

CO-CREATING SPACES:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO BELONGING, IDENTITY, AND CURRICULUM
MAKING WITHIN SCHOOLS

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Tara Lynn Prystay Thiessen, candidate for the degree of Master of Education in Curriculum & Instruction, has presented a thesis titled, ***Co-Creating Spaces: A Narrative Inquiry into Belonging, Identity, and Curriculum Making Within Schools***, in an oral examination held on Wednesday, July 18, 2012. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) inquires into the lives of three teachers, Anne-Marie, Lucy, and me. As three co-researchers we inquired into our stories of experiences which we lived out as children and youth as we participated in art making spaces in school. Throughout our research conversations we shared artistic representations of our experiences. Each of these conversations was audio taped and highlighted tensions we experienced in schools. This unfolding sharing of our stories of experiences led Anne-Marie, Lucy, and me to create visual art pieces that represented the vital place of art making experiences and spaces as we negotiated diverse school contexts. I drew upon both our research conversations and our artistic representations to compose this thesis which highlights art-making experiences as central in shaping a curriculum of belonging in schools. All aspects of this narrative inquiry were negotiated with Anne-Marie and Lucy.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Mike: I thank you for your patience and for your tireless support throughout this journey. I truly appreciate your willingness to be without a wife for many, many weekends and evenings over the past 4 years.

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1. NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS

I can remember the exact moment drama became an integral part of my life. I was in Grade 7 trying, as I think all middle years students do, to find a place to fit in. I was an awkward teenager, chubby and shy, wanting acceptance from my peers. A friend suggested we audition for the drama production. We signed up; I practiced at home and went to my audition feeling nervous but excited. However, it's not the audition I remember but the next day when the roles were posted.

There was my name beside the character of Mariah, the lead female role! I was so excited I ran to my friend's locker and we both collapsed in a fit of giggles and excited chatter. It was in this moment that I remember feeling as though someone or something had let me in. I felt as though I was finally going to belong.

As I reflect back on this experience I think the idea of “fitting in” was not something I began to awaken to until my middle year's school experiences. In elementary school everyone seemed to fit in. We had grown up together and although I remember moments of tension around the usual childhood issues, such as arguments over playground equipment, my years in elementary school were peaceful. Although I was not aware of it at the time I now see that a dominant narrative shaping my elementary schooling was that if there was unhappiness about yourself or issues around fitting in these were to be kept silent. For example, I remember Grade 6:

In Grade 6 I had two very close friends, Lisa and Cheryl¹. Throughout the year it seemed that Cheryl became jealous of my friendship with Lisa. There were many instances when it seemed that Cheryl was intentionally working to make Lisa feel left out by excluding her from activities or ignoring her when she was around. This bothered Lisa so much that she decided to confide in a teacher about Cheryl's treatment. The teacher called the three of us together and I remember her talking about the importance of being friends and of treating people the way we wanted to be treated. I can remember Cheryl sitting across from the teacher and nodding as though she was agreeing with what the teacher was saying. I also remember Lisa trying to voice her concern about Cheryl in an effort to make the teacher understand how Cheryl was affecting her friendships with me and other girls but, it seemed as though the teacher wanted us to come to an agreement about how we should treat each other so we would get along in the classroom.

As my story above shows, as a child in school I felt expected to get along with everyone. As a child in school, I do not remember a time when I was able to express tensions in relation with classmates without receiving a speech from teachers about the importance of cooperation and of getting along. I am now coming to see that instead of learning to question the dominant narrative of fitting in, I was taught to keep my concerns to myself so that I did not disrupt the teacher's smooth classroom routines by speaking out.

This knowledge of how to be a student in school seemed to change quickly once Grade 7 arrived. Not only did my peers and I travel to a new school where we met

¹ Throughout my thesis, actual names have been changed to respect the privacy of the identities of individuals and places.

students from all of the other public elementary schools but our now small group of friends seemed forced to coexist with the new people. We, however, no longer seemed able to keep silent about our feelings regarding the tensions that emerged between us. In many ways it seemed as though we were expected, since we were now adolescents, to be unhappy, indignant, and vocal about our lives.

Within our new school setting, my peers and I seemed focused on seeking out friends who were fun and confident. Those youth who, like me, were more hesitant to meet new people seemed left behind. So while the story of fitting in did not seem as strongly followed in junior high as it was in elementary school, my peers and I seemed even more focused on fitting in: in junior high the need to fit in suddenly seemed to become the dominant narrative shaping our lives. I changed friends quickly, agreed with the same jokes as the other girls, and disliked the same people. It was, however, some time before I experienced any type of fitting in. Instead, my beginning in junior high was shaped by changes in friendships and feelings of loneliness and of being lost.

However, as shown in the story I shared at the beginning of this section, the moment I learned I had received a lead role in the school play I was overjoyed. I remember hoping that this experience would give me an opportunity to fit in. I remember feelings of having accomplished something significant and of knowing that I was ready to take on the challenge. As I rehearsed and memorized lines for the role as Mariah, I began to feel more confident in myself. I think my initial confidence was built around the hope that I would finally be seen differently by peers. Today, however, I understand that becoming Mariah in the play shifted something deeper within me: I became confident in my ability to navigate my life without changing who I was in order to fit in.

The drama role gave me the reassurance that I had something to offer. Suddenly, fitting in was not my goal. As I continue to think back I realize I never fit in with the “popular” or “in” crowd. Instead, I found a group of people who were comfortable with who I was and who I was becoming.

Outwardly, I remember the excitement friends and family felt for me when I told them about my role as Mariah. They were very supportive and, I believe, somewhat surprised because although I previously participated in smaller Christmas concert type productions this was the first time I was going to be in the spotlight. Other students began to notice that I was more outspoken and once the production was over, the ways I interacted with peers also shifted. For example, I became more vocal in class and more confident when confronted by less friendly students. I also think I became somewhat arrogant when I walked the halls. The confidence I gained from this experience as Mariah and as part of the extracurricular drama group made me feel like I had something of value to contribute to the school; it gave me something to be proud of. It was in these ways that I began to feel like I belonged in school and, I also became no longer willing to accept other’s judgements of me. St. Clair Pond (1998) states: “Early experience of positive relationships and healthy self esteem can provide a child with the necessary foundation for establishing lifelong positive interactions” (p. 82). I believe the experience of the drama production led me to a space where my self esteem and sense of positive interactions within the drama community allowed me to find new ways of connecting with peers as well as interacting with people with whom I had difficult relationships.

For example, I remember dealing with a boy who had taken to calling me names and insulting me throughout our Grade 7 year. Previous to my experience with the drama production I tried to ignore his comments and to just quietly and inwardly cope with my feelings. After I felt as though I had become valued and supported within my drama community, I remember doing two things: I stood up for myself by informing this boy about how his words made me feel and, I began to trust my teachers enough to tell them about the situation and to ask for their support.

1.1 Wondering about Community Making.

In high school I always auditioned for the extracurricular one act plays. I was given roles every year until Grade 12. That year, two teachers approached me and asked if I wanted to take on a different role. They asked if I wanted to be the stage manager for their production. Since I made a decision that theatre was to be my future I wanted to get experience in the different areas. I accepted the role of stage manager and told my previous director that I would not be auditioning for his play. After auditions were completed and rehearsals started, I learned that my production would be cancelled because of lack of interest from the actors. Not only was I not able to be the stage manager but I was not able to audition for any other plays. This was a very difficult situation to be in because drama was the one place where I felt safe. Grade 12 was a hard year for me because of personal and academic issues. Not only did I have those issues to deal with but I did not have a drama community to depend on. I no longer looked forward to school because I was no longer a member of the drama community.

In looking back on this experience I see ways it shaped a great deal of change in my life. Throughout my Grade 12 year there were a number of difficulties that arose connected with friendships and family and I remember facing these issues feeling as though something was missing. Usually I had a drama community to turn to, a space that allowed me to deal with issues or to at least have a safe place away from my problems. Without extracurricular drama I also had a great deal more free time. In that free time I questioned my place in school and often felt lost. Extracurricular drama was a place of belonging and when I could no longer participate in it, I felt as if I had nowhere to go. Drama was a place where I could work out problems without talking about them but it was now gone from my life.

After more presently reflecting on the sense of community I remember experiencing within this extracurricular drama community, which I lost in Grade 12, I found myself drawn to Greene's (1995) ideas regarding the formation of community. Green writes that community "cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict . . . it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common" (p. 39). When relating this idea to my earlier experiences I realize that my drama community was not made solely because we were a group of people with a common goal. We were a group of people who took on a journey and assisted each other through that journey. We were able to help guide and shape each other's experiences by questioning and sharing our stories. Greene writes further that community "ought to be a space infused by the kind of imaginative awareness that enables those involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their group's becoming" (1995, p. 39). For me, the drama

community was a space where we were encouraged to collaboratively draw upon our imaginations and experiences in order to dig deeper into the lives of complicated characters or to delve into the relationships between our characters. As a group of diverse people, it seemed we were able to connect as a community through this imaginative work. If community is “marked by an emerging solidarity, as sharing of certain beliefs and a dialogue about others, [and] it...remain[s] open to newcomers” (Greene, 1995, p. 39) what happens when someone loses that community? If a community is meant to be open to newcomers, should it then be open to those who have no specific “role” within that community? When, as a teenager, I lost my connection to the extracurricular drama community I was no longer able to participate in the creative processes and imaginative bonding that occurs when actors work together. I had been a consistent member of the extracurricular drama community over a number of years. Suddenly, I found myself on the outside of that community. Where, I wonder, in school, might I have experienced a similar sense of solidarity, of shared beliefs, imaginative awareness, and openness to newcomers? Perhaps more importantly, if a community outside the classroom is lost, is it possible to experience community connections within the classroom? According to Greene “[community] can happen even in the local spaces of the classroom, particularly when students are encouraged to find their voices and their images” (p. 39). If community can be created both in and outside of the classroom, I then ask: What is community?

Dewey refers to community in a social sense. He writes that “from the standpoint of the individual, [community] consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in

participating according to the need in the values which the groups sustain” (Dewey, 1927, p. 147). As I think about my experience in relation with classroom and extracurricular communities, Dewey’s idea of the role of the individual within a community could then be placed in any context. For example, within the classroom, the students could share responsibility for contributing to and participating honestly and openly with their classmates and teacher in order to feel like a member of a classroom community. What is also unique to me in Dewey’s idea is the suggestion that the community members must be open to negotiating the values and needs of the classroom community.

As a teacher, as I think with Greene’s (1995) and Dewey’s (1927) ideas, I am becoming aware that community is not a fixed idea. If community is “achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common” (Greene, 1995, p. 39) then that space will change depending on the persons who are involved in the space. The space will also be influenced by what people have in common and, as well, what is different between them. Communities formed within the classroom are bound to shift when different tasks are taken on or different experiences connect the students with one another and with the teacher in differing ways. I am beginning to realize that this changing, evolving aspect of communities must be acknowledged and encouraged so that students can share in the creation and maintenance of their communities. Further, Dewey writes that an aspect of being

human is to develop. . . an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community; one who understands and appreciates its beliefs, desires

and methods, and one who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values. (Dewey, 1927, p. 154)

In these ways, there is hope for all students to find a place within school where they feel they can contribute in meaningful and relevant ways. The key to this happening in schools might require that students feel a genuine connection to the multiple places they experience in school—inside and outside of the classroom. For me, the first step in experiencing community in school was finding a place where I felt welcomed and accepted; a place where I felt I truly belonged. This place was outside the classroom in an extracurricular drama group.

1.2 Shifting from “Fitting in” to Belonging

As a young person, I was always the most comfortable in arts based activities. When I was given the role of Mariah in the school play I came to it with a great deal of musical experience. What I am gradually awakening to as I inquire into this experience was that until becoming Mariah my experiences with music almost always included an element of independence; there had never been much focus on collaboration or community building in relation with other students involved. As I reflect further on my drama experience in Grade 7 I think I was gradually learning that I could not build community by myself. Being involved in community meant having support and encouragement while I was learning; it also meant giving support and encouragement. Because I had never before felt this kind of support I started to look forward to school. At the end of the day I knew I would be going on stage and interacting with a community of people. I also felt that this community of people cared about my thoughts and opinions. I often remember members of this community asking for my interpretations of

characters and scenes. I worked with fellow actors on their lines and together we became drawn into the worlds of our characters. I remember often feeling helpful in this community when my questions led someone to think deeply about their decisions. In this community I remember feeling that I was able to make an impact and that I was encouraged to speak up. My opinions were valued.

As I continue to think back, I sense that my feelings of significance and acceptance shaped my feelings of belonging. Brokenleg (1998) writes that “belonging is the organizing principle in Partnership cultures. Significance is assured by belonging, whereas in Dominator, or dominant, cultures one gains significance by standing out from the others” (p. 132). Brokenleg uses the terms “partnership cultures” and “dominator cultures” as a way of viewing cultures first introduced under the “Cultural Transformation Theory” explained by Eisler (1987).

While reading Eisler’s (1987) work, I began to understand that dominator cultures may refer to “the ranking of one half of humanity over the other” (p. xvii) and partnership cultures can be looked at as “the principle of linking rather than ranking” (p. xvii). Eisler clarifies that with the partnership model “diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority” (p. xvii). Connecting these ideas with Brokenleg’s explanation of belonging, and as I reflect on my drama experience, I realize I did not consider myself significant because I was a lead of the play. I came to see myself as significant because I felt accepted and as though I belonged within the drama community. To be accepted, supported, and cared for within this community and to feel that I was able to show acceptance, support and care for others, was what gave me the strength to participate fully within the drama production.

Brokenleg (1998) also explains that “mastery measures competence by an individual's progress relative to past performance rather than in comparison to others. [In this way] the achievements of all are celebrated” (p. 132). I feel deep resonance with Brokenleg’s thoughts around mastery and belonging because as I look back now on my experiences I realize it was not the performance that mattered to me. Instead, I think it was through my growing feelings of belonging within the school landscape that I began to see value in myself. I think that rather than compare my acting ability to the abilities of fellow actors, I was gradually realizing how being in a community and belonging with fellow actors, and that all of our individual and group achievements could each be celebrated, was what I most valued.

