience of social living?” May that be seen as ethical behavior? Ethics is defined as, “the moral principles by which any person is guided; the rules of conduct,” and morals are defined as “of or pertaining to human character or behavior considered good or bad; of or pertaining to the distinction of right or wrong; conforming to accepted standards of conduct.” Teaching is an ethical enterprise and schools teach ethical lessons whether implicitly or explicitly. In *Class and Schools*, Rothstein writes, “While public opinion surveys consistently include higher test scores as a school goal, they are not the only goal and apparently not the most crucial,” and cites a 1994 survey in which, “the respondents gave their highest rank to preparing responsible citizens” (2004, p. 96). While a continuous thread of concern about the teaching of ethical development and moral teaching runs throughout this study, issues of ethics and morality are treacherous waters for teachers. The waves in these topics can be

rough indeed. They can be dangerous due to the multicultural nature of our schools, the contextual nature of ethics and political reality. “Schools must be seen as institutions marked by the same complex of contradictory cultures that characterize the dominant society. Schools are social sites constituted by a complex of dominant *and* subordinate cultures” (Giroux, 1988, p. 7). What is the teachers’ responsibility in this complex area?

Much of the moral/ethical teaching is placed within the framework of the social studies curriculum. The National Council for the Social Studies has set goals for social studies education which include: (1) concerns for right and wrong; the development of ethics; (2) concern for others; development of group and other-centeredness; and (3) concern for the world (n. d.). The State of Maryland Standards for Social Studies Grade I (2006) include being able to work together and knowing the rights, responsibilities and choices of belonging to various groups such as family, school and neighborhood. While these may be acceptable standards, I wonder if there are many teacher voices in the development of these standards. I continue to hear the cry of my participants, “They don’t know my kids.” How are curriculum developers to know the ethical and moral background from which the children in a class may come, and is it possible to address standards such as these without speaking to the heart, mind and spirit of the child?

### ***Storytelling and Moral Lessons***

Care theorists and character educators agree that the way to a better world is more likely to depend on better people than on better principles, but a question arises as to how we might produce better people. (Noddings, 2002, p. 1)

MacDonald (1993) and Bruner (2002) write that storytelling is a means for passing on the norms, beliefs, and values of a community, and enables teachers to tell their students what it means to be members of a society in a fashion that circumvents the

sometimes heavy handed fashion so often employed. Storytelling presents an avenue to forward complex issues and offers teachers an opportunity to broach sensitive topics in a safe and non-threatening fashion. Storytelling may circumvent some of the problems of tackling sensitive issues directly with children who are not ready to address them developmentally. What might storytelling provide for the teacher and student with divergent ways of interpreting ethical situations? Perhaps it might give teachers insights into the beliefs that color the behavior and attitudes of particular children.

An important life issue dealt with in school is that of sharing and taking turns. It is quite easy to sound like a broken record, the “*wah, wah, wah*” as Karen puts it when a teacher sounds out on this theme. Bekki uses storytelling to explain the need to take turns and the perils of being greedy to a first grade group without preaching:

The whole moral of the tale is not to be greedy, to take only what you really need. We talked about what does it mean to be greedy. The first graders don't really know that word terribly well. They do know selfish and they do know what it means “fair share.” They're very aware of getting a turn, that's a big thing. They must all be only children or oldest children because they all think that it is a real crime when they don't get a turn every time. I've been explaining this since the beginning of the year. Not everyone gets a turn every day.

Bekki displays pedagogical tact when she uses storytelling to build on and reinforce her teaching about sharing without placing blame or singling out any one child. How might this normative aspect of storytelling be used by teachers? Would it make it easier for teachers to address ethical issues? Storytelling may be an important method in the transmission of ethical behavior because children get “talked to” all the time; it is part of the “power-over” dynamic of which Kreisberg (1992) is so critical. It may be that through a story a child who acts selfishly is able to hear what is being said without feeling defensive or putting up barriers to listening.

Karen uses stories “because stories are wonderful in the sense that they can point out issues without preaching and actually get through to somebody.” Tracy uses stories to teach social studies and says, “Some of my stories, I think, really let them see how they should treat each other. That’s how I teach social studies, through stories. I give them a scenario and ask if that should be.” Renna tells an old folk tale in which the greedy wife wants to be God and rule over the world. She says, “We don’t go to God in my classes. You can get yourself in a lot of trouble.” She is able to adapt the story to avoid this contentious issue by telling her class, “she wanted too much.”

Storytelling provides children an opportunity to explore and work out ethical problems for themselves (Eder, 2010). The nature of storytelling reflects the respect the teller has for the listeners’ interpretive abilities, respect for their struggle to understand, make sense of ambiguity, and their reasoning skills, thus showing one of the competencies valued in the official curriculum. Karen decides to tell her personal story about bullying to a third grade class:

It’s not that they are cool or anything like that, but they have this potential to be looked upon as leaders and I think if they hear things like this, then maybe they’ll do the right thing when—because it happens to everybody. When you are doing the correct thing in life you know it because it’s feeling right, I tried to get that across to them. I also tried to make them understand that it’s hard to do the right thing.

She uses storytelling to present a dilemma. Karen wants them to come away with a particular lesson, “What would you do if? I wanted them to think about life, in general—almost the spirituality of life, but you can’t tell them it’s the spirituality of life.”

“Spirituality in education refers to ... compassion in the classroom that acknowledges the interconnectedness of the students, the teacher, and the subject” (Jones, 2005, p. 6). The value of being interconnected is reflected in the standards of The

National Council for the Social Studies (n. d.). Palmer, in *The Courage to Teach*, refers to the spiritual aspect as “diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching” (2007, p. 5). What is it that makes us wary of the word spirituality? It may be that its association with religion makes it suspect in the context of education. However, we are certainly more comfortable with the idea of *spirit* and we use it all the time to express our aspirations; it is what makes us human. We speak of the spirit of the law, the spirit of the Olympics, the human spirit, the American spirit, the spirit of cooperation, even Charles Lindberg’s plane in which he crossed the Atlantic Ocean was named “The Spirit of St. Louis.” The spirit is the “animating or life giving principles in humans or animals; the immaterial part of corporeal being; esp. considered as a moral agent” and is almost identical to the definition of soul, “the principle of life in humans and animals; a person’s spiritual rather than corporeal nature . . . the spiritual part of a human being considered in its moral aspect.”

Haydon writes that spiritual education has to do with, “the sense of oneself within a wider framework of meaning. By this I mean something not just cognitive, but involving a person’s feelings as well” (2006 p. 131). Children do not come to school in compartments; this bin is for the mind and this one for the spirit. They come to teachers as whole beings, needing guidance in both the cognitive and affective aspects of their lives. Storytelling is participatory and gives a way to present those moral lessons necessary to function in society in ways that make it possible for the students to be part of the process. It seems that storytelling gives my participants a way to incorporate all the elements of the being of their students. What my participants reveal and make seen in

storytelling is their being, their spirit. “ To reach deep inside students, where true learning takes place, we teachers must teach from our authentic selves. Students can always tell when we’re not” (Jones, 2005, p. 1). Storytelling gives my participants a chance to show their authentic selves, to let the students see their souls and to make room for the students to reciprocate. “There will be something spiritual, too, about identification with a wider human community” (Haydon, 2006, p. 131). Practically speaking, this “identification with a wider human community” reflects the standards of the Council for the Social Studies that address the issue of developing concern for others and for the world at large (n. d.).

Why was it so important for Karen to tell this particular story that shows moral choices may be hard to make? Certainly there are other stories that show the same principle, ones not fraught with her experience. A part of it was certainly to challenge herself, to go out on the “rackety bridge” described by Phelan (1993). It may be that she was using her breath to reach for that “invisible animating principle” we all share that makes us human. Karen knows that “The separation between the spiritual and secular is false. To deny spirit is to deny an essential element of our being and thus diminish ourselves and our approach to education” (Miller, 2000, p. 9). This storytelling reveals the care and protectiveness, the sense of being in “*loco parentis*” (van Manen, 2003, p. 51) that Karen experiences for her students. She is willing to take the risk of “exposure” to be on the path of connecting with her students on a profound level. Karen’s experience points to another type of care—the ethics of care. In *Educating Moral People* (2002) Noddings writes that the ethic of care centers around the relationships between



individuals who act “in direct response to the needs of the cared-for” (p. 8). This ethic of care echoes van Manen’s pedagogy of care:

From an etymological point of view, a pedagogue is a man or woman who stands in a caring relation to children: In the idea of leading or guiding, there is a “taking by the hand”. (van Manen, 1991, p. 38)

Both of these are present in the story Karen tells. She is in the caring relationship that “requires contributions from both parties in the relation” (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 6). For Noddings (2002) conversation is the heart of moral education. This is the sort of authentic conversation Gadamer (1960/2004) believes transforms us. As we see in this study, the experience of storytelling has created new ways to have conversations. The nature of storytelling is the reciprocity between the teller and the listener. It may be that the conversations engendered by storytelling will contribute to forwarding the ethic of care.

### ***The Real No Child Left Behind***

Teachers know that pupils come to them clothed in a bond of parental trust, and parents know that they, in entrusting their children to teachers, can count on the watchful eyes of teachers. (Aoki, 2005b, p, 195)

Storytelling is our oldest form of remembering the promises we have made to one another and to our various gods, and the promises given in return. (Yolen, 2000, p. 24).

Earlier in this chapter I referred to the variety of elements educators believe go into being an effective teacher. No matter how it is phrased, there is some recognition that care for the welfare of students is part of the equation. The care and deep concern for their students is a constant in the conversations with my participants, and it is the basis of their frustrations with curriculum, with the top down management in their public school systems. How is it that this sense of care is so deeply rooted in my participants’

pedagogical practice? For these teachers, everyone gets on the boat, no child is ever left behind. Van Manen writes, “Knowledge without love, respect, and admiration for the being of a child cannot come to a full understanding of that child” (2003, p. 140). It appears that the experience of storytelling provides another way for these teachers to express this pedagogical care and responsibility. Bekki tells of “getting her arms around” her students. Karen would “do cartwheels” if she could reach one boy in her class. On Back to School Night Tracy says, “I let my parents know, once your child comes across my threshold, they are my child now.” Tracy then shares the story about the outcomes and understandings she makes from one story she told at the beginning of the school year.

On the first day Tracy tells her new class a story, “about how I was so nervous to meet them. It was getting them to relate to me how they were so nervous to meet me.” Tracy knows she has made a difference because “a kid stopped crying.” She then shares what her one opening day story involves for one student and her own practice:

Brother stopped crying. He was one of my students retained in the first grade and I was his teacher once again. And after I told my story, it made him a little more at ease and he stopped crying. He came back up to me and he said, “That story was for me. I said, “How did you know? It wasn’t for you, it was for me.” He said, “No, it was for me.” Because I added about how you’re seeing old friends, how you are seeing new friends and how sometimes your friends go to another class and you may have to be in the same class.

Tracy now knows, “He took it really hard, even though it was the best thing for him, and then, I even took it a little hard, so it was like me validating, did I do the right thing? He cried every day. He did not want to come into class.” What did that experience mean for Tracy who has accepted the role of parent? Seeing Brother’s reaction to being back in first grade is disturbing to Tracy.

I felt like I devastated a child. I mean to the point that, I felt it at home, I was [wondering] did I do the right thing? My principal and my colleagues [said] “Oh, Tracy, you did the right thing!” I don’t think I did, y’all, I don’t think I did because this baby is coming to me every day crying. Then I’m crying, too.

In light of what her story reveals, Tracy begins to take action. She tells her principal that “ If a child is going to be retained, I would never want the child back in my room again, because this was the child that showed me that it is not the best decision.” The first and second grades have recess together and his former classmates start to ask Brother, “Why are you still in first grade?” Tracy shares, “He’d come back in the afternoon devastated again.” Tracy sees that she “had to get the second grade teachers to talk about feelings.” Tracy begins to work with the second grade students herself regarding Brother’s situation. She explains to them:

Sometimes people have to stay where they are, to get where they need to be. The second grade team worked with me to write little letters to him, to let him know it’s ok, that we still love you but you’re in first and we’re in second. We are just going to learn second grade before you and then you’re going to come up and you’re going to learn it with us, that you’re going to learn it, be better at it.

Tracy keeps in touch with Brother’s mom during all of these events. Brother’s mom makes the decision to keep her son in Tracy’s class because she feels the disruption would make a worse situation for him. Speaking for myself, I would not want to leave Tracy either. I do not write about leaving the *classroom*, the physical place where Tracy teaches; I would not want to leave *Tracy*, the one who cares and protects her students. When she tells her story, drops the pebbles into the pond, she sets in motion ripples that spread farther and in ways she could not have anticipated. All of this care and the actions that follow occur from one story. Tracy’s actions represent an aspect of van Manen’s concept of pedagogy: “As soon as we gain a lived sense of the pedagogic quality of

parenting and teaching, we start to question and doubt ourselves. Pedagogy *is* this questioning, this doubting” (2003, p. 147). In making the decision to retain Brother, which Tracy felt to be in Brother’s best interests, and then in questioning her decision when she sees how Brother is reacting, Tracy acts with the pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact van Manen writes is vital to pedagogy.

Karen finds that her story about the idea of bullying and how we treat others who are different has more far reaching consequences than she anticipated. The pebble she drops into a child’s life story quickly translates into action when a boy who talks about the hostility between him and his older brother comes to school with a new story:

For the first time ever, he told a story where he and his brother got along and played basketball together. I was stunned. I looked at him, “Really, was it good?” He goes, “Yeah, we had a blast.” The way he talked about his brother and him playing, he [said], “That was the best day of my life.” From one story.

Karen acknowledges her feelings, “It was good. It was a powerful feeling. It was very good to see him not hurt, not the weakling in that situation. Seeing that there are other things in his life.” Karen demonstrates what van Manen calls hope which gives us “the simple avowal: I will not give up on you. I know you can make a life for yourself” (1991, p. 68). Her pedagogical tact and sensitivity resulted in an unexpected outcome. She could not have predicted that her story would give this particular child a way to run counter to his usual way of being and acting. This boy has been given a chance to see that he has the power to rewrite his own story. While I do not think that one story will change the dynamic of this boy’s life, I cannot help but wonder, where could this boy’s story go?

In listening to others we are gathered into compassion. How far into the world of radical alterity is it possible for our hearing to reach out with

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? (Levin, 1989, p. 89)

Karen and Tracy are able to listen with increased compassion in part as a consequence of their storytelling. The trust given to them by these two students is a consequence of the intimacy and opening created by story. It appears that the lived experience of being heard as storytellers opens new avenues for my participants to being listeners. Is it possible that teachers who, because of their willingness to hear their students and be heard by them, allow themselves to “extend the compass” of their listening and their care?

### **Reflection and Revelation**

In order for reflection to occur, the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen or read and write—sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other’s experiences. Such interchanges lead to ways of knowing that enable individuals to enter into the social and intellectual life of their community. (Beleny, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 26)

Many authors (Aoki, 2005; Verloop, Van Dreil, & Meijer, 2001) refer to the importance of reflection for the professional development of teachers. To reflect means to cast a light, to look and consider and implies taking the time to do so. Given that reflection is not merely looking back, it gives a chance for thoughtful concern for future actions. This study, not so much revealed as “re-revealed” to my participants how little time they have to reflect and consider how they conduct their pedagogical practice and who they wish to be as teachers. Participating in this study gave the teachers a precious gift; the time to reflect on what they had done. Reflection, although touted as important, is rarely supported. As Aoki writes:

Reflection in the sense used here is not the kind of activity that students and teachers as actors engage in their typical daily life. For in their day-to-day existence, acting persons deal with their concerns in routine ways often without probing beyond the immediate exigencies. Often, actions are without thought. Missing is a conscious effort to examine the intentions and assumptions underlying their acts. (2005c, p. 131)

Bekki is the only music teacher in her school, and feels somewhat isolated from other music teachers. “When we first had Internet, we were all emailing each other.” Bekki acknowledges that reflection “Is something I haven’t taken the time to do since I started teaching. I think when you talk about it, different ideas come to mind than when you ruminate about it.” Renna remarks, “Time to reflect, no. Time to see colleagues, no. Time to clean my room, usually not.”

Teachers use practicing stories as reflection. Bekki comments on a remark Renna makes about putting notes in her lesson plans for future reference:

You were talking about little notes you make in the lesson plan. Mine are: “Good or Needs revision.” What [is it that] needs revision? Because [you have] no time to think about it at the time. I’m busy worried about what to do tomorrow.

Karen uses time spent reflecting on storytelling, “In order to incorporate it, where it should go.” Renna uses her reflection to practice her storytelling and feels that, “And because I did practice, I was able to challenge myself.”

### ***Thinking out Loud***

Heidegger writes, “Only when man [sic] speaks, does he think” (1993, p. 381), and this reflects the shared ideas of the participants. Bekki finds the conversations about storytelling cause her to reflect on teaching in general:

What’s been interesting is hearing the questions and thinking about some things about teaching and about what I teach that I hadn’t done before. You do that when you are an undergraduate, talk about values and then in the daily immersion of things, you don’t get to do that. You don’t do that

reflection anymore. So that's been interesting for me to talk about teaching and what it is like.

Giroux writes, "The present structures of most schools isolate teachers and cut off the possibilities for democratic decision making" (1998, p. 9). My participants delight in having other teachers present to bounce ideas from one to another. Our group conversation demonstrates that reflection has to be neither solitary nor solemn.

In our conversations the air snaps and sparks as the ideas zoom around the room like the balls in a pinball machine. They shoot ideas off one another, flip them around to get a better spin and rebound, the talk gets better and the points rack up. What might teachers discover when they interact with their peers in a reflective setting? How might the knowledge base of teaching be expanded? Renna becomes excited about Tracy's idea for teaching money and her use of her own stories:

You made up your own stories? You don't use classic stories? I had a flash in my mind; my students are having trouble with money, and with your idea of making up your own stories, and your [idea of making] money jewelry, I was thinking if I made up a story, with the penny, the nickel, and the dime, now maybe they are characters or the character uses them, could I get them to learn something that they are struggling with if I get the story to be the building of background foundation?

Tracy continues the idea, "That's the best way to get them because they, you're having them relate it to something." Bekki agrees, "To something tangible, to something concrete." Renna is looking for "something that clicked, something that they were able to get."

The group conversation about storytelling provided something the teachers feel they lack, the time to share with fellow teachers. Karen speaks about the group's energetic and somewhat chaotic interaction, "We don't get a chance to do this." Tracy adds, "We see little people all the time." As Renna points out, she doesn't even get to see

her colleagues, let alone ask questions. “If you want to stop and ask, that person is running just the same as you are. It’s either, you run with them or they pass you.” As noted earlier, storytelling gives my participants a chance, an opening, to talk to their peers. Once the opening is there, they jump in wholeheartedly. Their desire to be heard by, and to listen, to their fellow teachers is palpable. The pedagogical implications of this desire will be further developed in Chapter Five.

Throwing one pebble into still water produces a wave pattern that can be predicted. Storytelling turns out to be more like a cascade of pebbles creating waves that intersect, collide, form new patterns, spread influence, alter the motion of other waves, and create energy moving in shifting directions. During storytelling my participants were able to create something new, something of their own. They were free to put into play all of their accumulated skills for the benefit of their students. They were engaged in an activity that let them express themselves, and as a result, they felt an expansion of who they are, a confidence that they can successfully step out of their routine and return to the type of pedagogy that reflected their ethos of teaching. What does that sense of confidence do for them? How might it impact their future teaching? They were in control of this process and they claimed ownership of it.

In every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood—and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning. (Palmer, 2007, p. 10)

Through the experiences of paying attention to themselves, to be willing to reveal their being in the classroom, these teachers were able to see and be seen, hear and be heard. The environment they created for themselves and their students allowed them to



be vulnerable to their students and to connect with their authentic teaching selves and be able to articulate what is at the core of their teaching. Storytelling gave them the awareness of how powerfully and deeply connected they are with their students and allowed them to give their students permission to be connected to them. Letting people into your life can be a risky enterprise, fraught with peril. After all, it is the people closest to us that can break our hearts. “Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be” (Palmer, 2007, p. 11). Will teachers be willing to take that risk with students who will be gone from their classroom in a year? It seems to me that my participants have made the decision that it is indeed worth the risk. I cannot know if that is a result of their teaching experiences over the years or if that is who they always were. I cannot know if other teachers will be willing to take on that challenge, but I believe that storytelling may have something to offer if they choose to do so.