Of course I was not consciously thinking about these aspects of my experiences as a youth. In looking back on these experiences all these years later I realize the impact they had in my current teaching and, in particular, my passions for creating extracurricular drama communities within schools. Because I know the powerful place extracurricular drama communities held in my life, I now strive to create similar kinds of communities in the schools where I teach. In my classrooms, as well, I work hard at emphasizing the importance of creating a classroom climate where everyone feels they belong. I believe my own earlier classroom experiences as a youth in school have made me sensitive to the necessity of belonging. As a teacher I emphasize openness and respect with students when it comes to sharing ideas with the class and I focus on the concept of trust a great deal when first working with students.

The first day of my Education Psychology class our professor had us sit in a circle and explained that we were going to start every class with a rock circle

where we would pass the rock around the circle and have the opportunity to share stories with the class. We were to listen while our classmates told a story asked a question or simply made a remark about their day and we were allowed to pass if we did not feel like contributing. Her only rule was that we listen respectfully and attentively while other students shared their thoughts.

One way I now try to begin to shape belonging in my drama classes is through students and my living out our own form of a “rock circle” practice². During the rock circle I pose a question to the students or have them share a story or anything they feel is important with the class. In high school classes students eagerly shared stories about their weekends or problems they were having with their families. For example, in a Drama 20 class it was not unusual for students to ask for advice, opinions or ideas from their classmates and me.

I had 12 students in my Drama 20 class and I decided to introduce the rock circle concept. I outlined the rules making sure students understood they only had to share as much about themselves as they felt comfortable. As time went on, this ritual became a very important part of our day. One student, Jade, was having difficulty at home and the rock circle seemed to become her time to look for support and comfort. Some days Jade asked other students for advice but more often than not, it seemed she just wanted someone to listen.

² The Educational Psychology professor did not link her teaching us to live out a rock circle with any particular cultural beliefs. I recognize that a “talking circle” is a sacred practice within many First Nations. I explain this to students with whom I engage in a rock circle and that because I have not been given the talking circle teachings by an Elder I am not engaging students in a talking circle.

It is easy for me to think back to my days in this Drama 20 class and to remember how open the students became about their experiences and how willing they were to share their stories around the rock circle. But, as I think back to this Drama 20 and other classes, I also remember how difficult it was to get to a place in the process where students like Jade felt comfortable and safe to trust her peers and me. As a class, we saw each other every day for an hour. Every day I initiated the rock circle. There were many days, especially at the beginning, where no one participated, and where everyone chose to pass. At these times I felt it was on me to create a place of safety and I remember attempting to do so by sharing many stories about my life. It was not until November that Jade felt comfortable enough to share aspects of her life with us. The development of relationships was so significant because it took months of risk taking and openness with students before a genuine sense of trust was built. There have been, however, times when this trust was not built.

I taught a Drama 10 class in both the fall and winter semester. In both classes, I started out with the rock circle. The fall class brought together a very different group of students, a group of young people who seemed to spend the entire semester fighting popularity contests, bullying, and struggling to find a space where they could all fit in. Despite all of my efforts, and even with help from other students, this classroom did not become a trusting place for students. The rock circle died and we fell into the same routine everyday: a routine based on following my strict rules, deadlines, and objectives. My second semester was a completely different experience. I had a new group of students who were still diverse, but who seemed to share a love of creativity. The rock circle took flight

in this class and turned into a story sharing circle where the students told stories of their lives. This group and I became an unstoppable force and created many dramatic pieces. The students were risk takers, writers, and comedic geniuses and all students, even reluctant Lyle, a Grade 12 student among Grade 10 peers, participated fully.

As I think about classes where a sense of community seemed to develop I wonder about the place of belonging in this process of community making. Do students need to shift from living by stories of fitting in to stories of belonging in order for community to take shape? If so, how might I, as a teacher, support these shifting stories?

1.3 The Vital Importance of Relationships

A number of different shifts occurred with both groups of the Drama 10 students whom I storied above. Even though I worked hard to shape feelings of trust in both classes, the second class seemed to want to connect with each other while the first class seemed to struggle with the differences between them for the entire four months they were together. This experience taught me many things. Firstly, I learned that as a teacher I need to always strive to create relationships with students; every day I need to make time to check in with them. Secondly, I learned that as a teacher, there are forces beyond my control that enter the classroom; I need to do my best to work with what comes through the door.

Since this year with the two Drama 10 classes, I have worked alongside other challenging groups. As I reflect on these experiences I am reminded of the importance of continuing to try. Gould Lundy (2006) describes a project where she was asked to work with high school students from three different cities in Canada—Halifax, Toronto, and

Vancouver—in an effort to learn what was most relevant to the students about education. She selected nine students from each school and because she was most interested in hearing from students whose “voices are often invisible” (p. 48) she chose diverse students whom she describes as “not only those students who were performing well academically” (p. 48). Gould Lundy’s goal was to gain insight into the students’ school experiences through various dramatic techniques. Through this process, Gould Lundy hoped to discover what the students felt they needed from their teachers and schools. After working for several weeks with each group all of the groups came together. What was interesting was that although each group’s creative pieces were different from one another all of the creative pieces showed similar ideas about what the students felt they needed from teachers. The students ideas included: “teach us, allow us to make mistakes, respect us, don’t make assumptions about us without getting to know us, [and] we are vulnerable” (p. 51). Gould Lundy wrote that in order to achieve any of these goals, relationships must first be built.

Trust building is especially significant in drama because through drama there are a number of experiences people may want, or feel compelled, to share. Gould Lundy (2006) notes that her goal was to “gain insight into the details of [student’s] lives” and to “probe deep enough inside that human experience to find the voices we needed to hear” (p. 48). She planned to accomplish these goals through drama. For Gould Lundy “the first, most important job when [each] group met was to establish trust, collaboration and respect” (p. 48). Without these elements, it is unlikely Gould Lundy’s goals would have been met. Much like within my teaching experiences, without trust, collaboration, and

respect, classrooms do not become places where youth can experience feelings of belonging.

Barrera (2006) writes about “school bonding” and I think this process is also connected to shifting from living stories of fitting in to living stories of belonging. “School bonding refers to the sense of meaningful connection to the school institution and the people associated with it. School bonding may include a sense of belonging” (Barrera, 2006, p. 1). If I take Barrera’s ideas on bonding and look at them through the lens of drama, bonding seems to be intimately tied with the idea of belonging within a classroom community. In order for students to feel as if they belong in their classroom, as well as their school, bonding needs to occur. As a teacher, I am awakening to the need for spaces within the classroom where relationships are encouraged and can develop. If relationships are formed and if “students feel a sense of personal attachment to the school” perhaps they will be “less likely to engage in destructive behaviours and are more likely to engage in. . . school success” (Barrera, 2006, p. 2). As I think about Barrera’s thoughts alongside my earlier experiences with the two Drama 20 classes I sense that feelings of “personal attachment to the schools” and to the classes may encourage students to come to school on a more consistent basis. If this is so, I then wonder if drama, in class or extracurricular, might become an aspect of student retention through the bonding or sense of belonging experienced in drama communities.

Similarly, Smyth and Fasoli (2007) describe the notion of “relational power” and how the power of positive relationships affects student engagement and, at times, is the reason students stay in school. The concept of relational power is discussed in terms of

how one school in Australia worked to create positive change for students “at risk³” of leaving school early by encouraging staff and students to make relationships a priority. Through this process, teachers began to realize the importance of “earning [students’] respect” which Smyth and Fasoli “considered crucial to ensuring educational success” (p. 281). In this study the teachers told stories of ways their relationships with students allowed for “continuity with teachers” (p. 281) which supported them to understand that students’ “success depends on their seeing a purpose” (p. 281). I believe that central to students’ feelings of success was that they came to know school as a place where they felt safe, respected, and listened to.

Relational power, according to Smyth and Fasoli (2007), is “generally used to refer to the way in which collaboration and trust is created across and among constituent groups in schools” (p. 283). I believe relational trust is what is gained when students are involved in extracurricular drama activities. Smyth and Fasoli attend to the importance of relational power within a school which, I believe, is significant. However, I also feel this process can be linked with activities that exist outside of school. If I draw on the concept of relational power and say that in order to have a successful school we, as teachers, need to “[earn students’] respect”, create “continuity with teachers” and, if we understand and can agree that relationships are “considered crucial to ensuring educational success” which “depends on [students’] seeing a purpose”, then I believe relational power can be strengthened by extracurricular activities. Within an

³ “The labelling of students as ‘at risk’ is an individualistic approach that locates the source of failure within the students themselves, their families, their teachers and/or their schools. However, it is possible to reframe this problem by reconfiguring the phenomenon of ‘at-risk’ students and their schooling as a socially constructed condition that is capable of analysis at a number of levels using fresh perspectives. The authors were interested in analysing the socially constructed conditions that enabled students who might otherwise have dropped out to stay engaged in schooling” (Smyth & Fasoli, 2007, p. 279).

extracurricular setting there are ways for teachers to connect with students in an activity in which students already feel comfortable or successful. The relationships created once students are involved in extracurricular activities could be what keeps them striving for success. Is it so unbelievable that the only purpose for a student to come to school every day may be to maintain their place within their extracurricular community?

I am gradually realizing how important extracurricular drama was to my everyday school experience when I was growing up. In my increased wakefulness I wonder how many of the students with whom I work in school may come to school looking forward to what is happening after school and how their sense of being in school might shift if there were no extracurricular activities to which to look forward. As I continue to reflect on my extracurricular drama experiences I wonder about the many different relationships built through this process. In my own experiences as a teacher with students in extracurricular drama I realize that how I present myself and interact with students as a director is different from how I present myself and interact with students as a teacher. As a director, I am surrounded by students who share a love of drama whether it is through acting, designing sets or creating the lighting design. It is my responsibility to encourage these creative outlets as well as to teach students and guide them through different theatrical processes. Throughout the experience students are given much responsibility because they are accountable for their character, their role as stage manager, and so on.

If I metaphorically bring my knowing of extracurricular drama alongside my knowing of drama within the classroom, all the while considering Smyth and Fasoli's (2007) description of their experiences with teachers in Australia, I see that these teachers are aiming for what is achieved through extracurricular drama. Smyth and Fasoli state:

“One of the most significant power inequalities in schools is the lack of opportunity for students to have a say in their learning” (p. 284). If students are given responsibility and accountability within extracurricular activities and can achieve success there, could something similar happen within the classroom if students were also given responsibility and accountability for their learning? Would greater numbers of students feel increasingly successful in school if they were able to co-create classroom communities that were places of support and trust much like those communities created within extracurricular activities? As Cook-Sather (2002) discusses the idea of student accountability and responsibility she claims teachers need to begin to “[authorize] student perspectives” because students need to be “authors of their own understanding and assessors of their own learning” (p. 5). Therefore, if students were given the opportunity to create their own learning opportunities within extracurricular communities, and through these experiences to feel successful in school, could they draw upon these processes within other subjects and achieve similar feelings of success?

1.4 Relational Belonging as Shaping Spaces for Awakening to Diverse Gifts

As I tried to show earlier I believe an internal shift occurred during the time I was part of the Grade 7 drama production. Prior to this experience I struggled with feeling like I did not belong. Achieving the role in the production was the first moment I remember feeling a sense of success that connected me with other people in the school. Being part of Grade 7 drama made me feel like I was part of a group. The rest of the students and I worked hard on the production and through this process I grew comfortable voicing my opinions and displaying my sense of humour. In these ways I felt

more comfortable in the space of school. I finally felt my gift was becoming visible. Drama was my gift. It was something I could do well.

The concept of students' gifts is one I found difficult to research. In wanting to better understand how a focus on students' gifts may support students to more strongly identify with their school communities, I searched for literature that would deepen my thinking. However, in the midst of this search, it became clear that the concept of giftedness in the academic world meant talent in academic subjects⁴. What is predominant in this literature is a focus on developing advanced classes for students who excel in a particular area. I was not, however, seeing "gifts" as connected with advanced academic programs. Instead, I wanted to consider students who have strengths in areas that cannot be measured: a gift for creativity, leadership, machinery, and so on. All students, all people, have gifts. These gifts, if recognized and supported in school might be tapped into in a way that will hopefully support students to feel an increased sense of connection with their school. Students considered academically gifted have been given a voice through research into advanced academic programs, but I could not find any Western literature about the gifts schools value in students aside from those defined as brilliant or as scoring highly on standardized achievement tests in relation with mandated subject matter outcomes. Even through the arts, students with an eye for visual art, or those who exhibit musical excellence, were considered gifted. For this reason, I gradually decided to look outside Western literature and to focus on the work of

⁴ Later in my thesis writing I was pointed to Smith's 1999 article "What is given in giftedness?". Smith writes about gifts as something "[that] has been freely given. . . [gifts are] given freely [and] must be freely received without ulterior motive or agenda" (pp. 143-144). This meaning of giftedness resonated with my understanding of "gifts".

Aboriginal⁵ scholars. It was within this search that I resonated with the understandings of “gifts” held by many writers of Aboriginal ancestry. *The Sacred Tree: Reflections on Native American Spirituality* (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1984) shows that:

Human beings create many of the necessary conditions for the development of their own potential. They do this through the operation of their will. They decide to do so. Unless a person decides and acts to provide the necessary conditions for the development of hidden qualities. . . these gifts remain like the fruit hidden within the tree. (p. 34)

As I link these thoughts with the ways in which I believe drama transformed my experiences in school I continue to be drawn toward understanding the relational aspects of belonging. How might my life have unfolded if my gift with drama had remained hidden? Through participation in drama I experienced a space where my gifts were not only acknowledged but, valued, and in this way, school became a place to which I felt connected. Could it be possible for school to be a place where student’s diverse gifts are brought forward? In my school experiences the relationships that developed within the communities I was part of formed a space where I felt as though my gifts with drama were accepted. It was in this way that I began to feel part of the larger school story.