In this chapter I told the story of the major themes and the understandings revealed by my participants. The journey has turned out to be like one of my grandmother’s stories, intricate, complicated and comprised of unexpected outcomes. Each element added a particular flavor and tone contributing to the depth and meaning of the other. In Chapter Five I tell of the possible implications that storytelling could have in advancing the pedagogical lives of teachers.

## CHAPTER FIVE STORYTELLING: OPENING THE TREASURE CHEST

Van Manen writes, “Phenomenological research is a being-given-over to some quest, a true task, a deep questioning of something that restores an original sense of what it means to be a thinker, a researcher, a theorist” (2003, p. 31). In Chapter One I began my quest with the question: **What are the lived experiences of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?** As I traveled, I discovered that quests are queer things. Even with a clear goal in mind to pursue, you never know where quests will lead. You can never tell what you will find along the way, perhaps dragons, perhaps treasure, perhaps your heart’s desire.

As I traveled further on my quest to understand what experiences teachers might have as storytellers, I explored the importance of story in our lives, how our stories shape the ways in which we see ourselves and influence our view of the world (Bruner, 2002; Goncalves, Henriques, & Machado, 2004; Otasuke et al., 2004). I looked to the findings of the scientific research on the narrative construction of the human brain (Young & Saver, 2001), and to the research in the educational community in order to understand how storytelling and teaching aligned. I explored the world of storytelling and what storytellers and others can tell us about the history and scope of the phenomenon of storytelling (Collins & Cooper, 1997; Livo & Rietz, 1986; MacDonald, 1993; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). I discovered that storytelling is an integral part of who and what we are. This study began with a group of five teachers who agreed to join the quest, and we embarked on a journey to discover what it is like to be a teacher who tells stories in the classroom. Casey writes, “Journeys, then, are not just travels in time or across space”

(1993, p. 289), and that proved to be true for us. None of us had any inkling that this would be a journey into the heart of our pedagogical practices, a journey that would touch on how teachers perceive themselves, what they believe is the heart of their teaching, how they view the students in their classes, and how deeply embedded care is in their teaching.

In my quest to explore the lived experiences of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms, I became Ali Baba in the cave of the Forty Thieves, uncovering more wealth than I could possibly imagine. My participants were my Scheherazades, enticing and leading me from one complex, entangled tale to another, each one building and elaborating on the previous one, revealing unimagined levels of meaning. The question now is; What have I learned and what understandings have I developed of the things that have been revealed to me? What is it that I see that I did not see before? What possibilities surrounding the pedagogy of teaching as storytelling have been uncovered?

In this chapter I interpret the insights about teaching and teachers that I derived from conversations with my participants, insights that evolve into a coherent pedagogical philosophy of richness and care and the possible meanings these have for pedagogical understandings. Throughout this chapter are woven the concepts of care, authenticity, connection, and the reciprocal nature of teaching.

This study, which takes place against the backdrop of No Child Left Behind, does not attempt to either list or solve all the problems that beset education, or to present storytelling as an anodyne for all educational concerns. It is an attempt to show how a

relatively small change might have far-reaching consequences. In the first section of this chapter I discuss the insights that have been revealed by this study and focus on the reciprocal nature of teaching, the care that is at the core of teaching and the nature of pedagogical autonomy.

### **The Pedagogy of Teaching as Storytelling**

What is the essence of teaching that distinguishes it from other human activity? Aoki uses the senses of seeing and hearing in his search for the essence of teaching. In his essay, *Layered Voices of Teaching: The Uncannily Correct and the Elusively True*, he writes, “Authentic teaching is watchfulness, a mindful watching overflowing from the good in the situation that the good teacher sees” (2005b, p. 196). Even as Aoki writes of watching and seeing, he uses the auditory to bring forth the essence of teaching, writing of allowing the essence of teaching to speak to him, “I have come to seek a way to be more properly attuned, not only to see, but also to hear more deeply and fully the silent call of our vocation, teaching” (2005b, p. 109). The watchfulness of teaching is done with the eyes and the ears, as is the watchfulness of storytelling.

To be attuned means to bring into harmony or accord, make perfectly suitable for reception, and this research attempts to do just that, to bring into harmony the elements of the pedagogy of teaching as storytelling. Teaching is a call to our authentic selves, a call we must first hear in order to answer. Being attuned to speaking, listening, the care of pedagogy, and the call to the authentic self, brings us closer to the heart of the phenomenon of teaching.

I ask you now to think of a really good teacher that you have experienced in your time. Allow him or her to be present before you. I believe that the truth of this good teacher of yours is in the measure of the immeasurable. And, now, say to him or her: He *is* the teaching; she *is* the teaching. And

after you have said these words, allow the unsaid to shine through the said.  
Savor now the elusively true, the mystery of what teaching essentially is.  
(Aoki, 2005b, p.197)

What is the heart of teaching? The heart of the pedagogy of teaching as storytelling is woven through with care, wonder, imagination, and mindfulness. Each of these dimensions is interwoven and each is to be understood as having its own contribution to make in the journey into pedagogy.

### *Care*

The totality of Being-in-the-world as a structural whole has revealed itself as care. (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 274)

Personal fulfillment cannot explicitly focus upon oneself, as if selfhood were best taken care of in a literal and direct manner. Self-fulfillment comes not from a focus upon one's self per se. Instead, we are concernfully absorbed by that with and in which we meaningfully weave our lives. (Anton, 2001, p. 148)

One of the most profound insights I gleaned from this study is that perhaps the extraordinary is revealed in the ordinary—amidst the fancy words, the elaborate studies and theories, the methods and technology is the simplicity that the ground of teaching is care and the connections made possible by that care. But within this simplicity is an astounding presence. For Aoki and van Manen, care is the essence of pedagogy, and the idea of care permeates their work. Aoki writes that pedagogy means, “leading children. Teaching is truly pedagogic if the leading grows out of this care that inevitably is filled with the good of care” (2005b, p. 191). This quote from *The Tact of Teaching* by van Manen bears repeating:

Thus, from an etymological point of view, a pedagogue is a man or woman who stands in a caring relation to children: In the idea of leading or guiding there is a “taking by the hand” in the sense of watchful encouragements, “Here, take my hand! Come, I shall show you the world. (1991, p. 38)

In conducting this study I was fortunate that I was able to experience the strength of this pedagogical care from the beginning. From the outset, the main reason that my participants agreed to join in this quest, to take the time and make the effort involved, was care. Their desire to provide the best teaching and care possible for their students was a strong motivation; they saw an opportunity to improve their practice with the goal of nurturing their students' growth and possibly contributing to the base of pedagogical knowledge. Our conversations brought that sense of care into higher relief and gave my participants a chance to become aware of and articulate it in ways they had not done previously.

***Storytelling as care.*** My participants speak of holding their students in the palm of their hands as they tell stories to them. To hold something in the palm of your hand is to cradle it, to support it, to treat it with care. A storyteller is responsible for the audience (Livo & Rietz, 1986; MacDonald, 1993) and is the one who safely “calls us over” and “calls us back.” It is the storyteller who transports us to another reality, and we place our trust in the storyteller to keep us safe while we are there, and to bring us home again. Honoring the trust the audience places in the hands of the storyteller is the care of storytelling. The watchfulness and care of teaching finds its echo in the watchfulness and care of storytelling.

***Care in the classroom.*** “Part of the desire to become a teacher stems from an impulse to share something we love with others” (Danoff, 2005, p. 40). The revelations surrounding the concept of care, as revealed by storytelling, began in our first conversations as the teachers began to realize that the experiences of being seen and heard by their students was a mirror image of their pedagogical care for their students.

Their students were actively engaged in the caring relationship, and the care of the classroom flowed in both directions. The realization that the students were as involved as they were in this reciprocal caring relationship gave rise to an atmosphere of greater respect and understanding. Witherell and Noddings consider care and dialogue primary in pedagogy and write, “A caring relation requires contributions from both parties in the relation” (1991, p, 6). This reciprocal relationship of care is what the teachers were able to experience as a result of telling stories. The attention and connection teachers received when telling stories created heightened awareness on the part of the teachers and enabled them to better articulate more fully the care for their students. How would it inform pedagogical practice if teachers came to realize and kept awareness of this reciprocal care in the forefront of their practice?

Another facet of care in the classroom was shown in the attention and concern teachers paid to the needs of their individual students who may be encountering difficulties. My participants were aware of the challenges posed by certain students, and not one glossed over the obstacles involved. They quickly recognized the power storytelling has to connect with those students. Storytelling gave them another avenue for touching the lives of the hard-to-reach students, and they were grateful to have that. After telling a story Karen began to establish a connection with a girl who had held herself aloof from the class, and she wonders, “What did I touch in her? What does she need? What is it that struck her? I am trying to piece her together, which is good. I’m glad she’s connected.”

Storytelling presents these types of questions and concerns about the actions teachers take that affect the being of the child. If pedagogy is questioning, as van Manen

(2003) asserts, these sorts of questions are the hallmark of pedagogical watchfulness and tact. These questions reflect a set of values centered on the welfare of the child. The experience of storytelling, the awareness of being seen and heard that accompanied it, the questions prompted by it, made possible a much deeper connection to their students than my participants had previously. All through this study the experience of storytelling allowed the connection and contact between my participants and their students, a contact essential to care; it allowed the reciprocity of care to exist. This suggests that the pedagogy of teaching as storytelling has much to do with establishing those relationships that make the classroom bear the traces of home (Bachelard, 1958/1994).

In the experience of telling stories, participants had the sense of returning to their authentic selves, and the opportunity to share that deeper sense of being with their students. Teachers as performing artists let themselves be seen by their audience. “A performance artist is one who uses him or herself to convey an emotion, or situation, or imagery intended to be meaningful or stimulating to an audience” (Sarason, 1999, p. 6). The teachers in this study care enough to use themselves to connect with their students. Care brings us back from inauthentic ways of being and reminds us that the call of conscience is to take care of other beings (Heidegger, 1926/1967). The struggle lies in hearing the call to authenticity, which Heidegger tells us, comes from within us, without our knowing how to answer it. A return to the authentic self is a manifestation of care.

***Care outside the classroom.***

For the educator the question is, what will I mean in this child’s life? (van Manen, 1991, p. 34)

Carrying out this research made me realize that I can no longer answer this particular question. I no longer know the stories of the students; who has the sweetest



disposition, or is homeless, who is eager to please, who is diabetic, or who has an individual education program. I no longer know on which parents I can rely, or who has lost a job and is frantic to get another. These are vital matters to a classroom teacher; they change the climate of the classroom and affect learning, but I no longer need to know them, for I am no longer a participant, I am an observer.

If, as van Manen writes, “it is doubtful that a curriculum (or learning theory application) could ever be sensitive to the way a particular child or group of children could and should learn something specific” (2003, p. 145), the realization of the loss of the care of the classroom caused me to wonder: Could storytelling have a place in creating an alternate means to express that sense of care for those of us in education no longer in the classroom? Storytelling may create a path for important connections to be created, strengthened and maintained between people who work at different levels of school systems.

In the face of enormous hurdles and despite changing demands on schools, teachers and administrators have constantly improved public schools in the United States and navigated the disruptions imposed upon them. The latter is something almost no manager in private industry has been able to do. (Christensen, 2008, p. 65)

Private industries now use storytelling as a way to personalize and define their businesses, to transmit corporate culture and values, and to reach new clients (Bulava, 2009; Gruber, 2011). What if the pedagogy of teaching as storytelling were a part of the work done by those involved in positions outside the classroom? Storytelling certainly has the power to personalize, define and transmit culture. Perhaps it might have a role in keeping the faces and lives of the classroom from disappearing and becoming the data points about which Valli et al. write in *Test Driven* (2008).

What if educators who are not classroom based were required to tell stories of their own teaching days? Might that help to maintain awareness of what goes on in the classroom? If teachers were invited to listen to the stories of those outside of the classrooms might teachers develop a sensibility to their struggles and challenges? Through shared stories, those inside and outside the classroom have the possibility for creating a more productive and meaningful connection. Hearing and telling stories about school could very well keep those inside and outside the classroom focused on their mission and foster a sense of collaboration.

In *Teacher Centered Schools*, Cohen and Scheer put forward the idea that “Every educational professional in the system, every principal and vice principal, every department chair and curriculum coordinator, must be a certified teacher and must continue to teach” (2003, p. 30). My participants, intimately involved as they are in the classroom, reached new understandings and insights into their pedagogical practice through the experience of telling stories. Storytelling might hold the possibility of those new discoveries being shared throughout the educational community.

### ***The Sense of Wonder***

The seeds of this study were planted when I was a child listening with wonder to my grandmother tell stories, and in turn, seeing the wonder on my son’s face as I told stories to him. My sense of wonder grew as I told stories to incarcerated juveniles, to children in schools and to adults. It grew as I listened to the experiences of my college students as they told about their adventures with storytelling. It was nurtured by my love of teaching, and the incredible gift of being able to combine the two.

The word *wonder* comes from the Old English *wundor* and means “marvelous thing, the object of astonishment.” To experience wonder is to be astonished or surprised; it is a gift to experience that sense of wonder in our daily routine. Wonder is felt; it is an embodied experience. It sweeps the mind, clears it of all thought that went before. For as long as wonder lasts, it encompasses you. No “wonder” it is difficult to maintain in our lives.

We hear the call of wonder; we cannot summon it with a call. Wonder comes to us and we cannot prepare for it.

We intuitively know that wonder is not a cognitive state that can be simply produced or manipulated in others. One cannot even “will” oneself to wonder. Rather, wonder is something that can at best only be evoked. Wonder is a vocative phenomenon. (van Manen, 2002, p. 249)

The word *vocative*, that is a characteristic of calling to or addressing, connects us to Heidegger’s call to the authentic self (1926/1967), a call that resonates throughout this entire study. This sense of wonder, this amazement, aligns itself with the true heart of pedagogical practice.

Another definition of the word wonder is the desire to know something, the asking about something, the state of being curious. The desire to know also dwells in the heart of phenomenological research and this definition of wonder brings us back around to the transformative questions of wonder that Karen and Tracy both ask about their practice: “What was it that I touched in her?” “Did I do the right thing for this child?” These questions give rise to the pedagogical tact and thoughtfulness van Manen describes as hallmarks of a pedagogue (2003).

What does it mean to wonder? What does it mean to wonder pedagogically? Pedagogical wonder may very well combine the astonishment and the curiosity of

wonder. What is it we might wish to know about pedagogy? We may wonder why it sparkles sometimes and is so dull and insipid at others. We may wonder, what is it I really do and can I ever know? If we accept the wonder at the heart of teaching, do we then give ourselves permission to wonder about everything related to our practice? Who are we as teachers, as pedagogues, standing in wonder about our relations to the children we teach? What does wondering about that relationship do to the care we give to them and they give to us?

How might storytelling keep the sense of pedagogical wonder alive? Perhaps the answer lies in the escape from the ordinary, the wonder that storytelling provides. It creates a sense of wonder as it takes us to wonder-ful places. It creates that sense of being in the presence of something to be marveled about. “The opposite of wonder is matter-of-factness” (van Manen, 2002, p. 251). The things we do automatically often blind us to the wonder in the world around us. Routine, while comforting, may produce less mindful practice. The teachers in this study became cognizant of how much they are wrapped up in the daily, often mundane, tasks of teaching.

“Wonder shakes us into opening our eyes, and now we gaze at the object of our wonder” (van Manen, 2002, p. 250). The gaze of wonder for my participants was directed inward and outward. Throughout this study I have heard a sense of astonishment and surprise in my participants, a wonder that something as simple and straightforward as storytelling could cause such profound changes in their perceptions. What else is unseen because of its simplicity? What else lies in the realm of the ordinary, the taken for granted, that holds a key to revelation? Storytelling allowed them to experience wonder-ful aspects of their lives as teachers, dimensions not previously revealed to them. This

experience of wonder opened them to understandings about their approaches to pedagogy, their relationships, not only with their students, but also with others in their schools. It gave them a deeper understanding of the active role their students play, and it made them more conscious of what they felt they needed for success in school. It also helped them recognize where they felt support and change were needed to sustain their quest to improve their practice.

### ***Imagination***

But the role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected. (Greene, 1995, p. 28)

Imagination has some points of convergence with wonder, but wonder is more like a stroll, and imagination is more like a four-minute mile. Imagination is the way we create new worlds for ourselves; our minds are free to roam, or to create divergent realities. For many phenomenological writers (Bachelard, 1958/1994; Casey, 2000; Greene, 1995; McCleary, 1986), imagination is familiar ground and they frame their writing about imagination as opening and possibility. A possibility is something that can be done; it has a chance of being realized. Greene writes that with imagination, “more and more seems possible” (1995, p. 22), and this sentiment was borne out as the experience of storytelling took these teachers further into the heart of their pedagogy than they thought possible. Greene looks for ways “to use imagination in a search for openings” (1995, p. 17).

An opening is a doorway, something between solid things. We go through them and enter another space. “Walls want gaps. If two can pass inside the gap, the walls no longer separate the one from the other” (Doll, 2000, p. 3). This is the opening Greene is

searching for, a way to scale the walls that separate us. An opening can mean a vacant place, and this calls to mind the work Young and Saver (2001) have done in which they report that narrative can create a space, a place for connections to be made, a place for the mind to be open. Casey (2000) writes that imagining sets our minds free to explore possibilities, and through imagination we may go anywhere and be anyone we choose. This imagining connects and draws us into some understanding of those lives. Greene writes, “We are called upon to use our imagination to enter into that world, to discover how it looks and feels from the vantage point of the persons whose world it is” (1995, p. 4).

When we talk about imagination we use words that connote movement, light, passion, action and heat. We fire up the imagination; we spark, release, and set it free. Imagination is what inspires us to action. Storytelling fires the imagination, and becomes what Casey terms pure possibility (2000). Doll identifies:

literalism as the problem of our culture. Nothing, it seems, matters to our collective sensibilities anymore because all is laid out for us to see. To paraphrase Virginia Woolf, there is no room for one’s unknown. (2000, p. xiii)

Storytelling is the antithesis of literalism because it is the listener to a story who is the one who creates the meaning of the story through imagination. It is the listener who imagines what a beautiful princess or an ugly troll looks like, and it is likely no two look exactly the same.

According to Egan, education “is a process that awakens individuals to a kind of thought that enables them to imagine conditions other than those that exist or that have existed” (1992, p. 47). Through this research it is clear that those who imagined those unrealized conditions were the teachers. My participants were able to imagine

themselves as different from their usual teaching selves. As storytellers they were able to enter into the process of storytelling joyfully, exploring new ways of being and choosing what roles they wished to assume. If teachers can do that for themselves as storytellers, what might they imagine for their students, and how would that be made apparent in their teaching?

Imagining something may be the first step in making it happen, but it takes the real time and real efforts of real people to learn things, make things, turn thoughts into deeds or visions into inventions. (Rogers, 2004, p. 99)

What actions might imagination set in motion? How might telling of the discovery of the ancient city of Troy or the story of Arthur, the Once and Future King, fire the imagination of some child? What could be that does not now exist? What might we do to achieve what we have brought into our minds? Imagination and storytelling dwell in the realm of possibility. When you tell a story, you can never know exactly what it will be for the members of your audience. When you release the imagination, you can never know exactly where it will go. Doll calls for “a literacy of the imagination that will introduce strangeness, encourage slowness, express fluidity and feel the other mind: the soul” (2000, p. xvii).

### ***Mindfulness and Attention***

We all live in the “they world” described by Heidegger (1926/1927, p. 150). Not everything we do is a conscious choice every minute of the day. When we drive most of us do not consciously think through each separate element that makes up the experience of driving the car; much of the experience is automatic. We conduct our lives with routines. Routine can be comforting and safe, a haven from too much choice. There is a choosing to eliminate something from attention. It is a buffer from the inconsequential,

making room, if we choose, for other things to be seen and attended to. Far too often this opening that routine has to offer is lost; we simply forget. The experience of telling stories shook up the “they world” and the routine world with a call to the authentic self.

In the experience of storytelling, these teachers have removed themselves from the world-taken-for-granted, and, using storytelling, are “choosing to make this choice,” a choice Heidegger writes is necessary to return to our authentic selves (1926/1967, p. 313).