Further, *The Sacred Tree* (1984) describes that “the Creator has made each of us to be a unique human being, and given to each of us a special combination of gifts to be used to further develop ourselves and to serve others” (p. 35). Drama has been the place where I have been able to develop myself as a person and I believe my gifts in drama

⁵ I use the term Aboriginal to include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

have been central in shaping my identity as a person and as a teacher. I believe I am better able to serve students because of the knowledge my drama experiences gave me in how to connect with students, how to begin to create communities, and how to support students to feel that school is more relevant through co-creating a curriculum that speaks to them through their own experiences. Asking the question: “How might my life have unfolded if my gift in drama remained hidden?” causes me to reflect and consider that without having a space to live out this gift I may not have found myself in the teaching field. I believe my life would have taken a much different turn had drama not been a part of my experiences in relation with school.

Through his research Sefa Dei (2003) sees that “dropping out” from school is conventionally attributed to individual failings and weaknesses (p. 245). Further, he writes:

Youth truancy and delinquency are generally explained by poor parenting and socialization skills. Often victims are seen as the causes of their own problems. The individuation of school success or failure allows social science to see homes, families and their support systems as the sources of schooling problems instead of critically examining what schools do or do not do to ... support ... all students.

(p. 245)

As I reflect further on Sefa Dei’s (2003) work on youth disengagement in Canadian schools while continuing to inquire into my earlier experiences, there are questions about schooling that I believe need to be asked. As I am drawn toward these questions I cannot help but think about how, for example, in Western Canada, we could be doing better at supporting students to complete high school and to enrol in post-

secondary education. While the high school graduation rate has risen in every Canadian province during the past decade, approximately 9.5% of young workers age 20-24 in the three-year period between 2002-03 and 2005-06 still had no high school diploma. The early school leaving rates were even higher in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta at 12.6%, 10.3% and 11.3% respectively. The problem is even more acute in rural communities. In rural Manitoba and Alberta, early school leaving rates were over 20% in the same period. (Chisholm, 2009). According to Labour Force Survey data, for 2007/2010, the “dropout” rate among First Nations people living off-reserve, Métis, and Inuit aged 20 to 24 was 22.6%, compared to 8.5% for non-Aboriginal people. By Aboriginal group, the dropout rate among young off-reserve First Nations people (North American Indians) was 25.8%, and for Métis, 18.9%. (Gilmore, 2010)

In thinking about the lives that these statistics represent, I am drawn toward questions, such as the following: Do we take the time to allow all students’ gifts to be noticed and valued? How do teachers make spaces for all young people to make relationships so they feel they belong and in this way, create spaces where gifts might be discovered and valued? What can I, as a teacher, do to ensure these gifts and relationships are not only sustained but allowed to flourish? How do I, as a teacher, make time to discover student’s gifts while also addressing the government mandated “outcomes” I am increasingly required to meet? Does this focus on meeting government mandated outcomes smother students’ diverse gifts? In Chapter 2 I inquire into these questions in relation with more of my stories of experience and additional literature.

2. TRANSFORMATIONS IN MY UNDERSTANDINGS OF CURRICULUM

In my fourth year of university I was required to take the course Introduction to Dance Education. In this class we were to learn about the history of dance, different styles of dance, how to create dances, and how to use this knowledge in our classrooms. In March of that year, America declared war on Iraq and this struck a nerve with some classmates and me. We had been discussing our thoughts and feelings before class and ended up in an emotional debate. The intensity of this debate carried into class and the professor took notice. She stopped the class and asked us to talk about what was bothering us. After sharing our thoughts on war, particularly the Iraq war, she drew upon our frustrations and anger and encouraged us to explore and express them through dance. We began by vocalizing our emotions and then moved those feelings into dance. I did not realize it then but, as I look back, I am beginning to understand that our professor let our stories, thoughts, and feelings reshape and lead her curriculum objectives for that class.

When teaching Drama 30 to an incredibly talented group of Grade 12's I found myself struggling with how to challenge them. They were very creative students. I tried looking through the government mandated subject matter outcomes for drama to see if there were any activities that seemed interesting. Finding none, I went to the students and asked them, "What do you want to learn?" One group of

13 students responded by saying they wanted more experience with script writing processes. After getting the other groups working on areas of their choice I worked closely outside of class time with the group who wanted to write a script. They had a specific goal in mind: they wanted to write the script for our fall drama production. We worked during lunch, after school, and in class and came up with a rough draft of a script. The group had their English teacher edit their script and they became inspired to write songs to go along with it. Over 3 months, this group of 13 students wrote an entire script and songs. Together we put it into production. We had a cast of over 40 students working with their script. The first night of the production I went on stage and informed the audience that this was a piece written by a group of Grade 12 students. The response after the production was incredible. I felt that these students gained a genuine understanding of drama in a way they would not have experienced without taking on the challenge they set for themselves.

As shown by the stories above, I believe there are times when teachers make time to discover students' gifts and experiences and can situate these as central within a curricular setting. For example, in the Introduction to Dance Education course, the professor made a space for my peers and me at a time when we were feeling angry and frustrated. Instead of focusing on her daily curricular objectives she looked at how we could use what we were feeling to make the class. By doing so, this professor allowed us to reshape her lesson plan because she realized there were more important issues to address. She used our feelings of anger and frustration to shape the class so that it was

relevant to the subject matter. She allowed us to draw upon our thoughts, feelings, and voices, and through dance to express something pertinent to us on that day.

Similarly, as my above storied experience as a teacher shows, I found the drama subject matter guide⁶ difficult to turn to in my experience with the Grade 12 students. They were a unique group who had gained many different theatrical experiences outside of the classroom. Therefore, I decided to ask the students what they wanted to learn. In doing so, the students came up with an idea I had not thought of and, both they and I became passionate about the tasks at hand. With that particular group I never had to worry about off task behaviour and, often, was pleasantly surprised when they showed up in the classroom at any free moment throughout the day. I believe that because the students shaped the paths of their learning themselves they found a space in the classroom that let them connect with the subject of drama. When I had to assign a mark for their semester I was not surprised to see how many mandated subject matter objectives they had attended to as they wrote and performed their script.

As I considered these two stories of experience I began to question where the idea of “curriculum” comes from. What exactly is curriculum? Does it only exist in the guides we are given at the beginning of our teaching careers?

When thinking of the first time I heard the term “curriculum” I was drawn back to my first year of university in an Education Professional Studies course. In this course I remember being told that the curriculum is what we rely on, what we teach from, and that it is a guide that tells us, as teachers, what is most important to teach students. After that class this definition of curriculum lived in me for years. Throughout my university

⁶ Saskatchewan Curriculum Drama 10, 20, 30 Curriculum Requirements 1993.

journey, I constantly read, reread, and highlighted sections of curriculum guides for exams, presentations, and lesson plans. In spite of all of the reasons to use the curriculum guides none were as important as my internship. During this experience I learned alongside an amazing cooperating teacher who taught me, among many other things that I could teach anything in the class as long as I could relate it to a mandated curriculum objective. This started a new thought process where I planned my lessons around the objective I wanted to cover on any particular day. This is how I viewed curriculum for my first few teaching years.

As a first year teacher, I was required to have year plans based on the subject matter objectives for each unit I taught. I had binders of lessons plans made from my internship that carefully noted how and when I used resources from the curriculum as well as some lessons inspired from the curriculum guide itself. I felt prepared, confident, and knowledgeable if ever questioned about the subject matter content I taught in my drama classes. I knew this preparation supported my day to day interactions in the classroom with students. I also knew it would be especially useful when the superintendent came to observe:

I remember feeling very comfortable teaching in front of the superintendent. He was a friendly person, frank but easy to talk to. He was supportive in my interview and made it a practice to stop by the drama classroom when he was in the school. The day he came to officially observe my teaching, I was prepared. My lesson was organized and my objectives were clear. The lesson went well, although it was far from perfect. Instead of talking about what I could have done better or if I felt my objectives were met, the superintendent focused on the

students. I remember him commenting about how comfortable the classroom felt and how the students seemed to respond to me in a positive way. He spent a couple minutes reminding me how important it was that those relationships were developed because I would not find success simply in what I was teaching. His emphasis was on the “how” of teaching and for him, this meant strong relationships with students.

Although I was not awake to this at the time, as I think back to this first visit from the superintendent I realize he was the first person who made me question the idea of curriculum. Without knowing it then I was beginning to look outside of the subject matter documents for ways of teaching students. My focus gradually drifted away from the binders and moved toward the students. After leaving my first school, one that emphasized student centered teaching, I was ready to draw upon, at another school, what I was beginning to understand about teaching. At this next school I was teaching younger students and decided to use student input, rather than the subject matter outcomes alone, as a way to guide my first year at the new school. I continued to use student ideas to shape the lesson plans, particularly in drama. Students had an exceptional amount of input and I discovered how many government mandated subject matter outcomes⁷ I was able to attend to while allowing students to shape their learning in ways that interested them. I did not know it at the time but, I am beginning to understand that through these lived experiences I was gradually redefining my understanding of curriculum.

⁷ I realize I am shifting between two terms of “objectives” and “outcomes” in some of my stories and my inquiry into these stories. As a beginning teacher in Saskatchewan the Ministry of Education used the language of objectives in subject matter documents. Today, the Ministry of Education uses the language of outcomes. My shifting between these two terms highlights the temporal nature of my experience.

2.1 Beginning to Understand Myself as a Curriculum Maker

It was not until my EC&I 804 graduate course that I began to put these pieces together. What I was experiencing in my own classroom was not able to be described using the subject matter guides. I now realize that what was beginning to happen within my teaching was the idea of curriculum making. In EC&I 804 I began to understand that the term “curriculum” has many different meanings. In the class, I was able to read a great deal about curriculum and was drawn to Clandinin and Connelly’s (1992) chapter about the “teacher as curriculum maker”. In this chapter, Clandinin and Connelly discuss the Oxford English Dictionary definition of curriculum and how, over time, educators have used that definition to shape how curriculum is created: “a regular course of study or training, as at a school or university” (p. 364). This definition was familiar to me since it is how I was introduced to the concept of curriculum years earlier in the Educational Professional Studies course. However, throughout the EC&I 804 course I began to discover that the drama subject matter documents were one aspect of curriculum making. Clandinin and Connelly point out a second piece of the Oxford English Dictionary definition in which curriculum can be described as “the course of one’s life” (p. 364). As they continue to describe curriculum in relation to this second definition Clandinin and Connelly introduce the idea of curriculum becoming something more than the subject matter guide given to teachers:

Teachers and students live out a curriculum; teachers do not transmit, implement, or teach a curriculum and objectives; nor are they and their students carried forward in their work and studies by a curriculum of textbooks and content, instructional methodologies and intentions. An account of teachers’ and students’

lives over time is the curriculum, although intentionality, objectives, and curriculum materials do play a part in it. (p. 365)

As I looked back on the experiences I lived in my early teaching years and inquired into these experiences through Clandinin and Connelly's (1992) ideas about curriculum, I began to understand that what I was trying to accomplish with students was to live out a different kind of curriculum. The curriculum that was beginning to exist in our classroom was a space where learning was occurring, not only through or about the subject matter outcomes but, through the stories, experiences, and connections students made with the outcomes, with one another, and with me. Each student brought a different outlook or point of view and through those differences, the curriculum became the ideas and concepts brought out in their questions and experiences rather than simply the activities I was creating for them:

In Grade 3 drama there is a unit in the subject matter outcomes about dragons and a number of activities are suggested to direct students toward specific questions which should lead them into a dramatic experience. Wanting to include the students in the process I took one idea from these drama subject matter outcomes as a starting point. This starting point was asking students what they knew about dragons and how they came to learn about them. From that simple question came stories from books, television, and the students' imaginations. There was a moment that I now realize was a point where the curriculum stopped being about dragons and started becoming about fighting for what is right. The students gradually drew upon their childhood experiences to shape a drama about how dragons should be treated, interactions which seemed to mirror the

feelings they earlier shared in their stories of dragons. They spoke out on behalf of the dragons, protested about the conditions of the dragon's homes when it was discovered they were kidnapped, and they fought to reclaim the dragon's lives in an effort to show the dragons how life has the potential to be better than they thought. Instead of leading children into dramatic activities about maps and biographies the students created stories about the histories of the dragons, their abilities and strengths, and the love they had for the dragon that was assigned for them. A wonderful, engaging curriculum emerged, but only in part as a result of the earlier noted subject matter outcome I drew upon.

Although subject matter guides, resource materials, and ideas are present in my teaching, I am beginning to see that part of my work as a teacher is to allow students' life experiences to connect to the work that unfolds in the classroom. As I learned these new ways to think about curriculum I found myself increasingly drawing on the idea of "curriculum potential" as discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (1992, p. 376) as a way of viewing the role of the provincially mandated subject matter outcomes. Rather than accept the subject matter guides as a strict formula, curriculum potential causes me to think of them "not [as] embodiments of things for teachers to do but reservoirs of potential from which teachers and students may create a variety of classroom curricula" (p. 376). As shown in my story of working alongside the Grade 3 students the subject matter guide was a way to ask students to think about the lives of the dragons. Instead of creating scenarios that I thought, as their teacher, were most relevant, the students were able to connect to this subject matter, transforming the drama that took shape into something that belonged to them.

Similar to my experience with the children in Grade 3 are those of Paley whose teaching stories are discussed throughout Clandinin and Connelly's (1992) chapter. Through her experiences with Kindergarten children Paley noticed that "children learn from one another's stories and see themselves as new characters both in their own stories and the story being constructed in the classroom" (p. 390). This idea resonated with my experiences with the Grade 3 class because the students seemed to experience the drama class as both the dragon character they created for themselves but also as part of the theme of acceptance that was created through the drama. Together, they were able to use their individual experiences to teach each other about stories of their lives.