To be mindful means, “taking heed or care; being conscious or aware.” In *A Brief Definition of Mindfulness* (n. d.), Black writes of mindfulness as “an open and receptive attention to and awareness of what is occurring in the present moment ... waking up from a life lived on automatic pilot and based in habitual responding.” My participants found that their “automatic pilot” was not available to them when storytelling; they needed to pay attention to what they were experiencing. Mindfulness is related to the flow experience Csikszentmihalyi describes:

Because of the total demand on psychic energy, a person in flow is completely focused. There is no space in consciousness for distracting thoughts, irrelevant feelings. Self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual. The sense of time is distorted; hours seem to pass by in minutes. (1997, p. 31)

The mindfulness engendered by storytelling brought forward the understanding that moments of mindfulness could be available during other times in the school day. My participants found that the mindfulness experienced in storytelling began to extend to their entire practice. They became mindful of how much thoughtful attention they pay to their students and revealed to them how committed they are to their students. They became mindful of how carefully they observe their students to determine, not only what



the students need educationally, but who they are. My participants are intimately connected with their students, and storytelling allowed them to see that. If mindfulness is created by storytelling, where else is it to be found in the classroom? Where is the mindfulness, the attention, of a teacher to be directed?

Storytelling is a give and take, a dance between teller and audience, a call and response and these all require a partnership. The experience of storytelling caused my teachers to become mindful of the reciprocal nature of teaching and become conscious of the active role their students play in creating the life of the classroom. It allowed the partnership, the reciprocity of teaching, to manifest itself. This was not something they expected, but once seen by these teachers, it became a powerful agent for change in their view of themselves and their students. If teachers are mindful that their students are not passive receivers of instruction, but rather active participants and shapers in the life of the classroom, how might this change the being of the classroom? The awareness of the mutual state of care altered the dynamics between teacher and student into something deeper, more meaningful, and more satisfying. This understanding by the teachers led to a greater respect for the students and their abilities, creating a higher set of expectations.

Mindfulness is tied to the greater awareness of the authentic self. It dwells in the “spacious listening” of Levin (1989). The choice to tell stories is a choice for mindfulness, a choice for authenticity and because teaching is a reciprocal action, the openings for mindfulness that teachers create for themselves could become like pebbles dropped into the pond, causing ripples that affect their students.

## **Pedagogical Possibilities/Storytelling in Education**

But once you tell a good story, they want to hear more, they want to do more, and they want to know more. They want to know more about you. And they are more than willing. (Karen)

One reason to conduct phenomenological research is to offer insights that might further the practice of pedagogy. Drawing on my experiences as a teacher of teachers, a storyteller and the interpreter of this research, I seek to uncover the pedagogical insights this study has to offer teachers currently in the classroom and for those in teacher education. The power of the pedagogy of teaching as storytelling lives in the potential to transform teachers' understandings of their pedagogical practice and deepen their connections with their students and others in the educational community. Nonetheless, if storytelling is to be used in the classroom, teachers must be confident that it will help them deliver instruction and that it is solidly connected to the "world of aims" (Gadamer, 1960/2004). The pedagogy of teaching as storytelling comes to the paradigmatic and practical aspects of education with powerful tools; it takes advantage of our narrative brain, gives an effective means of engagement with a topic, increases reading and listening skills, and addresses the higher thinking that promotes the formation of concepts.

Storytelling is aligned with what we know about how our brains function and takes advantage of the fact that we make meaning of our world through stories (Bruner, 2002; Bruner, 1990; Goncalves, Henriques & Machado, 2004; Young & Saver, 2001). It gives teachers access to prior knowledge and provides the scaffolding Vygotsky tells us is necessary to form more complex constructs (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Stories help us make meaning of what we learn and support us as we strive to develop our sense of self

and to navigate through our social interactions (Danoff, 2005; Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

### *A Shift in the Wind*

Creating a climate of high expectations for students is an important element in achieving academic success. Through the experience of storytelling my participants came to understand and develop increased respect for their students' abilities. Each participant remarked on their surprise as they told of the skills their students possessed that were revealed by storytelling, such as attention, listening and retention skills, the ability to form sophisticated concepts which, to their chagrin, they had underestimated. They questioned how they could have missed these things; had they not been paying attention, were they not mindful? It is more likely that the opportunity to let these skills emerge had not been present until storytelling gave them an opening to reveal themselves, and the mindfulness created by telling stories allowed my participants to be aware, awake, and responsive to them. It is revelations such as these that will shape how teachers form their expectations of students.

As these teachers traveled further into the experience of telling stories, I found that the real change was taking place for them as they began to visualize a climate of high expectations for their own pedagogical practice. I return to Gadamer's understanding of horizon: "Horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. ... "to have a horizon" means not being limited to what is nearby, but being able to see beyond it" (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 302). My participants were challenged by the task of taking on a new skill right in front of their students; they

left their accustomed, comfortable vantage points, and tested what constituted their horizon.

Many of us as adults feel a strong reluctance to tell stories to an audience in a formal situation, which is why we go to great length to prepare ourselves...Telling stories is an art which we have to acquire, practice and polish. (Grugeon & Gardner, 2000, p. 40)

My participants came away with a sense of exceeding their own expectations, of having gone beyond what they thought themselves capable of doing. Finding out that you can do something risky, as these teachers did with storytelling, is a source of power. It stretches you and increases a sense of self worth and perhaps gives greater space to experiment. It also creates a model for their students, a model of being willing to enter into the risk. The importance of safety comes into play once again, for this willingness to accept challenges can only occur in an environment that makes a safe space for risk taking. It also creates a model for children, a model of someone being willing to enter into the risk.

### ***What is it That We Name?***

One of Tracy's storytelling sessions illustrates the use of storytelling to enact curriculum possibilities. In her interactive storytelling Tracy included concepts of process and procedure, following directions, predicting from what is known, sequencing, analyzing data, working collaboratively, seasons of the year, elapsed time, state of matter, cause and effect, weather, and problem solving. The storytelling enabled Tracy to access the students' prior knowledge, laid the groundwork for further exploration of these concepts, a practice known as scaffolding, and provided a frame of reference for Tracy and her class. This is just one example of how storytelling can be used to deliver instruction in a fashion that ensures participation by the students.

One of the revelations of this study was how adroitly these teachers incorporated storytelling into their practice; it reflected the understanding they have of their teaching. It was nothing short of masterful, but that level of practice is something that goes unnoticed and unremarked even by the teachers themselves. Storytelling gave these teachers another way to operate within the classroom, something new in what Renna called their “bag of tricks.” Each participant knew what Renna meant by this term; it was a repertoire of things that have pedagogical value for them, and yet, Renna called it a “bag of tricks.” I want to think about what it is we are saying when we refer to teachers’ experience, professional judgment, and knowledge as a “bag of tricks.”

What does this naming say about how we see teachers, and what it is that teachers do? What does it say about the education they received as teacher candidates; can we reduce all that pedagogical understanding and knowledge, all that striving to master subject matter, to a party trick done with smoke and mirrors? A trick is an illusion, if you are tricking someone you are fooling them, playing a prank on them. Does this phrase “bag of tricks” mean that we are offering only illusion to the children in our classrooms? What Renna calls a “bag of tricks” is a highly developed, complex, and coherent pedagogy that is open to including new practices that prove to offer value. What is dismaying is that my participants all accepted this terminology at the same time the use of storytelling was bringing them back to an awareness of how pedagogically sound their decisions and instincts are. Is this a reflection of the tension teachers feel about their status as professionals? To put storytelling in the “bag of tricks” negates the powerful transformations it has made in the perceptions of the life of the classroom and reduces storytelling to entertainment. What happens when teachers take ownership of their

professional acumen and scholarship and name it to reflect that understanding? What might happen to current educational reforms that Giroux claims will reduce teachers “to the status of high-level technicians carrying out dictates and objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life” (Giroux, 1988, p. 121). How might the top down reforms described by Giroux be mediated by the language that honors the achievements of teachers?

### ***Gordian Knots of Storytelling***

Turn him to any cause of policy, the Gordian of it he will unloose,  
Familiar as his garter. (Shakespeare, 1936, p. 558)

In ancient Gordium there was an ox cart in front of the temple tied up with a knot so intricate, so complex and so intractable it defied all attempts to untie it. The legend had it that an oracle declared whoever unfastened the Gordian knot would be the ruler of all Asia. The cart stood there for one hundred years, and no one was able to untangle the knot until the arrival of Alexander the Great. In 333 B.C.E., so the story goes, Alexander the Great came to Gordium with his army on his quest to conquer the known world, and in the presence of his generals, he attempted to untangle the knot. He saw that the knot had no ends, no way to even begin to untangle it. He knew the stakes were high, for solving this challenge was pivotal in gaining legitimacy and support for his ambitions in Asia. He studied the problem for a moment, then took his sword and slashed through the knot, resolving the problem with one quick stroke. Since then the term Gordian knot has stood for problems that seem to be unsolvable, and it seems an apt metaphor for problems in education. On the face of it, storytelling is so simple, but the revelations and transformations brought forth in conversations with my participants led me to wonder what role, however slight, storytelling might play in any of these two persistent,

somewhat intractable, issues: retaining teachers, and the lack of diversity in the teaching force. Could storytelling loosen at least one or two threads in the knot?

***Keeping teachers in school.***

Accomplished teaching involves making difficult and principled choices, exercising careful judgment and honoring the complex nature of the educational mission. (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2002, p. 21)

Retention of teachers appears to be a chronic problem for our schools (National Education Association [NEA], (n.d.); Committee for Economic Development [CED], 2007; National Center for Educational Statistics, [NCES], 2010). A CED report states that if “even if [only] 5 percent of teachers left the profession each year, schools would still have to hire 180,000 replacements annually” (2007, p. 2). The NCES Teacher Follow-Up Survey 2008-2009 reported that eight per cent of teachers left the profession the previous year, with the attrition rate for teachers with one to three years of experience at nine per cent. To me, the most distressing finding of this report is that teachers are less satisfied with their careers. The level of job satisfaction has dropped fifteen points since 2009, and salary is not the primary reason for this drop. How might the pedagogy of teaching as storytelling be applied to this problem?

My participants felt that through telling stories they were able to use their creative energy, and experienced a great sense of satisfaction in part because they were in control of the storytelling process. Not only did they relish the sense of autonomy that came when they were telling stories, they felt a sense of greater effectiveness and accomplishment. Through the experience of telling stories, my participants became increasingly aware of just how competent, professional and effective they are. You would think that knowledge would be self evident, but it is not. It tends to be lost or

covered up in the routine and the “dailiness” described by Elbaz-Luwisch (2005, p. 72). They were proud of themselves and that feeling of pride was a gratifying surprise, a validation of their ability to master a challenge. What is it that lies behind the surprise that my participants felt and why should it be a surprise?

This surprise stood in stark contrast to their remarks about curriculum restrictions, along with a sense of being unappreciated for their teaching in a system that did not seem to value their expertise and with the feeling of being deskilled, an issue that Aoki (2005), Apple (2001), and van Manen (1991) have all addressed. This led me to wonder, if these experienced teachers are remarking on how effective and gratified they are as they tell stories, what relevance, if any, might that sense of satisfaction have for other teachers who might be considering leaving the teaching profession? Is it possible more teachers might stay in education if they felt they had some measure of the autonomy reported by my participants when they told stories? Would storytelling compensate in some degree for the constraints imposed on teachers?

From our experience in psychiatry and psychology, we can unequivocally say that there is a price tag that must be paid if we repress a major part of our being. The price tag is a loss of joy and zest. (LeShan, 1974, p. 125)

My participants talked about shedding their teacher personae, leaving that behind for a brief time, and returning to their authentic teaching selves. Storytelling re-ignited some of the passion with which they entered teaching. Would being able to enter into the persona of the storyteller defray what LeShan refers to as the price tag that is paid with a loss of joy and zest? Would the possibilities of more authentic and deeper connections with students and their own teaching selves weigh in any decision to remain in the classroom? There are myriad factors involved in retaining teachers, all of them



interwoven, but it is intriguing to speculate how storytelling might influence them in some small way.

***Connectors to diversity.***

One of the resources necessary for improving the performance of students of color is a teacher workforce that is culturally competent and diverse. (National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004, p. 8)

There is great concern in education centering on the lack of diversity in the teaching force. The Center for American Progress published *Increasing Teacher Diversity: Strategies to Improve the Teacher Workforce* in 2011 that describes a student population of ever increasing diversity and a teaching force that is predominately white. According to the report, less than 15 percent of teachers are minorities, and “in over 40 percent of public schools there is not a single teacher of color” (Bireda & Chait, 2011, p. 1). The report ties the presence of minority teachers to the achievements of minority students.

Schools must be seen as institutions marked by the same complex of contradictory cultures that characterize the dominant society. Schools are social sites constituted by a complex of dominant *and* subordinate cultures...Teachers and others interested in education must come to understand how the dominant culture functions at all levels of schooling to disconfirm the cultural experience of the “excluded minorities.” (Giroux, 1988, p. 7)

Storytelling does afford an approach for including those whom Giroux feels are excluded. Wondering about diversity comes from my conversations with Karen and Renna. Both are charged, not with assimilation per se, but with helping their students navigate in the world in which they live, and storytelling provides a way for the “other” to be recognized. Teachers of all ethnicities have at their disposal a rich source of readily available tales from other lands, other cultures, the inclusion of which give recognition to

students of differing ethnicities and cultures. This is akin to multicultural education; however, if this effort is based on the ongoing telling of stories, rather than primarily on textbooks, it can provide listeners with opportunities to grasp nuances and shades of meaning unavailable from passages in books. People and their cultures reside in their stories. Telling the stories of different cultures, many of which are represented in our classrooms, allows aspects of diverse cultures to be seen, heard, and given a place of honor in the curriculum. A teacher who brings storytellers from different or divergent cultures into a class gives students an embodied example of the importance of the culture and the understanding that those cultures are valued, undermining the “special communities” thinking that “threatens to simply reinforce an unquestioned sense of normalcy” (Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2003, p. 37). It becomes harder to demonize and distance someone when you have heard their stories.

Storytelling creates a relationship, a bond between teller and audience, which makes possible empathy and understanding of people with different worldviews. It can provide insights into *that which lies beneath*. When studying Mexico, students may make paper flowers, but what is the story behind those flowers? What is behind the Gollum figure in the stories of Eastern European Jews? What are the stories and who are the people caught up in the many Diasporas that have happened in the world? Why did different peoples choose to tell their story in the way they did, and what does it show about them, their customs and values and our commonality? Storytelling has the power to make these stories, and the people in them, come alive and breathe; transporting students to places they may never see. The questions storytelling raises speak to the why of things, and it takes imagination to answer those questions.

So often in schools, the troublesome child is understood only pathologically. They are rarely taken to be a commentary on *us* and what we and our curriculum guides and our institutions have presumed. (Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2003, p. 38)

There is another type of diversity teachers face. The “other” is not only cultural, but exists outside of what we consider to be “normal” behavior. Each one of my participants has students they find worrisome, “troubling children who haunt the margins of educational practice” (Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2003, p. 37), and their concern for these students is evident in all they do. In *Back to the Basics of Teaching and Learning*, (2003) Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen challenge the notion that the differences should be erased because, “the intractable, irreducible differences of individuals can form the ground of true freedom” (p. 42). I think of Tracy, who touches something in her autistic student through story. If I write that he is a member of her class, that may sound obvious to you, but he *is a member* of her class, he belongs to the group. In what ways might storytelling provide inclusion and give some level of understanding to teachers of how they view the differences in their students, and resist the urge to “fix” them?

Hilder, in “The Enemy’s Gospel” writes, “I believe that it’s only when we see ourselves, each other, and our students as flesh-and-blood people with stories to tell that we can grow human together” (2005, p. 178). When we tell our stories to our students, making room for them to tell their stories to us, we may resist labeling those who “disrupt our complacency ... and honor those who live on the margins” (Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2003, p. 51), and have stories that require us to interpret them differently.

### ***Stepping into the Being of Teaching***

Teachers are “trained,” and in becoming trained they become effective in trained ways of “doing”. (Aoki, 2005, p. 160)

I want to push gently against the college student culture that sits silently in lecture halls that limits dynamic engagement to texting. (McCaleb, August 5, 2011)

To explore the openings that the pedagogy of teaching as storytelling offers to teacher preparation, it is appropriate and useful to review what it means to engage in pedagogy. At its most basic, pedagogy is the art and science of teaching, but this reveals little of the nature of the phenomenon of pedagogy. Pedagogy “is the activity of teaching parenting, educating, or generally living with children, that requires constant practical action in concrete situations and relations” (van Manen, 2003, p. 2). Van Manen also writes that pedagogy is a relationship of caring and is always focused on what is good for a child (van Manen, 1991). For Aoki, pedagogy is filled with the “goodness of care” (2005b, p. 191). The essence of teaching is care and the practical actions that bring that care to life. It is the connections, relationships, and conversations that storytelling makes possible that are my focus here. Storytelling offers teacher educators a chance to shift to a new perspective and model of preparing teacher candidates. Telling stories allows a conversation to develop, and reveals the “to and fro” that is the reciprocal nature of teaching.

### ***The ineffable.***

We may have to accept the possibility that the notion of pedagogy is ineffable and that no scientific observation or conceptual formulation will lead us to an unambiguous definition of pedagogy. (van Manen, 2003, p. 143)

Perhaps one of the most important things a teacher educator can do is to acquaint their teacher candidates with the ineffable nature of teaching. In phenomenological research we seek to describe a bit more closely, attempt to reveal what is covered over or hidden, and to approach ever nearer to the heart of a phenomenon. This is an endeavor

for which we use language and, unfortunately, language can be lacking. This insufficiency of language became clear as I watched my participants grope for the words to explain and articulate what they experienced when telling stories. As they talked their eyes would move around the room as if the words might be somewhere out there hovering over their heads waiting for them. They would gesture with their hands as if they could conjure up the right words out of the air. The inadequate nature of language to express what they wanted to say was frustrating. It was frustrating because they knew something important had happened to them and they wanted to name it. My participants are living in a world that wants clear, sharp-edged answers and these teachers are accustomed to that type of discourse. Then, along came storytelling and the language changed. They come to the lived experience of the ineffable and the current discourse fails them.

What is it that we mean when we use the word ineffable? As with other sections of this dissertation I begin with etymology in order to shed light on this word. Ineffable derives from the Latin words *in*, meaning the opposite, and *effabilis* means able to be spoken. Joined together, *ineffabilis*, means “unutterable.” Something that is ineffable, by its nature, is not speak-able. Ineffable is defined as something “too great to be expressed in words; unutterable, indefinable, indescribable. Not to be uttered or disclosed.”

I then turn to “unutterable,” a word that means that a concept is too all encompassing to describe; it is inexpressible, indescribable. Something unutterable is something not to be mentioned or named; a person, thing or condition dwells in the realm beyond description or expression. Another definition of ineffable and unutterable puts a twist on the way we might think of these two words, for these words share another

meaning. Both mean that which *may not* be spoken, a thing not permitted to be spoken; something that is outside the realm of language, something so sacred or profane it may not be spoken, a mystery that cannot be named. It is an interesting paradox, that as teachers tell stories, something that lives by words, they are faced with a phenomenon that has a nature that is ultimately not speak-able, perhaps something that, even if we had the words, may not be spoken.

It may be that what constitutes the bond with storytelling and teaching is the ineffable nature and reach of both. They can be picked and parsed, examined and deconstructed; yet at their heart, they are unknowable. In some way storytelling put my participants in touch with the ineffable nature of storytelling and brought forth the ineffable nature of pedagogy. Storytelling is indeed a naming that sits outside the regular domain of pedagogical discourse.

***Making the connection.*** In *Exploring Identity, Commonality, and Difference*, Rock describes the importance of teacher candidates establishing connections with students they will be teaching. “Many researchers have noted that teachers, especially in the elementary grades, should devote substantial energy to creating a stable classroom community that is governed by group goals and strong relationships between teacher and students” (2010, p. 149). In our conversations, I listened as my participants marveled at the connections that developed between themselves and their students as a result of telling stories, and the transformations it made in their attitudes and practices. Storytelling by its nature creates relationships and a sense of community (Collins & Cooper, 1997; Kuyvenhoven, 2009; Witherell & Noddings, 1991), and that relationship is one of authenticity, safety and trust between the teller and the audience. The

performative nature of storytelling creates an intimacy as the teller presences him or herself in front of the audience and lets him or herself be seen and heard. It creates an alternate world, a time out of mind, something that exists only for the teller and the audience. It affords those involved in teacher preparation a way to create a nurturing relationship and move teacher candidates toward a more developed understanding of how the dynamic of the classroom is co-created.