It was through the EC&I 804 readings, discussions, and reflections on my own teaching experiences that I began to understand that as a teacher, I am a curriculum maker. Perhaps, I realized, I am not a curriculum maker in the sense that I was part of creating the drama subject matter document that is used provincially but, I am a curriculum maker as I draw upon the subject matter document, the community in the making within the classroom, and my own experiences. In this way, I began to understand that my definition of curriculum was evolving from that of only the subject matter to the world of connections created within the classroom. Looking back on my experiences with the Grade 3 class I realized that what was occurring between the students and me was an enacted, co-constructed curriculum. We were curriculum making. Part of seeing myself as a curriculum maker required that I began to understand curriculum as "something being lived as each new learner constructs meaning and learns to live a new but connected story" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 392).

Clandinin and Connelly are not alone in their view of curriculum as something alive and in the making. For example, they draw upon Schwab (1983) who takes a similar look at curriculum, pointing out that

curriculum is what is successfully conveyed to differing degrees to different students, by committed teachers using appropriate materials and actions, of legitimated bodies of knowledge, skill, taste, and propensity to act and react, which are chosen for instruction after serious reflection and communal decision by representatives of those involved in the teaching of a specified group of students who are known to the decision makers. (p. 240)

Schwab and Clandinin and Connelly seem to agree that the subject matter documents are merely that: a guide to assist teachers with possible learning outcomes. What was significant to me was that these curriculum theorists challenged my earlier thinking that subject matter objectives are the curriculum. This reading supported me to understand that it is the material and the connections students make through this and with one another and the teacher that *makes* the curriculum.

Schwab (1983) also suggests that “curriculum is not an endless collection of objectives” and “curriculum is not necessarily the same for all students of a given age and standing” (p. 240). If these ideas are considered alongside Clandinin and Connelly’s (1992) ideas of curriculum making, then these scholars seem to agree that curriculum is not stable, predictable or constant. Instead, curriculum constantly changes within a classroom depending on the experiences being considered, who students are in the class, and who the teacher is. As I thought about these ideas I could not help but wonder why teachers are expected to follow a “curriculum guide” and to adhere to the timelines and

objectives specified when deeper learning can and does occur in relation with these documents. Is it possible to form classrooms where student's experiences are put before the mandated objectives that are required to be fulfilled?

Schwab (1983) continues to challenge the concept of objectives stating that "lists of objectives often so trivialize because they anatomize, not only a subject-matter, but teachers' thoughts about it" (p. 240). He asks readers to consider what he names as the "four commonplaces of education (teacher, student, what is taught and milieu of teaching-learning)" (p. 241) in an effort to reconsider how curriculum might be viewed. As a teacher, I have found that the subject matter, or what is taught, was emphasized greatly in my teacher education. Not often do I recall discussions around the teacher's role in curriculum making. I recall even less about the student's role in curriculum making. What became more significant as I considered these commonplaces within my teaching was how rare it is to hear curriculum discussions that address the milieu or the students as significant considerations. As I considered all of the points made by Clandinin and Connelly (1992) and Schwab while carefully reflecting on my classroom experiences I came to an understanding that my curricular responsibilities need to align with "attending to the perspectives of those most directly affected by, but least often consulted about, educational policy and practice: students" (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3).

2.2 Awakening to the Lived Curriculum

I now realize that the subject matter documents which I used to construct lessons plans are what Aoki (1993) describes as the "curriculum-as-plan" (p. 258). Further, Aoki writes that the curriculum-as-plan is shaped by "the work of curriculum planners, often selected teachers from the field under the direction of some official often designated as

the curriculum director or curriculum supervisor” (p. 258). If teachers in the field are the experts needed to facilitate curriculum making, where are the voices of the people, of the children and youth, whom we serve? Not often are the voices of students heard when considering the creation of the subject matter documents. Instead of debating the need for those voices I want to focus on the ways students’ lives shape the “lived curriculum” (Aoki, 1993, p. 255) that exists in the classroom. In part, the lived curriculum refers to “stories of [student’s] lived experience” (Aoki, 1993, p. 257). If teachers pay attention to students in their classrooms, instead of the lesson plan becoming “premised on adults’ notions of how education should be conceptualized and practiced” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3), might classrooms become spaces where students can bring their interests, stories, and gifts and draw upon these to co-create with class members and teachers places of community and belonging?

Discussing the multiplicity of curricula that shapes classrooms, Aoki (1993) highlights the significance of attending to the unfolding lived curriculum. Through Aoki’s description of the experiences of a teacher named Miss O, readers are provided ways of understanding both the differences, and connections, between curriculum-as-plan and the lived curriculum. In part, Aoki understands multiplicity to refer to curricula “between and among curriculum-as-plan and the lived curricula” (p. 260). In the case of Miss O, the curricular landscape was a “multiplicity of between” (p. 260) meaning not only the space between the curriculum-as-plan and the lived curricula but also, the space that existed between the students and the subject matter Miss O was to cover. Aoki writes:

Even before Day 1 of the term, our teacher, Miss O, walks into her assigned Grade 5 classroom. Because Miss O is already a teacher, her presence in the classroom initiates a transformation of the sociocultural and physical environment into something different. Even before a pupil walks in, she silently asks: “Can I establish myself here as a teacher?” and the classroom’s desks, walls, chalkboards, floor, books and resources jointly reply, albeit wordlessly, by what they are. They respond to Miss O’s intention and presence. And when the pupils arrive, things and pupils arrange themselves, as it were, around Miss O’s intention. They become “teachable”, “promising”, “difficult”, “hopeful”, “challenging.” The environment ceases to be environment, and in its place comes into being a pedagogic situation, a lived site pregnantly alive. Within this site, Miss O soon finds that her pedagogic situation is living in tensionality—a tensionality that emerges, in part, from in-dwelling in the difference between two curricula: the curriculum-as-plan and the lived curriculum. (p. 257)

Within her classroom, Miss O has to deal with the balancing of the curriculum-as-plan and lived curriculum. When she weaves the two together, the spaces in between and among these two is the multiplicity of curricula: something in the making that is “ever open, knowing no beginning and no end” (p. 261). Miss O has to work not only within the subject matter expectations but, also, with students with whom she is face-to-face when first entering her classroom. She not only has to achieve the mandated subject matter goals but, she also has to attend to many different children with many different stories. She is experiencing the lived curriculum with “Andrew. . . who struggles hard to learn to read” (p. 258), with “Sara, whom Miss O can count on to tackle her language

assignment with aplomb” (p. 258), with “Tom, a frequent day dreamer, who loves to allow his thoughts to roam beyond the windows of the classroom” (p. 258) and, with Andrew, Sara, and Tom and each of the students in the Grade 4 classroom. Miss O has the task of understanding “their uniqueness from having lived with them daily” (p. 258) and knowing that

their uniqueness disappears into the shadow when they are spoken of in the prosaically abstract language of the external curriculum planners who are, in a sense, condemned to plan for the faceless people, students shorn of their uniqueness or for all teachers, who become generalized entities often defined in terms of generalized performance roles. (p. 258)

Clandinin and Connelly (1992) weave together the ideas around the four commonplaces from Schwab and come to see curriculum by “erasing the distinction between curriculum and instruction, between ends and means. . . [to an idea of curriculum in] which the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process and in which teacher, learners, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (p. 392). This dynamic interaction is what appears to be happening in Miss O’s classroom alongside the multiplicity of lived and planned curricula. In Miss O’s classroom there is a larger idea being constructed and lived out in relation with curriculum. Miss O can describe the students, their personalities, stories and struggles, and these may impact her way of looking at subject matter and her interactions with students, and students’ interactions with one another. If the common places, the multiplicity of curricula, the lived curriculum, all come together in dynamic interaction, what is the result for the students Miss O lives alongside? What might the result be for all students?

As I brought these questions to my experiences as a student who found a place to belong through drama I became aware that the result for me was a shift in my identity. The curriculum making that was occurring in my extracurricular drama experiences caused me to shift from a place where I may have been at the margins to a place where I reconnected with peers, teachers, and myself. It was a place where I gradually began to draw upon and to voice my lived experiences. As I thought back I began to question if curriculum making in schools could be about more than getting to know students, more than about sharing stories, and more than about engaging learners. Could, I wondered, curriculum making become a place where students have the opportunity to compose and recompose their identities? Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Orr, Pearce and Steeves (2006) explore this idea in their narrative inquiries. Their book, *“Composing Diverse Identities: Narrative Inquiries into the Interwoven Lives of Children and Teachers”*, explores the lives of children and ways their identities are shaped by, and sometimes shape, the curriculum they experience in classrooms and schools. For example, as Clandinin, Huber, Huber, et al. (2006) describe their work alongside a teacher, Emily, and the children in a Year 3-4 classroom, they write of beginning “to imagine how curriculum could be seen as a course of life, perhaps a curriculum of lives” (p. 12). Clandinin et al. explore the stories of several children however one in particular showed me how curriculum making and identity making are intimately connected. As they paid close attention to Lia, a young girl of Somali ancestry, and her repeated sharing of the book *Whoever You Are* (Fox, 1997) Clandinin et al. gradually learned that Lia’s strong connections to this book were shaped because it included “more than white people” (p. 13). Living alongside Lia, alongside her teacher Emily, alongside the subject matter

mandated in the classroom, and within the broader school, provincial, and social milieu, supported Clandinin et al. to begin to understand Lia's identity making in relation with the book:

As Lia talked about the book there was a sense of a meeting of her life stories with the lives of the characters. It included, as she said, 'more than white people.' In her continued returnings, Lia seemed to be awakening to how the classroom presence and honouring of a book that contained characters like her was threaded into possible new tellings of who she was. (p. 13)

In this way, Lia was able to connect with the book as a way to negotiate a curriculum for herself that supported her identity. She was able to make connections to the characters and her own background and, "[i]n this way her identity and the in-classroom curriculum making were negotiated as her life stories interacted with the stories her teacher was living by" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 13).

This view of the negotiation of a curriculum of lives resonates with my own experiences with extracurricular drama. Being given the space to question or engage deeply with peers and teachers allowed me to explore different stories of myself, differing identity threads. It was in this way that my curriculum making and identity making became part of the curriculum of lives that shaped the extracurricular drama space into a place where I felt a sense of belonging.

The hope behind the idea of understanding students as co-curriculum makers within their classrooms, which is a central idea in Clandinin et al. (2006), resonates with Cook-Sather's (2002) sense that "when students are taken seriously and attended to as knowledgeable participants in important conversations, they feel empowered and

motivated to participate constructively in their education” (p. 3). To reach this goal of consciously negotiating a curriculum of lives perhaps we, as teachers, need to begin by “ensuring that there are legitimate and valued spaces within which students can speak, retuning our ears so that we can hear what they say and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 4). Maybe through these actions, students will experience schools as places where their diverse identities are respected, valued, and supported to flourish.

3. NARRATIVE INQUIRY AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that “life- as we come to it and as it comes to others- is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments in time and space” (p. 17). This idea resonated with me as I began to consider thesis work around art making spaces and experiences within schools. When I, as a teacher, sit in our school staff room or am in the presence of teacher friends, we begin to fall into the pattern of teacher talk. We cannot stop telling stories of how our lives have intertwined with the lives of other teachers or students. Therefore, when considering the methodology in which to pursue thesis work it made sense to draw upon what I and many teachers tend to do naturally. Teachers tell and retell storied moments from their classrooms so regularly it can feel at times that we engage in narrative inquiry without intention. I constantly question, reflect, and discuss how the lives of students are present both in and out of the classroom. Sociality, place, and temporality, the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) are often addressed when discussing the school landscape. When deciding to engage in thesis work I wanted to focus on the stories of experience within art making spaces and experiences that occurred in the participating teachers’ pasts as students as well as the connection of their past to their present teaching stories. As my research work began, narrative inquiry was the process I decided to use to explore those experiences.

Narrative inquiry is a research methodology that is utilised in studies regarding community, anthropology, occupational therapy, cross cultural studies, and many other areas (Clandinin, Pushor, Murray Orr, 2007; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). However, as I

read about the growing field of narrative inquiry as a research methodology (Bach, 2001; Bateson, 1989; Coles, 1989; Gergen, 2003; hooks, 1997) a question emerged: What does it mean to engage in narrative inquiry? Gradually, I was seeing that although it was common for colleagues and me to share stories of our experiences we may have not been engaged in narrative inquiry into our stories. In this chapter readers will discover both my understanding of narrative inquiry and ways in which this understanding shaped my living as a narrative inquirer.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain that narrative inquiry is a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomena under study. (p. 477)

It was this understanding of narrative inquiry that grounded my narrative inquiry. Furthermore, inspired by Schwab's notion of commonplaces within curriculum, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) described three commonplaces of narrative inquiry—temporality, sociality and place—which they hoped would “clarify the distinct qualities of narrative inquiry” (Clandinin, Pushor, Murray Orr, 2007, p. 22). Connelly and Clandinin (2006)

imagine these commonplaces as “places to direct one’s attention in conducting a narrative inquiry” (Clandinin, et al., 2007, p. 23). However, “just as it was for Schwab in curriculum, the study of any one of a combination of these three commonplaces might as well take place in some other form of qualitative inquiry” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). To take on a narrative inquiry there must be “simultaneous exploration of all three commonplaces” (p. 479). Connelly and Clandinin’s movement toward these three commonplaces of narrative inquiry was not to create a lock-step process but, instead, emerged from their long-time focus on Dewey’s (1938) attention to connections between temporality, interactions, and situations in understanding experience. As described by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), “the view of experience to which Clandinin and Connelly refer. . . has its roots in John Dewey’s (1938) pragmatic philosophy” (p. 38). Further, Clandinin and Rosiek write that “there are two particularly salient features of Dewey’s conception of experience. The first is that experience is the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry—narrative or otherwise—proceeds...” (Dewey, 1976, p. 38). Additionally:

Dewey’s conception of experience ... does not refer to some precognitive, precultural ground on which our conceptions of the world rest. Instead, it is a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment. (p. 39)

Understanding experience in these ways, and therefore the study of experience through narrative inquiry, shows that:

Dewey’s ontology is not transcendental, it is transactional. The epistemological implications of this view are nothing short of revolutionary. It implies that the

regulative ideal for inquiry is not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower. The regulative ideal for inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world. (p. 39)

This transactional ontology has long been central in Clandinin and Connelly's conceptualization of narrative inquiry as a research methodology. For example, as Clandinin and Connelly (1998) outline their concerns with ways in which the telling of stories seems to have become commonplace in education, they highlight how:

it is *education* that is at the core of our enterprise and not merely the telling of stories. We see living an educated life as an ongoing process. People's lives are composed over time: biographies or life stories are lived and told, retold and relived. For us, education is interwoven with living and with the possibility of retelling our life stories. As we think about our own lives and the lives of teachers and children with whom we engage, we see possibilities for growth and change. As we learn to tell, to listen and to respond to teachers' and children's stories, we imagine significant educational consequences for children and teachers in schools and for faculty members in universities through more mutual relations between schools and universities. No one, and no institution, would leave this imagined future unchanged. (pp. 246-247)

3.1. Attending to Temporality

Clandinin et al. (2007) describe temporality as the movement between the past, present, and future. “Events and people always have a past, present and a future. In narrative inquiry it is important to always try to understand people, places and events as in process, as always in transition” (p. 23). When engaging in a narrative inquiry then, narrative inquirers try to understand each story, event or person across time. The key to attending to temporality is trying to understand how the past has affected a person’s present and how both past and present experiences may influence the person’s future experiences. Dewey writes about the continuity of experience, or experiential continuum, where “the principle of continuity means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). This understanding of temporality was key in the undertaking of my narrative inquiry.