### ***Smiling in September***

Storytelling provides interesting insights into the issue of managing the conduct of a classroom. Beginning teachers often worry whether they have the skills to engage their students, and this worry is legitimate because being able to maintain a safe, well-ordered classroom is a responsibility of the teacher. The nature of storytelling, intimate, participatory, and reciprocal, gives teacher educators and teacher candidates a new lens with which to view the establishment of a classroom where all are safe and learning takes place.

***Attention again.*** Storytelling is a way to guide and focus attention and to create engagement. All my participants were aware of the heightened focus and attention they received while telling stories, and how that attention spread into other parts of their day.

To control attention means to control experience, and therefore the quality of life. Information reaches consciousness only when we attend to it. Attention acts as a filter between outside events and our experience of them. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 128)

The nature of storytelling calls forth and focuses attention, and my participants found that when they were storytelling, the admonitions to keep paying attention, or the necessity of stopping for disruptions, were few and far between. These routine (and expected) occurrences take away from instructional time, and dilute the power of the teacher's

voice. The experience of being attended to at this level may subtly change the dynamic of the interplay between teacher and students. Storytelling may eliminate some of the repetitive teacher talk in the classroom, giving more time for students' contributions, more time for talking *with* students instead of talking *to* them, and more time to discuss concepts on a deeper and more comprehensible level. I can imagine the shift in the orientation teacher educators might make and how that could spread like ripples in a pond. I can imagine how teacher candidates might flourish when they are out from under the "Us vs. Them" mindset.

***Concordance in the classroom.*** How shall teacher educators and teacher candidates approach the issue of the conduct of a class? The answer will depend on the orientation of the initial question. Is it the teachers' role to control their students in a rigid and authoritarian manner: "How can I control these children?" Or does the answer lie in this question: "In what sort of conversation must I and my students engage such that we create a classroom that nurtures growth and fosters learning?" The first shows a relationship based on viewing the students as antagonists. The second question demonstrates a much more collaborative approach and is grounded in the revealed understandings of my participants about engaging in conversations with their students and the understandings about their students' contributions to the being of the class.

Engaging in a conversation is quite different from handing down edicts. As Gadamer (1960/2004) writes, we first must get the attention of the one with which we wish to converse, and storytelling is a powerful means of gaining attention. Gadamer writes that through conversation we come to understanding. "Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other" (p. 385). The safety to



make that opening and be willing to walk through it can be created by storytelling. Entering into a conversation with students implies an understanding on the part of the teacher candidates that they are in a reciprocal relationship with their students that has the potential to be one of respect.

The use of storytelling to regulate behavior and provide ways of defusing tension caused by the deviation from those norms of the classroom is well documented (Bettleheim, 1976; Bruner, 2002; Campbell, 1988; MacDonald, 1993).

In human beings, with their astonishing narrative gift, one of the principal forms for peacekeeping is the human gift for presenting, dramatizing, and explicating the mitigating circumstances surrounding conflict-threatening breaches in the ordinariness of life. (Bruner, 1990, p. 95)

This aspect of storytelling offers to all teachers a different way of dealing with the inevitable conflicts in the classroom and creates pathways for teachers to construct a different response to unacceptable behavior. This represents a shift in the normal cycle that consists of escalating misconduct and repeated reprimands, followed by a trip to the principal's office.

In *Orality and Literacy* Ong writes, "The spoken word proceeds from the human interior and manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors, as persons, the spoken word forms human beings into close-knit groups" (2002, p. 73). If students have developed a sense of community and rules of that community are broken, the offender may be less likely to be rewarded by others and may be more amenable to changing behavior. The community fostered by the shared experience of storytelling supplies a method to deal with deviations from the rules in ways that are not punitive, and has the potential to reduce defensiveness and to avoid power struggles. What a relief it would be for teachers to view their students as having responsibility for the class, and to share

responsibility for the conduct of the class with them. What openings and possibilities might that call into being?

### ***Being on the Journey with Others***

Imagine if we treated as basic to teaching and learning listening openly and generously to each other, not just to a healthy and sane understanding of other, but also of oneself. (Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2003, p. xiii)

The enthusiasm with which my participants talked during the group conversation was electric; they were delighted to have companions on this quest. Their eagerness to share reflected their previous comments about the lack of time to spend with fellow teachers. They wanted someone to talk to, someone who shares their experience as educators.

Earlier the point is made that curriculum for being involves a journey on which pilgrims attempt to make sense of their lives. This sense making more readily occurs when companions share in the reflective mode, when they are caring, and when they value dialogue as a major way of conducting inquiry and generating knowledge. (Berman, Hultgren, Lee, Rivkin, Roderick, 1991, p. 9)

During undergraduate work, pre-service teachers may work with a variety of mentor teachers. After graduation, most teachers never see another teacher actually in the midst of teaching. I do not refer to the occasional demonstration lessons offered by specialists; I refer to actual teaching in an actual classroom. Teachers are being asked to constantly improve, but you can't improve your craft by self-reference; you need to see what other teachers are doing. How are teachers to know what they need to improve?

Most teachers face the arduous task of trying to figure out on their own how things went and what might have been done better. The task is arduous because the ability to notice what one has done is often impeded by *secondary ignorance*: that is, by not knowing that you don't know ... The way to reduce its presence is to organize schools so that they allow colleagues to see and critique each other's teaching. (Eisner, 2002, p. 49)

Teaching can be quite isolating (Knoblock & Goldstein, 1971; Halstead, 2011). Teachers are not encouraged to share problems and concerns, and too often asking for help can backfire. Being seen by one's colleagues presupposes a climate of safety similar to the classroom climate created by my participants in cooperation with their students.

At the start of this study I was dismayed at the questions my participants were asking. They wanted to know if they could tell any story they wished, how long a story should take, when I wanted them to tell; should they only tell two, or could they tell more if they wanted? I found this to be distressing because I was relying on their professional understanding of how they conduct their classes and how storytelling would best fit into their practice. In part, their questions were generated by a desire to help me, but it was as if they were waiting for the hidden agenda, waiting for the trick, the "gotcha." These questions made me realize how tightly our teachers are controlled, how little their judgments are valued, how the sense of being deskilled impacts their everyday classroom life. These may be some of the reasons that the issues of safety and trust keep recurring in this research. The pedagogy of teaching as storytelling may extend a sense of safety to teachers experimenting with telling stories, creating a "no harm, no foul" situation.

The power of storytelling to create community, safety and trust plays a prominent role in the study of storytelling conducted by Shank in 2006. *Teacher Storytelling: A Means for Creating and Learning within a Collaborative Space* is a study that has implications for teacher educators and for the use of storytelling to develop a community of teachers. Shank found storytelling creates a climate of safety for the teachers in the group, enabling them to take risks, express doubts, and find support and validation from

other group members. This study revealed what Shank terms “the centrality of storytelling in teachers’ lives” (p. 721). Through storytelling teachers were able to create a collaborative community focused on understanding their pedagogical practice, grapple with problems, and share a vision for teaching. The group of teachers in the study got off to a rocky start with teachers spending time rehashing old issues and complaints. The turning point in the study came when one member chose to be authentic and presented a pedagogical concern, letting others in the group see her vulnerability. As a result the members began to see themselves as mirrors of each other, each struggling with many of the same issues. The level of trust established allowed group members to hear constructive conversation about their practice. Shank makes clear that this trust and collaboration were not immediately forthcoming; it evolved over time with regularly scheduled meetings: “The stories were not told in brief encounters, but in extended, focused conversations, thus enabling the CIG [Collaborative Inquiry Group] members to explore the ideas that grounded the practices” (p. 17). Participating in this collaborative group gave the members an understanding that their authentic issues had relevance for others. “The stories they told, when grounded in their own experiences and questions, facilitated risk-taking and reflection” (Shank, 2006 p. 715). These “extended, focused conversations” are a far cry from the hurried and fleeting interactions described by my participants.

Scheherazade spent three years telling stories to the sultan before his madness was cured and Penelope waited twenty years for Ulysses to return. The collaborative community Shank describes took two years to develop. “Because the group had met on a regular basis for over 2 years in long sessions, the stories became a natural part of their

deliberations and enabled them to collaborate by examining their teaching publicly” (2006, p. 721). The time given over to this study is indicative of the value the group and the school placed on it.

The story Shank tells has meaning for in-service and pre-service teachers, as it relates to the aspects of safety, time for collaboration, and reducing the isolation of teachers. Shank’s study on collaborative storytelling fires my imagination: it starts me along the path of what might be possible. I look at this study and I think, “Why not?” This study could provide a template for storytelling as professional development that addresses key issues for teachers. Collaborative storytelling could break down barriers that isolate teachers and reduce the defensiveness that comes from experiencing oneself as being criticized. I can imagine storytelling circles in schools across the country, inspiring teachers to share their stories, triumphs, and trials. I can see them rejoicing and commiserating with each other, and I can imagine what doors that could open for their students.

### **Reflections on the Quest**

I am done with great things and big plans, great institutions and big success. I am for those tiny, invisible loving human forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, which, if given time, will rend the hardest monuments of pride. (James, 1899)

As I come to the end of my quest, I wish to look backward and reflect on where I have traveled as a result of one question: **What is the lived experience of teachers who begin to use storytelling in their classrooms?** The answers to that question led me into the care that lies at the heart of this pedagogy and the many ways it lets itself be

expressed. I am in a state of wonder, in the presence of something astonishing, and I stand humbled in the face of it.

### ***Wonder***

I wonder at the strength of care that exists at the core of teaching, and the power it has to effect change. I wonder at the eagerness of my participants to jump into an enterprise in the hope of making things better for their students. I wonder at the power of one small endeavor to reveal a phenomenon of such depth and meaning. This leads me to wonder what other aspects of a teacher's world go unnoticed and unremarked? Perhaps it is time for those of us in education to change our perspective on reforms we deem "important," and reconsider the "tiny, invisible, loving forces that work from individual to individual" (James, 1899). I wonder if those forces might be the ones that ultimately change the face of education; giving that phrase, "the face of education," the real faces of teachers and students.

As I listened to my participants I have come to re-know that when I am a storyteller for children, they are giving the gift of themselves to me. This is a wonder-full gift, and it is manifested in their attention to and affection for me. In a way, that attention and affection concealed the true treasure from me. I could look at the surface and be proud of what I was doing; I did not need to examine it more deeply. It is possible that I did not really want to see the reality of this treasure because it was almost more than I could hold. I would rather have seen the children before me as a "class" I was with for thirty minutes. I did not want to acknowledge the hearts that held me. Now I understand that I must be willing to presence myself to that audience of children and allow them to

see who I am on an authentic level. I have come to understand that all of this care and all the gifts of storytelling are there for me as a teacher.