3.2 Attending to Sociality

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain sociality in three ways. The first aspect of sociality speaks to personal conditions, the second aspect speaks to social conditions, and the third aspect attends to the relationship between the participant and researcher. Personal conditions can mean “the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480) of the inquirer as well as the participants. Social conditions refer to “existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors, and forces, people and otherwise, that form each individual’s context” (Clandinin, et al., 2007, p. 23). The relationship between the participant and inquirer is one where “inquirers are always in an inquiry relationship with participants’

lives. [They] cannot subtract [themselves] from relationship” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Therefore, narrative inquirers must be willing to consider the conditions of these relationships when engaging in narrative inquiry. As readers realize from the above description staying close to experience, and relationships, is vital in narrative inquiries.

This attention to experience and relationships is also highlighted by Munro Hendry (2007). As she reflects upon the “future of narrative” (p. 487) Munro Hendry highlights the common qualitative research process in which researchers

construct lives by reducing them to a series of events, categories, or themes and then put them back together again to make up a whole called *narrative*. ...

Dissecting lived experience by looking at parts to see the whole maintains an atomistic view of experience. (p. 491)

Of particular concern to Munro Hendry about this orientation to research and narrative is that “research is still seen as representation. We invest our trust in methods not in our relationships” (p. 493). Furthermore, she writes:

My concern is and continues to be that analysis often becomes a mode for saying what we want to say and not really listening to what is being said. As researchers we often bring our preconceived notions and understandings and want our data to fit what we already know and want to believe. ... My concern with rigor and validity have to do with staying true to our informants’ stories and not imposing our narratives on them. I would maintain that to increase our rigor we need to be more faithful to our relationships and not impose more methods. ... What I would like to suggest then is that research is not ultimately about interpretation but about faith. Trusting in the stories and the storyteller. (pp. 493-494)

There is a vibrant and growing past and present focus in narrative inquiry on listening to, of having faith in, and upon trusting stories and storytellers (Caine & Steeves, 2009; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Craig and Huber, 2007; Huber & Clandinin, 2002). For example, increasingly narrative inquirers have invited participants to be co-composers of field and research texts (Clandinin et al 2006; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). As “living, telling, retelling, and reliving mark the qualities of a life” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 187), it is in and through relationships among narrative inquirers and co-researchers that these aspects stay central in narrative inquiries.

3.3 Attending to Place

The final commonplace of narrative inquiry is place: “the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The idea to remember when considering place is that “all events take place some place. . . . the specificity of location is crucial. . . . Place may change as the inquiry delves into temporality” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480).

For my thesis research the choice of narrative inquiry came as a natural choice when considering working within the field of education. As Clandinin and Connelly state: “Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively” (2000, p. 19). As readers know from Chapters 1 and 2, I came to this narrative inquiry puzzling over belonging in school. In particular, I wanted to inquire into possible connections between extracurricular art making communities and ways in which these experiences

shape students' senses of belonging in schools. I chose to inquire into the phenomenon of belonging as grounded in the experiences of two teachers, Anne-Marie and Lucy, and also my own experiences. Together, we shared and inquired into our narratives of experiences of belonging in school.

3.4 Co-composing a Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin et al. (2007) describe eight elements to consider when designing a narrative inquiry: justification, naming the phenomenon, inquiry methods, analysis and interpretation, knowledge shaped through the inquiry, ethical considerations, and representation and intention of research texts. They consider these elements as a “set of questions to ask [themselves] at each phase of a narrative inquiry” (p. 24). They also remind readers that as “we work through the elements, it is important to remember the commonplaces and how they shape each response” (p. 24). In this section, I describe ways in which I attended to each of these elements as this narrative inquiry unfolded.

3.4.1 Justification.

The first element described by Clandinin et al. (2007) is the justification of the research study. For me, this was at the core of the beginning of my thesis research. When beginning my thesis proposal I asked myself “what am I passionate about?” which was an easy question to answer because art making experiences in school resonated so strongly. The difficult questions to explore were, “why is this important to others?” or “in what ways will this impact the research field?” I often found myself puzzling over what I wanted readers to take from my thesis research. As I continued to read authors such as Bruner (2004) and Zinsler (1987), I found that their methods of autobiography and memoir resonated with me. I decided that the place to start was in my own art making

experiences, that is, in those spaces of belonging that are significant to me. In imagining a narrative inquiry that could explore possible connections between art making spaces and belonging within schools I realized that the value of the research would impact me as well as the future participants.

Justification has three layers: personal, practical, and social. Clandinin et al. (2007) write that personal justification comes from the “importance. . . of situating yourself in the study” (pp. 24-25). To begin exploring this type of justification, inquirers begin their inquiry by writing their “narrative beginnings that speak to the researcher’s relationship to, and interest in, the inquiry” (p. 25). My narrative beginnings in Chapters 1 and 2 map the multiple threads that shape my personal justification for this narrative inquiry. As I inquired into my earlier art making experiences in school it became clearer to me how significant those experiences were to how I lived out my school journey as a youth and then as an adult within a university context. My experiences in high school led to tensions around my sense of belonging within the school landscape and those tensions were what I wanted to explore throughout this narrative inquiry.

Practical justification refers to how researchers “need to justify the research practically, that is, how it will offer insight for changing or thinking differently about the researcher’s own and others’ practices” (p. 25). As I considered the practical justifications of my narrative inquiry, I felt that continuing to inquire into the spaces which Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I felt made school a positive place would impact on my teaching, and perhaps their future teaching. Alongside Anne-Marie and Lucy, I learned about creating spaces of belonging in classrooms and schools as we inquired into stories of our in school art making experiences. I also hoped our inquiry would support readers

to understand the importance of belonging and of creating communities of belonging within their classrooms.

The last layer is social justification which requires researchers to “think about the larger social and educational issues the study might address” (p. 25). Social justification is an area where I felt some tension. In a world that tends to privilege quantitative research, I struggled with how the educational research landscape would value this narrative inquiry. Would readers situated in certain academic frameworks find value in stories of experience? Reading Sarris (1993), I was reminded that there is always immense value in narrative. Sarris writes of an experience with three women peeling potatoes. In that one moment, he is challenged, judged, and observed. He chooses to take that experience and learn rather than justify his position as a man or defend his inability to see things in the ways of the three women. He chooses to learn from their and his stories and their interactions. My hope for this inquiry was to allow Anne-Marie and Lucy to share their stories of experiences as students so that collectively our voices would impact the broader educational landscape. I wanted educators to experience our inquiry and to be provoked to think about questions such as “why do we teach?”, “for whom are we teaching?” and, “what might we do to ensure that every student feels successful in school, successful not only academically, but socially and emotionally?” My hope was that as members of the broader academic landscape read the stories shared by Anne-Marie, Lucy, and me they would experience resonance and, also, imaginative possibilities (Caine & Steeves, 2009) of what might be otherwise in classrooms and schools (Greene, 1995).

3.4.2 Naming the phenomenon.

The second narrative inquiry design element described by Clandinin et al. (2007) is “naming the phenomenon” (p. 25) or clarifying what the narrative inquirer is inquiring into. This naming becomes clearer as researchers consider their personal justifications alongside practical and social justifications. Regardless of the phenomenon, a narrative inquirer “always adopts a narrative view of the phenomenon” (p. 25), that is, they try to think narratively about the phenomenon as they attend to the three commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place. My narrative inquiry focused on the phenomenon of school belonging as connected with art making experiences, which I gradually saw as curriculum making. Attempting to think narratively about these phenomena I wondered about the experiences of teachers and students who have co-created communities attentive to students’ diverse experiences, diverse lives. What stories of experience does the teacher carry into her curriculum making alongside students? What stories of experience do students carry into their curriculum making alongside one another and a teacher? What stories of community, belonging, and curriculum making shape the broader context of the school, the neighbourhood where the school is situated, the province, and so on?

3.4.3 Inquiry methods.

Narrative inquirers consider the particular methods they wish to use to study the phenomenon (Clandinin et al., 2007). In order to choose these methods narrative inquirers must first imagine what their inquiry will look like. They must consider addressing the phenomenon “along with possible participants, as existing in an ever shifting space” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 481). Thinking about methods also means “figuring out and describing the kind of field texts (narrative inquirers’ term for data) [they] need to collect and compose” (Clandinin, et al., 2007, p. 27). These field texts may range from journal entries, field notes, photographs, and/or digital forms. However, inquirers must take the three commonplaces into consideration in order to ensure that the field texts are “attentive to all three” (p. 27).

When I first envisioned this narrative inquiry, I wanted the arts to play a part in how Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I explored our stories of experience. Important to me was that each participant had voice in the kinds of field texts composed in our inquiry. When looking for participants, because I felt I needed to talk with adults who were willing to share stories of school experiences connected with the arts as potential spaces of belonging, I decided to reach out to current teachers who either studied arts education in university or who were currently teaching arts education. My assumption was that if the arts were a part of their current life there was likely a chance that the arts played an important part in their schooling experiences. I sent emails to teachers whom I knew had arts education backgrounds or who were currently arts education teachers. Anne-Marie and Lucy each responded by saying they were interested in participating in this narrative

inquiry. Not only did they participate in our narrative inquiry, but they co-composed with me and one another the living out and the telling of this narrative inquiry.

To begin our narrative inquiry, we each created field texts in the form of “annals and chronicles”, which I explained to Anne-Marie and Lucy by drawing on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) description:

Annals and chronicles may be thought of as the rudimentary shaping and narrating of personal and social histories. ... [When people engage in constructing annals and chronicles they] are engaged in the construction of personal narrative histories. We think of *annals* as a list of dates of memories, events, stories, and the like... [In this process, people] construct time lines beginning, for example, at birth; at some distant, important period or date in the past history of the person’s family; or at some more recent date, as a kind of beginning benchmark. We think of *chronicles* as the sequence of events in and around a particular topic or narrative thread of interest, for example, the teenage years or the traveling years. (p. 112)

Anne-Marie’s annals and chronicles took on the form of a comic book, as shown in Figure 3. 1 below, while Lucy’s were a visual timeline, as shown in Figure 3.2:

Figure 3.1 A sample from Anne-Marie's Annals and Chronicles

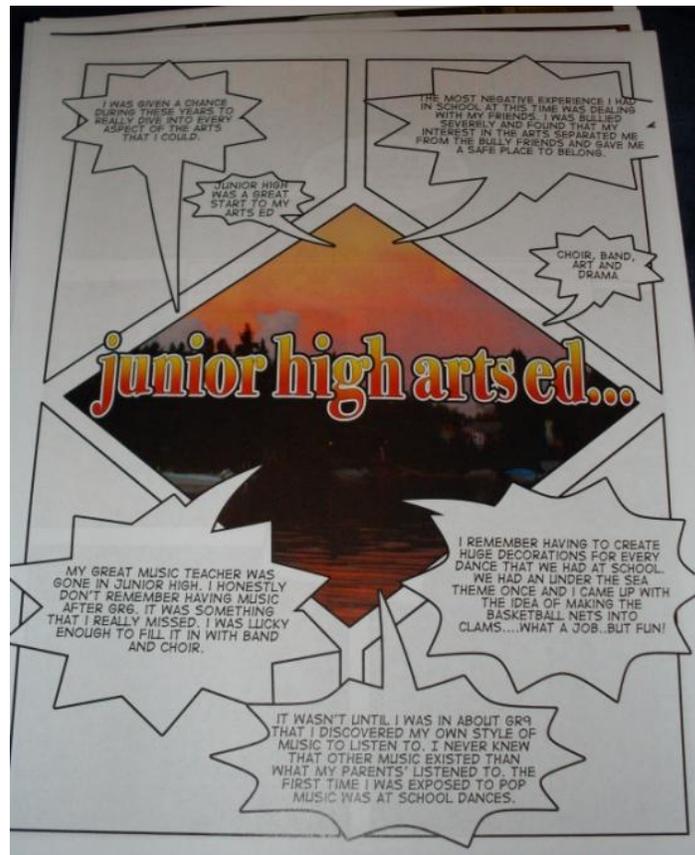


Figure 3.2 A sample from Lucy's Annals and Chronicles



(Visual Images of annals and chronicles, shared by Anne-Marie and Lucy, May 13, 2010)

Anne-Marie's annals and chronicles depicted her arts and schooling experiences throughout her whole life. Within her comic book, she included pictures of herself in school settings where she participated in art making experiences, pictures of her family, and stories of their influence on her identity as an artist as well as photos of teachers who impacted her identity as an artist within school. Lucy's annals and chronicles included stories of significant moments and people in her life who impacted her identity in schools as well as her identity as an artist.

In entering into this narrative inquiry with Anne-Marie and Lucy, I was learning to think narratively about my experiences. Thinking narratively about my experiences allowed me to better understand my earlier experiences and ways I have changed over time, place, and situation. I also found that through thinking narratively about my stories of experience, I came to new and different understandings of myself as a teacher and who I am becoming as a teacher. Together, Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I engaged further in thinking narratively.

As Lucy and I, for example, thought narratively about her stories of experience I initiated this process when I asked to talk and think more about her and Anne-Marie's chronicles and annals. For example, at one of our meetings, my goal was to ask questions about the stories of experience they had shared in order to encourage Lucy and Anne-Marie to think narratively about their stories. In talking with Lucy about her Grade 6 band experience there were a number of questions that arose for me as she talked. I raised these questions with Anne-Marie and Lucy at our next meeting. For example:

Tara: Tell me more about Mr. Peterson and your feelings about him and band.

Lucy: The band room gave me a safe spot to go. I would eat my lunch in the band room and he would have music playing. He really made me feel safe in a huge school. In middle school we switched teachers, like high school, and the band room was my safe place to go. It was something I was good at and he made me feel like I belonged.

Tara: How did he interact with you as a teacher? How did he show respect and encouragement for you that made you feel safe?

Lucy: With my background, I had very little to do with my dad so I had no male role model at all. When I got to his class, he never yelled at his class, he was very respectful. As a class, he ran it like any ordinary band teacher. He would lose his temper with some kids. I remember one time, he had this time out chair with a stand and he said, "If anyone is bad, you'll go to the time out chair". Our class was bad that day and he literally went around and started kicking band cases out of the way and setting up time out chairs. I remember thinking "if I were a teacher and my class was acting like this I'd be really mad too". Now that I'm a teacher and I feel like I'm going to lose it I sometimes think to myself "If there was a band case right here, I would kick it with all my might too". (Audio taped research conversation, May 12, 2010)

As this conversation went on, Lucy continued to think narratively, relating her experiences of her past to the influence these experiences have had on who she is and who she is becoming as a teacher.

The above audio-taped research conversation was one type of field text collected throughout our narrative inquiry. Other field texts included a personal journal I kept of

questions and reflections, and an artistic piece that, for each participant, showed the transformative place of the arts in our school experiences, particularly in relation with aspects of belonging. Both Anne-Marie and Lucy chose to create visual images for their final artistic reflection. Anne-Marie created several ink drawings and Lucy created a large painting. I took photographs of their representations which are shared in Chapters 4 and 5.

I also visually represented my stories of art making experiences in school. In Figures 3.3 and 3.4, I share photographs of my art pieces:

Figure 3.3 Photograph 1 of Tara's artistic representation



Figure 3.4 Photograph 2 of Tara's artistic representation



During one of our audio taped research conversations I shared the following stories of my experience as a way to further describe my above artistic representation. Because I talked at length about the connections between my visual representations and my experiences, in the excerpts shared below I direct readers to the different aspects of my representations with inserted titles:

My stories of the back of my visual representation

The back, for me, the mirror is myself and the outside part is me before Grade 7 and the inside is me after continuing on. The mirror represents myself and I did some musical representations (white lines as a musical staff). Before I got involved in arts in school everything [in my life] was about music and about piano. I felt very much on my own because piano is a very individual thing, you are on your own, you are by yourself. That's why I made it to be facing outward because there wasn't much inclusion with other people or a community that I felt I particularly belonged to. The question mark was because when I was that age I didn't have a clue where I fit in or what I wanted to do but piano was a bit of a home for me.

My stories of the inner aspects of my visual representation

My inside stuff is all of the things that have happened. Drama is a huge part of who I am. That's why the mirror now has a mask instead of a question mark. All of the rocks represent the rock circle that still means so much to me and I use every day in my classroom. The one attached to the mirror says "truth" because that is something I have come to value on my own. In order to get to know myself, the students, the community, you have to be honest and on stage is where

I felt I could be the most honest and most accepted and find a place to belong. The other stones are things I have gotten from other people. There's wisdom and faith. Wisdom I get from my family, my teachers, and friends. And students. And faith I get from those people as well. In terms of teachers, I mean both those who taught me and those I know as teachers now, because I think teachers are smart enough to realize when they have to pull a kid in somewhere. I can list off the top of my head the names of teachers who noticed that I needed somewhere to belong and that felt they had a place that I could belong. So being a part of their communities, whether it be in junior high drama, high school drama or in band, I learned more from those teachers who were involved in extracurriculars with me than I ever did in a classroom. So that I take with me.

Looking backward based on these experiences

Looking back on that experience, that is why, to me, extracurricular is so important because that's where I feel the most connected to students, with the exception of the rock circle time because the kids will answer the most personal questions in that moment. It's like we almost forget for 3 minutes while everyone is answering that we're students and teacher and we're just sharing. I learn a lot from them as well. I was going to, at first, like flip this upside down to make it look like a stage but I decided to flip to on its head because I think that's what happens in life. You figure something out and everything gets flipped upside down and then you figure something else out and it gets flipped upside down and so I think that my growth as an arts person keeps changing. When I was in school,

looking back now as a teacher, I see how I've grown in my personality and my interests and how I connect to people.

Looking forward based on these experiences

But now that growth is very different. I am no longer concerned about, I know I always have a home in the arts and in my schools and I'm not, I mean when you're a kid you worry about those things and you worry about what happens when you don't have those communities, and when extracurricular is done or you aren't included in something. When you're younger you really turn towards those things but now I'm at a place where I am comfortable enough by myself that I don't need the reassurance of a community but I need to create those for kids because [communities] did so much for me that I think it's important to give all of that right back out and to make sure that kids have a place, especially in drama. For me that is the one place where all are welcome. (Audio recorded research conversation, June 6, 2010)

While revising earlier drafts of this chapter I decided to draw on my visual representation as a way to give readers a sense of this aspect of Anne-Maire, Lucy's, and my collaborative narrative inquiry. However, in returning to both my visual representation and the stories I shared I made a significant discovery. As I looked back on my visual representation, I realized I would still include all of the elements described above even though much time has passed. But, as this narrative inquiry has grown, there are now new pieces I would add. For example, I would now include representations of my family to

show the connection they have to my school landscapes or, in some cases, to represent the gap between my family experiences and my school experiences. I would also change my perspective on not “[needing] the reassurance of a community” because as I continued to reflect on my past experiences in relation with my current experiences, I realized that the communities I belong to, whether by chance or choice, deeply affect and influence my connections to the arts, schools, and students.

3.4.4 Analysis and interpretation.

The fourth element described by Clandinin et al. (2007) is the analysis and interpretation involved in moving from the composition of field texts to research texts. Through this process, narrative inquirers consider their field texts and “examine, describe and specify the commonplaces” (p. 28) in order to learn from participants’ and their storied experiences. Beginning this narrative inquiry, I attended to the three commonplaces as I inquired into my stories of experience. For example, as part of a course assignment in ED 816 I wrote the story I shared on page one. Over time, as I inquired into this experience attending to temporality, sociality, and place, my proposal took shape to undertake thesis research and, in particular, Chapters 1 and 2 were written. In the upcoming Chapters 4 and 5 readers will see ways in which Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I continued to be attentive to temporality, sociality, and place as we inquired into our field texts.

3.4.5 Positioning.

Positioning addresses ways narrative inquirers position “their studies in relation to other research on a particular phenomenon, to related programs of research, and to research undertaken using different epistemological and ontological assumptions”

(Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 29). This positioning is comparable to literature reviews done within other methodologies (p. 29). As already shown in the previous chapter, I determined that the literature attentive to students' "academic giftedness" in relation with particular subject matter outcomes was not the kind that would help me as I inquired into a teacher and students' experiences of curriculum making, particularly curriculum making attentive to belonging and community in classrooms and schools. Instead, as also shown in Chapter 2, I began positioning my narrative inquiry in relation with research and literature that explored community, belonging, and curriculum making from diverse perspectives.

For me, this process felt like "world traveling"⁸ (Lugones, 1987, p. 3).

Throughout this narrative inquiry the place of belonging from which Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I began our inquiry seemed to transform each time we met. We traveled into each other's stories of experiences and from there learned a great deal about tensions each of us experienced within our unique art making spaces and experiences in schools. Lugones writes that "we learn to love each other by learning to travel to each other's world" (p. 4). Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I connected as we traveled to each other's world and this world travelling created opportunities to explore the broader landscape of belonging within schools. As our inquiry unfolded, we came to a place where "familial curriculum making" (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011) was a tension that required exploring.

⁸ Lugones (1987) writes about worlds that "[have] to be inhabited at present by some flesh and blood people. . . a world need not be a construction of a whole society. . . a world may be incomplete. . . a world is a description of experience" (pp. 9-11). Lugones writes that we can travel or "shift from being one person to being a different person" (p. 11). And if there are worlds which we travel to playfully we must "[be open] to surprise, [be open] to being a fool, [be open] to self-construction or reconstruction" (p. 17).

Consequently, I had to reposition the inquiry to include literature on familial curriculum making.

3.4.6 Knowledge shaped through our inquiry and ethical considerations.

The sixth element narrative inquirers need to attend to is the knowledge shaped through the inquiry; the “uniqueness of each study [which] allows narrative inquirers to offer some sense of what it is that can be known about a phenomenon that could not be known, at least in the same way, by other theories, methods or lines of work” (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 30). Following that is the seventh element, ethical considerations that must be taken into account:

In narrative inquiry, inquirers must deepen the sense of what it means to live in relation in an ethical way. . . Ethical considerations permeate narrative inquiries from start to finish: at the outset as ends-in-view are imagined; as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 483)

When I received research ethics approval (See Appendix A) to begin my narrative inquiry and after Anne-Marie and Lucy agreed to participate, I met with each of them to share a summary letter as well as a consent form. Together, these documents outlined the proposed processes of our narrative inquiry, possible meeting times, and potential lengths of meetings (See Appendix B). In these meetings I also offered each participant a copy of my thesis proposal, which they could review as they considered whether or not to participate. The letter explained that their anonymity would be protected through pseudonyms and gave them the option of opting out at any time during the research period; it also explained that they would engage in four to five whole group research

conversations and that they would be given the opportunity to discuss the thesis chapters so these felt resonant and respectful to them.

After each of these initial individual meetings, both Anne-Marie and Lucy expressed desires to meet as a group, which we did on four occasions. Each of our four meetings lasted for two hours and was digitally audio recorded. Since neither Anne-Marie nor Lucy requested a copy of my thesis proposal as they were agreeing to participate in the inquiry, at our first meeting we started our conversation with me discussing the “research puzzles” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41) which I hoped to inquire into through our narrative inquiry. These puzzles were described at the end of Chapter 1. At this time, I also talked about narrative inquiry as a research methodology as I felt it was important for Anne-Marie and Lucy to gain an understanding of what it might mean for each of them to engage in narrative inquiry. As well, because I felt it was important that Anne-Marie and Lucy felt comfortable with me and one another as we collectively shared and inquired into our stories of experiences in relation with belonging in school, I spent a great deal of time sharing stories of my experiences in relation with belonging and community building. Many of the stories I shared in this first meeting are included in Chapters 1 and 2.

3.4.7 Representation and intention of research texts.

The final design element described by Clandinin et al. (2007) involves the process of representation and the intention of the research text. Reading Mwebi’s (2005) narrative inquiry I was struck by the complexity he described in wanting to not lose the lives and voices of children with whom he inquired, as well as the life of the teacher and of the broader community in which their inquiry unfolded. Yet, Mwebi also wanted to

acknowledge the still very “taboo” nature of HIV/AIDS in many schools, communities, and families in Africa. To assist narrative inquirers as they face these representational complexities Connelly & Clandinin (2006) describe considerations that may be helpful; the first being that as a narrative inquirer writes, they need to

continue to think narratively, crafting the research text with careful attention to the narrative inquiry commonplaces. The text needs to reflect the temporal unfolding of people, places and things within the inquiry, the personal and social aspects of the inquirer’s and participants’ lives, and the places in the inquiry.

(p. 485)

Throughout our narrative inquiry I kept a journal of thoughts and questions that arose while the three of us were sharing our stories of experience. For one of our meetings, I decided to ask some of the questions I had recorded. Through this process, Anne-Marie and Lucy were able to think narratively about their stories, and through this process to begin to see ways in which these experiences have impacted their lives as teachers. An example of this is shown in Chapter 5 where I share excerpts from research conversations that Lucy and I engaged in around her mother’s participation in her Kindergarten classroom.

Narrative inquirers must also take into account the range of textual forms possible in narrative inquiry research texts, such as literary forms. Inquirers may often “think of many different textual forms reflective of the shapes lives take” (Clandinin, et al., 2007, p. 32). The “writing of a research text is a narrative act” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 485) meaning that if an inquiry were to take place at a different time for a different purpose an entirely different research text may be written. Throughout our narrative

inquiry, Anne-Marie and Lucy had each read, revised, and negotiated the representation of their stories through a final meeting where we read through the written work together, discussed findings, made changes, and continued to ask questions. In doing this, Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I became co-composers of this narrative inquiry. I found it important to ensure their experiences were represented honestly and accurately and that they each felt respected in the final research texts.

For example, when Chapter 4 was completed, I invited Anne-Marie to have a discussion with me. We agreed to read the chapter together and I will always remember my nervousness as I hoped she would find the chapter as exciting as I did. Her feedback was immensely helpful, partly in addressing my fears of inadequacy in representing her stories of experience but, also, because I had misunderstood some aspects of one story she shared of school. My misunderstanding was that I thought Anne-Marie's story was of a music teacher whom she learned alongside only in Grade 4. Anne-Marie corrected me, letting me know that this teacher was her music teacher throughout elementary school. The nature of the relationship Anne-Marie had with her elementary school teacher over years is drastically different and paints a different picture of relational belonging than the relationship of one Grade 4 teacher over one year. For this and many other reasons, I was thankful to have Anne-Marie and Lucy engaged in this narrative inquiry as co-composers.