Conducting phenomenological research is not done at a remove; the researcher is involved with the participants in the research, in contact and conversation, and my participants brought life and light to this quest. “In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs” (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 361). This experience has transformed my listening to take in the “Thou” more fully. I have let myself hear what is being said to me, both as the storyteller and as the teacher. A listener is quiet, making space in the mind for what comes; it is a taking in. In the being of the listener, in being open to what is said and unsaid, I have experienced revelations about my pedagogical life, in my own understandings of what storytelling is, and how it connects to the practice of pedagogy.

### *Magic*

The best of the stories we can give our children, whether they are stories that have been kept alive through the centuries by the mouth-to-mouth resuscitation we call oral transmission, or the tales that were made up only yesterday—the best of these stories touch that larger dream, that greater vision, that infinite unknowing. They are the most potent kind of magic, these tales, for they catch a glimpse of the soul beneath the skin. Touch magic. Pass it on. (Yolen, 2000, p. 50)

I began my quest to uncover the lived experiences of teachers who begin to tell stories in their classrooms with the magic of storytelling, and I return to that magic as my quest draws to a close. Magic is an “inexplicable and remarkable influence producing surprising results,” and has the quality to enthrall us. In storytelling we all have the power to “touch magic,” and travel on the ebony horse to the lands of enchantment.

Storytelling is the experience that provided a way for my participants to re-engage themselves as teachers and to reconnect with a sense of wonder and magic. At the time of this study No Child Left Behind was the federal policy that impacted their teaching practice. There will continue to be other federal policies that influence teaching in the schools and teachers will continue to face challenges about what and how they teach. Storytelling will remain a place of pedagogical engagement for teachers to “touch magic.”

Moments like this act as magical interludes, placing our hearts at the edge of our souls: fleetingly, yet intensely, a fragment of eternity has come to enrich time. Elsewhere the world may be blustering or sleeping, wars are fought, people live and die, some nations disintegrate, while others are born, soon to be swallowed up in turn—and in all this sound and fury, amidst eruptions and undertows, while the world goes its merry way, bursts into flames, tears itself apart and is reborn: human life continues to throb. (Barbery, 2008, p. 91)

The experience of storytelling was a “magical interlude,” for my participants and their students, a time carved out before and after some other activity, and if they choose, it may become more. I learned that teachers and children thrive on magic and wonder. What a thing to have magic in school; what a thing to have wonder! If part of teaching is to ignite the imagination, to dream of the impossible, to reach beyond ourselves, to say “I could,” storytelling provided that for my participants, and more importantly, they felt it provided that for their students. It created a place of safety for all “hearts at the edge of their souls,” uncovered a sense of power and agency my participants had forgotten they had, and renewed their commitment to their profession.

Of all the treasure storytelling brings to education, it may be that the greatest contribution storytelling can make to teaching is to promote and encourage mindfulness in teachers, mindfulness of the work they do, mindfulness of the humanity and courage of



their students, mindfulness that they can create worlds for the children in their classes. The effects of having teachers awake and present to the possibilities of pedagogy may be incalculable. Ultimately, storytelling is a song of the soul and this song begins with the words: Once upon a time.

## APPENDIX A LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

I appreciate your interest in participating in the research I am conducting for my doctoral degree at the University of Maryland. This study will explore the experiences of teachers who use storytelling in their classrooms. I ask you to tell a minimum of four stories of your choosing and to explore your experiences of storytelling in the classroom through individual conversations. One after you tell your first two stories, and the other after you tell the next two stories.

I am asking you to attend an initial meeting with the other participants, at which I will provide some background on storytelling. At this meeting we will discuss the elements of storytelling, along with effective ways to use storytelling in your classrooms. We will explore the ways in which you may already be using storytelling in your classrooms, how accessible stories are to teachers, and how storytelling and teaching are related. I will model storytelling and describe how I prepare to tell a story. At this time we will discuss scheduling any practice sessions, you may wish to have, so that I may provide support for your storytelling. A final meeting of the group will give us a chance to reflect on the journey we have taken. As a participant you will receive a list of storytelling resources for teachers and a copy of Margaret Read MacDonald's book, *The Storyteller's Start Up Book*, a book I have found to be a great resource for storytellers at all levels of experience.

You may use a pseudonym for my reporting and you will not be identified by your name anywhere in published documents. Each time we meet, our conversations will be recorded and transcribed, and I will provide you with a copy of your conversations. After the research is complete I will share the results with you. If at all possible I would like to complete the preparation sessions in the summer of 2010. There will be an initial group meeting, practice sessions, either individually or in a group, and a final group meeting. The locations of the meetings will be determined by what is most convenient for you and the other participants. You will find more detail in the enclosed consent form.

This study will make important contributions to understanding the value and benefits of storytelling for teachers and students. I am hopeful that you will agree to participate. If you do, please sign the enclosed consent form, which I will collect when we meet. I will contact you when I am ready to schedule our meetings. If you have any questions at all, please feel free to call or email me at the contact numbers listed below.

Thank you and I look forward to working with you.

Moira Dougherty Home: (301) 864-2384 Cell: (301) 526-4199  
Email: mo\_doc@hotmail.com

**APPENDIX B  
CONSENT FORM**

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Once Upon a Teacher: A Phenomenological Investigation of Teachers Who Use Storytelling in the Classroom</b>
	This is a research project being conducted by Moira Dougherty (student investigator) under the guidance of Dr. Francine Hultgren (Principal Investigator) at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a classroom teacher who has expressed an interest in using storytelling in your classroom. The purpose of this research project is to uncover and describe what constitutes the meaning for teachers who use storytelling in their classrooms. The educational orientation of this research is connected to an interest in the understanding that teachers have of storytelling in classroom situations.
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	As part of this study you will be asked to use storytelling in your classroom, engage in conversations about your storytelling, and meet with the other study participants as a group to discuss your storytelling experiences. You will be given opportunities to learn about and practice storytelling. You will be asked to use storytelling in your classroom a minimum of four times, two before our first conversation and two before our second conversation. The procedures of the study involve an initial group meeting to discuss storytelling, telling stories in class, and having two individual conversations with the student researcher, Moira Dougherty, of approximately an hour and a half each. At the end of the study all participants will take part in a group conversation lasting approximately one and one half to two hours. All of these conversations will be conducted in a location in which you feel comfortable. In the two individual sessions, the conversation will center around your experience of storytelling and what you see as most significant. The types of questions I might ask will center on your experience of storytelling: (1) What makes a story a success for you? (2) How do you know when a storytelling is successful? (3) What is your experience of storytelling in your class? (4) Have you ever told a story that was not well received? (5) Have you chosen to use storytelling to further delivery of instruction or to utilize it some other way? Further questions will be based on your personal experiences and your previous answers. To summarize, there will be two group sessions and two individual conversations. These sessions and conversations will be conducted in locations in which you feel comfortable.
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, audiotapes and all written material will be kept in a locked file. Your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Audiotapes will be destroyed after ten years. You may choose to use a pseudonym. Any writing about this research will protect your identity to the fullest extent possible. Your information may be shared with the representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required by law. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible.
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	There may be some risks from participating in this research study. Possible risks include being uncomfortable about your storytelling ability and telling stories with the student investigator present.

<p><b>What are the benefits of this research?</b></p>	<p>The benefits to you may include increased comfort and competence using storytelling as part of your pedagogical practice. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the uses teachers might make of storytelling.</p>
<p><b>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</b></p>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p>
<p><b>Is any medical treatment available if I am injured?</b></p>	<p>Participation in this research is highly unlikely to cause injury.</p>
<p><b>What if I have questions?</b></p>	<p>This research is being conducted by <b>Dr. Francine Hultgren</b>, EDPS, at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Francine Hultgren at: (301)405-4562, 2210 Benjamin Building, (fh@umd.edu.).</p> <p>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: <b>Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678.</b> This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>
<p><b>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent</b></p>	<p>Your signature indicates that: you are at least 18 years of age, the research has been explained to you, your questions have been fully answered, and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</p>
<p><b>Signature and Date</b></p>	<p><b>NAME OF SUBJECT</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>DATE</b></p>

## **APPENDIX C POTENTIAL QUESTIONS**

I am interested in each aspect of your storytelling experience, from choosing a story through telling the story to your class. The following are questions that may be used to prompt conversations throughout the study.

### Choosing and Learning the Story

- 1) How did you choose stories to tell?
- 2) What was your experience of learning to tell the stories?

### Telling the Story and Afterwards

- 1) How would you describe your experience as you told stories?
- 2) Were there any aspects of this experience that surprised you?
- 3) How did you feel emotionally when you were telling the story?
- 4) What did you notice about yourself when you were telling stories?
- 5) What made the greatest or most vivid impression on you?
- 6) What were your physical reactions to the storytelling process?
- 7) Tell me about your class' reactions. What made the most impact on you?
- 8) How did this experience differ from your regular practice?

## APPENDIX D

### RESOURCES FOR STORYTELLING

While this is by no means a comprehensive list of materials available to you, I have included the materials I found most helpful to me when I told stories in the classroom.

Booth, D., & Barton, B. (2000). *Story works: How teachers can use shared stories in the new curriculum*. Ontario, Canada: Markham.

Forest, H. (1995). *Wonder tales from around the world*. Little Rock, AR: August House.

Harrison, A. (1992). *Easy to tell stories for young children*.  
Jonesborough, TN: National Storytelling Press.

Holt, B., & Mooney, D. (2000). *More ready to tell tales from around the world*.  
Little Rock, AR: August House.

Holt, B., & Mooney, D. (1994). *Ready to tell tales: Sure fire stories from America's favorite storytellers*. Little Rock, AR: August House.

*Many Voices: True tales from America's past*. (1995). National Storytelling Association.  
Jonesborough, TN: National Storytelling Press.

Mooney, D., & Holt, B. (1996). *The Storyteller's guide: Storytellers share advice for the classroom, boardroom, showroom, podium, pulpit, and center stage*. Little Rock, AR: August House.

Pirotta, S. (2007). *Around the world in 80 tales*. Boston: Kingfisher.

*Tales as Tools: The Power of story in the classroom*. (1994). National Storytelling Association  
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Yolen, J. (2000). *Touch magic: Fantasy, faerie & folklore in the literature of children*.  
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