Narrative inquirers also need to think about the audience or audiences for whom they are writing.

Research texts that emphasize one [audience] to the exclusion of others lose impact. Inquirers who forget their participants and their readers and write only

for themselves, become narcissistic; inquirers who write for imagined audiences and neglect their participants could be unethical; and inquirers who write only for self and/or participants may be unable to answer the questions “Who cares?” and “So what?”. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 485)

This narrative inquiry is aimed at a teacher audience. As Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I are all teachers it felt relevant for us to want to share, and to inquire into our stories, all the while holding other teachers in mind. However, as we thought about teachers as our audience we thought not only about those who live and work within a classroom. Administrators and consultants also live under the umbrella of “teacher” even if their roles differ from that of a classroom teacher. In the middle of our narrative inquiry I became a consultant for my school division and began to understand that my new role, as someone who works directly with teachers, allowed me to cultivate relationships across the division. As a result our understandings of teachers as the audience for this work broadened to include those outside of the classroom but who still work closely with teachers who work directly with students.

When considering the audience of this thesis, aside from an audience which may live on an education landscape, I also felt tension in sharing this work with my friends and family. Torgovnick (1994) brings forward an element of research that resonated with me. She writes about how she struggled for many years with what should be published, what stories should be told, and what stories should be left to family. The stories shared in Chapters 1 and 2 are stories from my memories of experiences. Tensions exist for me around the stories being shared with my family as they may have no recollection that I was experiencing those tensions in school. Or perhaps their memories of these

experiences differ greatly from mine. What conversations will occur as a result of sharing these stories? I felt the same tension when thinking of Anne-Marie and Lucy sharing their stories within this thesis with their families. What messages will each of our family members derive from this work? At the same time, I felt a sense of relief in telling these stories as they have been put aside for many years. Although the intent of a thesis may initially be for an educational landscape, there is much to be valued in sharing these stories of experiences with those closest to us. The questions “So what?” and “Who cares?” will have vastly different answers depending on the audience. The answers to these questions are equally significant.

3.5 The Necessarily Relational Aspects of Narrative Inquiry

In their 2000 text, Clandinin and Connelly write that:

We understand that relationship is at the heart of thinking narratively.

Relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do. Narrative inquiry is the study of experience, and experience, as John Dewey taught, is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally. Participants are in relation, and we as researchers are in relation to participants. Narrative inquiry is an experience of the experience. It is people in relation studying with people in relation. (p. 189)

In subsequent work, Connelly and Clandinin saw this deeply relational aspect of narrative inquiry as part of the sociality commonplace. As earlier described, sociality is concerned with the dialectic between personal and social interaction. The relational as an aspect of sociality is described by Connelly and Clandinin (2006) in the following way:

Another dimension of the sociality commonplace is the relationship between participant and inquirer. Inquirers are always in an inquiry relationship with

participant's lives. We cannot subtract ourselves from relationship. . . . Narrative inquirers, particularly in living studies, are in relationship: negotiating purposes, next steps, outcomes, texts, and all manner of things that go into an inquiry relationship. (p. 480)

Cain and Steeves (2009) also address the significance of relationship in narrative inquiry. They write: "narrative inquiry is marked by its emphasis on relational engagement between researchers and research participants, whereby the understanding and social significance of experience grows out of a relational commitment to the research puzzle" (p. 8). Also, as Craig and Huber (2007) explored the relational aspects of their narrative inquiries they wrote of "relational reverberations" which they described in the following way:

As we look back from our more present vantage points we see how this thread of "people in relation studying with people in relation" has imprinted our becoming as narrative inquirers. It is an identity thread that reverberates in moments lived through and recorded in our field texts and that was picked up and pulled forward in some of our research texts; it is a thread that reverberates in our present narrative inquiries and as our lives continue to unfurl in diverse contexts and relationships. (p. 255)

Craig and Huber also write about the challenge of imbuing research texts with relational forms of knowing. They write:

Another closely related matter is finding a narrative way of presenting our research so that it foregrounds relationships while maintaining research rigor with which others can identify. How to achieve the appropriate tone-pitch-ambience is

very critical. One way we see narrative inquirers honoring the relational aspects of their inquiries is by consciously inviting participants to live as co-researchers.

In some instances, these co-researcher relationships have led to narrative inquirers and participants co-composing field texts. (p. 272)

While attempting to be attentive to the relational aspects of this narrative inquiry, as I played with differing ways to represent the experiences of Anne-Marie, Lucy, and me, I decided to extend what I was already in the midst of learning, that is, of engaging in narrative inquiry alongside co-researchers and writing a thesis, to also include publishable papers. What I gradually imagined was that one paper would focus on Anne-Marie's stories of experience and the other would focus on Lucy's stories of experience. I made this decision because I felt it was important to work toward both the completion of my thesis and two publishable papers so that this work might reach a broader spectrum of readers. I was especially hopeful that by publishing two papers this work might reach more teachers who may find a place for these ideas in their own classrooms and curriculum making alongside children and youth.

However, as I moved forward, I encountered numerous challenges, some which I could not resolve and others which I realized are not resolvable. For example, knowing that certain conventions, such as a footnote about pseudonyms, or particular literature may feel repeated, I initially wrote a short prelude to Chapters 4 and 5 in hopes of addressing those concerns to readers. However, the prelude written was brought forward as a concern with my thesis committee members. Although they understood the intent of the prelude, they wanted to address concerns of repetition for future readers of this thesis. They also wondered about the choice of genre, meaning the reason for my wanting to

write two publishable papers for Chapters 4 and 5. As this discussion continued, one committee member imagined how the prelude might work if I wrote about showing the significance of teacher research, that is, moving from *my* stories to *our* stories, through the two publishable papers.

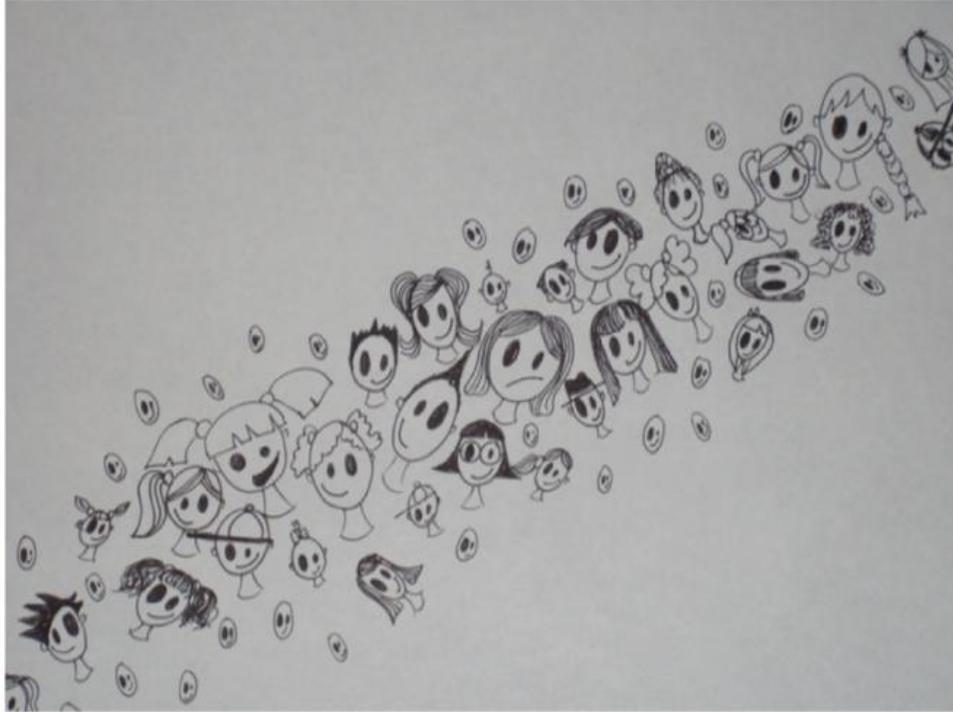
After this meeting my supervisor and I again talked about the relational aspects of narrative inquiry. It was then that I realized that Anne-Marie's, Lucy's, and my co-composing two publishable papers was a way to show our living in relation as our narrative inquiry unfolded. As readers proceed to Chapters 4 and 5 they will experience repetition. This repetition is in the form of the theoretical and methodological grounding of my thesis which I needed to include in each of the papers. What I hope readers will hold in the foreground as they experience this repetition is that each life has been, and is, its own unique composition. Chapter 4 traces experiences lived by Anne-Marie and Chapter 5 traces experiences in Lucy's life. These experiences and their lives have unfolded in differing ways and this is visible in each of the papers.

At this point I am uncertain if Anne-Marie or Lucy will eventually have their actual names listed as a co-author on each respective paper. While I hope this will happen, what I have come to realize through this narrative inquiry process I have lived with Anne-Marie and Lucy, is that my co-composing with them has both lengthened my inquiry and changed who I am and who I am becoming. I realize that I could have written chapters *about* Anne-Marie and Lucy. I could also have written papers *about* each of them. But, in co-authoring the two upcoming papers, part of our hope is that our co-authoring might have a small place in reshaping a dominant narrative of research in which the researcher writes and publishes and the "participants" do not. Our strongest

hope is that when students new to research have opportunities to read our co-authored texts that they, too, will find ways to honour the relational that lives in narrative inquiries in which they may be involved, from start to finish and beyond.

4. EXPLORING THE CURRICULIM MAKING OF BELONGING IN SCHOOLS

Figure 4.1: Anne-Marie's visual representation



(Visual image shared by Anne-Marie⁹, June 6, 2010)

This is the way I viewed myself in school. . . odd. . . out of place. I see this both as myself when I was at school but, also, as my students. I see this girl all the time. I really identify with the girl at school who feels alone, a little bit of an odd ball and on the outside. (Audio taped research conversation, June 6, 2010)

The above two field texts were each shared by Anne-Marie, one of two participants with whom I engaged in a year-long narrative inquiry (Prystay Thiessen, 2012). Each field text, one a visual representation of her experience and another, a story

⁹ As a way to protect participant identities, pseudonyms were used.

shared in an audio taped research conversation, are expressions of Anne-Marie's experiences of feeling alone as she navigated a school setting. Anne-Marie often storied feeling "on the outside" of life at school. These stories Anne-Marie shared of herself filled me with questions of belonging in school. As I thought about Anne-Marie's experiences I wondered about the possibilities of teachers co-creating communities of belonging with students, both within classrooms and in extracurricular settings. How do we, as teachers, ensure that students feel connected to their school settings? What place might we, as teachers, have in co-creating with students school spaces where all children and youth, especially children and youth who feel as though they are "odd. . . out of place" or "on the outside" feel that their diverse and multiple identities are valued and supported?

4.1 Situating Our Narrative Inquiry

As I invited Anne-Marie into narrative inquiry I came to our shared work having also lived as a student who felt invisible in school settings. My feelings of invisibility gradually shifted as I became involved in a junior high school drama production. Although at that time I was not awake to ways in which my continued participation within the extracurricular drama community was shaping my identity I now realize that as I continued to participate in this space throughout high school, university, and into adulthood, I was also coming to understand belonging in social contexts. As I reflected on Anne-Marie's experience alongside my experience as a student in school I wondered how students might come to feel they are part of a community, why students may feel outside a community, and what happens to students' identities as a result of these feelings.

4.2 Attending to Belonging in Schools

Greene (1995) writes that community “cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict . . . it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common” (p. 39). Greene supports the idea that community “can happen even in the local spaces of the classroom, particularly when students are encouraged to find their voices and their images” (p. 39). Reading Greene’s thoughts I questioned what may be needed to ensure students experience spaces in school where their voices, their images, their identities flourish. Smyth and Fasoli (2007) suggest that “earning [students’] respect [is] crucial to ensuring [students’] educational success” (p. 281). Furthermore, one way to earn students’ respect is through conscious wakefulness to “relational power” (p. 283), which is a concept “generally used to refer to the way in which collaboration and trust is created across and among constituent groups in schools” (p. 283). In their work, Smyth and Fasoli highlight the need for teachers to consciously work to hear, and to understand, the stories students tell, the gifts students embody, and the struggles that shape the diverse lives of students.

4.3 Connecting Belonging in School with Relational Understandings of Curriculum

In their view of “teachers as curriculum makers” Clandinin and Connelly (1992, p. 392) stretched my understanding of the connections a teacher and students can make as they negotiate relationships in a classroom:

Teachers and students live out a curriculum; teachers do not transmit, implement, or teach a curriculum and objectives; nor are they and their students carried forward in their work and studies by a curriculum of textbooks and content,

instructional methodologies and intentions. An account of teachers' and students' lives over time is the curriculum, although intentionality, objectives, and curriculum materials do play a part in it. (p. 365)

Clandinin and Connelly's understanding of "curriculum" encompasses much more than government mandated subject matter documents. Indeed, "curriculum is being lived as each new learner constructs meaning and learns to live a new but connected story" (p. 392). This idea of lived curriculum is connected with Schwab's exploration of four curricular commonplaces: "teacher, student, what is taught and [the] milieu of teaching-learning" (Schwab, 1983, p. 241). Understanding curriculum as "something experienced in situations" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p.6), that is, something experienced, in the interaction of a teacher's life with the lives of students, connects with Aoki's (1993) idea of the "lived curriculum" as a way to describe how students' "stories of lived experience" (Aoki, 1993, p. 257) shape the classroom curriculum. Aoki shows that a "multiplicity of curricula" exists "between and among [the] curriculum-as-plan and the lived curricula" (p. 260). Within Aoki's understanding of curriculum, the curricular landscape is a "multiplicity of betweenness" (p. 260). By this, Aoki is attending to the space between the curriculum-as-plan and the lived curricula. He is also attending to the spaces that exist between the students with one another, with the teacher, and with subject matter expectations.

Carrying my earlier questions of belonging in schools into the curriculum courses I undertook as part of my masters program I became drawn to these more active and relational notions of curriculum as something in the making, as fluid, shifting, and emergent. I began to imagine how we, as teachers, might feel more empowered to create

a classroom community where all students feel a connection, that is, where each student feels s/he belongs and is valued. Central within this process of belonging, is voice: “When students are taken seriously and attended to as knowledgeable participants in important conversations, they feel empowered and motivated to participate constructively in their education” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). If we, as teachers, can draw upon the lived curriculum as a starting point for co-creating spaces of belonging with students might we then move closer to “[ensuring] there are legitimate and valued spaces within which students can speak, retuning our ears so that we can hear what they say and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 4)?

4.3. 1 Co-composing a narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry is a research methodology where researchers’ “first and foremost way of thinking about experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477) is through story. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that:

The term experience helps us to think through such matters as an individual child’s learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on. (p. 2)

As a research methodology narrative inquiry focuses on the concept that experiences are on-going and that “experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Although narrative inquiry has been used in a number of fields, such as anthropology, social work, and nursing, the field of education seems to lend itself to narrative inquiry: “Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience

should be studied narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). While reading about narrative inquiry I wondered: How would I engage in narrative inquiry?

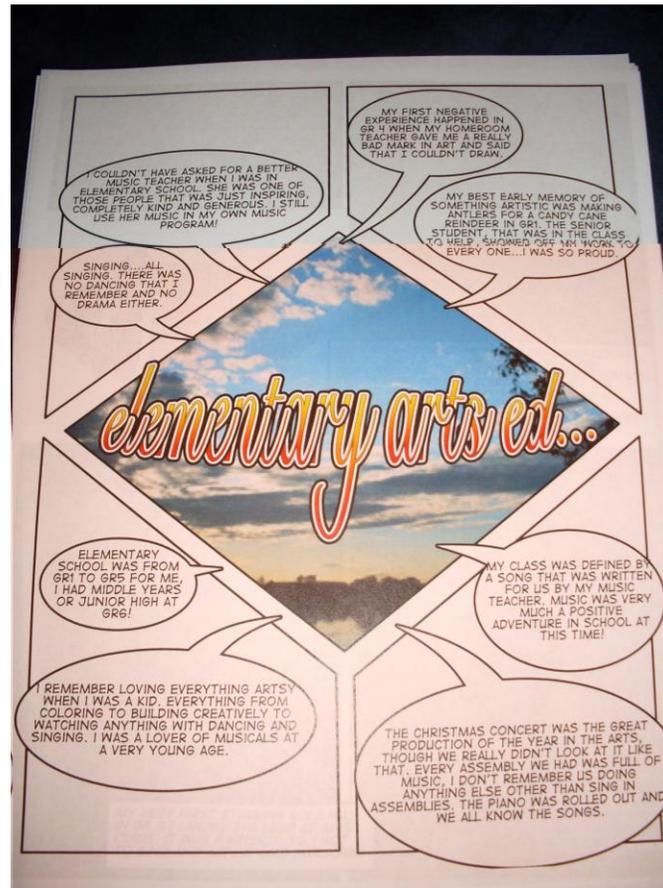
4.4. Engaging in Narrative Inquiry

As a starting place for this narrative inquiry in which Anne-Marie and a second participant, Lucy, and I engaged, I searched for participants who had a connection to the arts within a school setting. In considering these criteria I searched for potential participants in school settings, arts centres, and through other educators. I started my search with current arts educators. After finding two willing participants in Anne-Marie and Lucy, I first met individually with each of them to discuss the timeline of our inquiry. At this time, each participant signed a consent form. From this point forward, Lucy, Anne-Marie, and I began to form our narrative inquiry together. Throughout our four meetings, all of which were audio recorded, Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I engaged in many different discussions, including several field text activities such as composing annals and chronicles, which are described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as

The rudimentary shaping and narrating of personal and social histories. ... [When people engage in constructing annals and chronicles they] are engaged in the construction of personal narrative histories. We think of *annals* as a list of dates of memories, events, stories, and the like. ... [In this process, people] construct time lines beginning, for example, at birth; at some distant, important period or date in the past history of the person’s family; or at some more recent date, as a kind of beginning benchmark. We think of *chronicles* as the sequence of events in and around a particular topic or narrative thread of interest, for example, the teenage years or the traveling years. (p. 112)

Anne-Marie's annals and chronicles took on the form of a comic book, as shown in the following photograph:

Figure 4.2: A sample of Anne-Marie's annals and chronicles



(Visual Image, Page 8, shared by Anne-Marie, May 13, 2010)

As I later listened to the several audio recordings of our conversations in relation with Anne-Marie's and Lucy's annals and chronicles, a number of questions arose for me in relation with our told stories. Since I wanted to discuss specific stories represented on their annals and chronicles, our third meeting became a space where we further inquired into our stories. At the end of this third meeting, I asked Lucy and Anne-Marie to consider creating another field text, an artistic piece (visual, musical, dramatic, and so on)

that, for them, spoke of the transformative place of the arts in their schooling experiences, particularly in relation with aspects of belonging. For Anne-Marie, the several drawings included in this paper show her expressions of ways in which the arts shaped feelings and spaces of belonging in her schooling experiences. Each of her representations, and the stories she told in relation with them, showed the indelible connections these experiences of belonging had in her unfolding life journey.

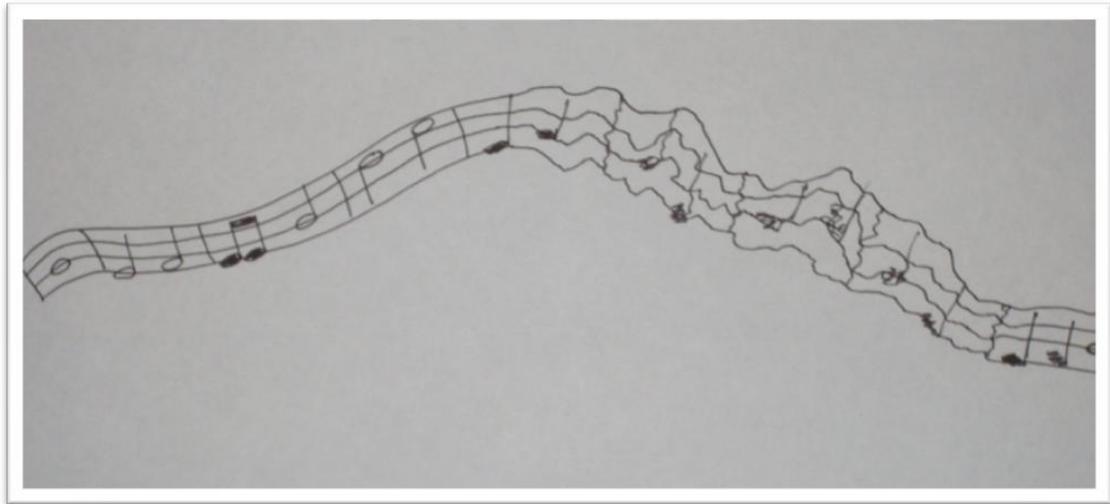
As Anne-Marie and I inquired into her stories we attended to the earlier described three dimensions or commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In this way we understood that Anne-Marie's stories exist on a temporal plane that moves from the past, into the present and, that holds potential to shape her future experience. As well, Anne-Marie's stories reveal her inward feelings and thoughts as well as the social conditions that surround her stories. Finally, "all events take place some place. . . . the specificity of location is crucial. . . Place may change as the inquiry delves into temporality" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). As co-participants in this narrative inquiry we considered the impact of each dimension on Anne-Marie's unfolding life. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000) attending to the temporal, social, and place dimension of experience shapes a process of thinking narratively. Furthermore, Downey and Clandinin (2010) write that

Thinking narratively means keeping the terms [temporality, sociality, and place] close to their experiential origins, to think of them 'not so much as generating a list of understandings achieved by analyzing the stories' . . .but rather thinking with them to understand the lives being lived. (p. 385)

In these ways, Anne-Marie became a co-composer of each phase of our narrative inquiry, including the composition of this research text as we inquired into her experiences, thinking narratively with her stories of experience.

4.5 Co-inquiring with Anne-Marie's Stories of Experience

Figure 4.3: Anne-Marie's visual representation



(Visual image shared by Anne-Marie, June 6, 2010)

This is my journey through music. It started off positive and went through a really rough, rocky period in high school. It has now started off positive again since I've started teaching. I [had] never really engaged myself in music until I started teaching. . . it's always been so negative in the back of my mind. (Audio taped research conversation, June 6, 2010)

As Anne-Marie shared the above visual image and stories of experience she connected with it, she focused first not at the beginning of her "journey through music" but in what she described as a "really, rough, rocky period in high school". In sharing her stories of high school band, Anne-Marie focused on a band classroom which she

experienced as a place where she felt no sense of belonging. She also focused on the lack of relationship between herself and the band teacher. Although other students seemed to connect with the band teacher, Anne-Marie spoke of living quite different experiences, experiences including public embarrassment and ridicule when she joined the high school band program:

My band teacher [in high school] was terrible. He was a bully. He would publicly embarrass you in front of other students. He would ridicule you if he didn't like you. I loved to play my instrument. I loved band, I loved making music but it got so bad that I eventually just quit. (Audio taped research conversation, April 25, 2010)

Despite feeling ridiculed in her high school band classroom, when it came time for the high school musical, Anne-Marie wanted to be part of this extracurricular school community. Gathering up her courage Anne-Marie auditioned even as she knew that the musicals were run by the same band teacher with whom she struggled in the band classroom:

Musicals were run by the band department so I never had a chance at a part [in the high school musical] after quitting band. You had the quitter stamp on your head. And the awful thing was that they did my favourite musical. They did 'The Music Man' . . . I just loved the musicals they did. I remember sucking it up and thinking, 'I love 'The Music Man' so much, I [know] every word to every song; I [know] the dialogue from that movie so at least I [want] to try out for the chorus. I [know] I [don't] have a shot at any of the main parts but I'm going to come out for the chorus'. I remember going to one practice and they gave me the music

and I thought, ‘Ok I can do this’ and I sat there and I sang and the first opportunity he [the band teacher] had to ridicule me, he took it and I didn’t go back. I just didn’t have the self confidence. It took so much for me to go because none of my friends were there at all. It was just something I wanted [to experience] before I graduated. I [wanted] to be in a musical because I loved them so much and the first opportunity he got to embarrass me, he took it. I was out of there so fast. It was one of those things I was just disappointed in myself. (Audio taped research conversation, April 25, 2010)

After the above experience Anne-Marie quit the musical and never again returned to audition. As she showed in her above story, the tensions that lived between her and the band teacher not only affected Anne-Marie while she remained on the school landscape and attended band class but they also affected Anne-Marie as she tried to enter the extracurricular music landscape. While her interactions in each of these places changed, something also changed within Anne-Marie—her self-confidence. No longer feeling confident to or capable of interacting with the band teacher Anne-Marie left the audition and, for the remainder of high school, carried within a deep sense of being “disappointed in [her]self”.

In time, these high school tensions experienced by Anne-Marie caused her to reflect on her own teaching practices and to ask questions about how she, now as a teacher, could draw upon these experiences to try to co-create spaces with students where relationships, respect, and acceptance, unlike her high school band experiences, were nurtured and valued in school:

Often times I think, I worry that I have said something to a student and unintentionally turned them away from something. I think about how my negative experience shaped me and I just pray that I haven't created that negative experience for my students. What if I wouldn't have had that negative experience in band, because other students loved him, worshiped him. Our school board worshiped him, the parents worshiped him but there were the few of us that he made our lives miserable. And I think about all those other people who had those positive experiences and I wish I was one of them. (Audio taped research conversation, May 12, 2010)

Yet, as Anne-Marie's earlier shared visual representation shows, not all of her musical experiences were filled with tension. In fact, as can be seen in her visual representation, Anne-Marie's early experiences in music were very positive. As she moved through school her subsequent decisions about joining band were shaped by these earlier experiences. For example, Anne-Marie storied one person, a teacher who taught Anne-Marie music from Grade 1 to Grade 4, as shaping within herself a sense of feeling accepted and valued as she participated in early music making experiences:

I couldn't have asked for a better music teacher when I was in elementary school. She was one of those people that was just inspiring, completely kind and generous. I still use her music in my own music program. (Audio taped research conversation, April 25, 2010)

As Anne-Marie continued to share more of her experience with this music teacher, she described what she felt made them so inspiring:

I think it was the feeling you got in her class. It was going to be fun; it was going to be exciting. I remember she sat and played the piano and encouraged us and made us feel good about signing. Singing was really ingrained in me after that. We sang songs that were about how to be a better person and how to treat others well. She was a beautiful person inside and out. She was one of those people that lit up a room, made you feel at home and was someone you loved to be around. I remember thinking, 'That's the kind of person everyone should all strive to be'. Just very generous and kind and caring. She always made you feel welcome and important. Everyone was important to her. I don't ever remember her singling anyone out or raising her voice. It was that safe feeling when you walked into her classroom. Everyone was equal, everyone was welcome. (Audio taped research conversation, May 12, 2010)

Anne-Marie's experiences alongside this music teacher stand in stark contrast to the experiences she later lived alongside the high school band teacher. In this relationship Anne-Marie began to story herself as a good singer; she also felt "welcomed" into, and "important" in the classroom space. Now, many years later, as Anne-Marie is also a teacher, she thinks of this teacher as she interacts with students, trying to ensure that their experiences are fun, encouraging, and welcoming.

There is a sense in Anne-Marie's stories that it was this music teacher who significantly shaped her identity as a music maker. While in high school band Anne-Marie's identity as a music-maker was shaken, the significance of these elementary music experiences alongside this teacher seemed to have supported Anne-Marie to not lose her love for music. In this story, too, Anne-Marie also connects the qualities of the

music teacher, that is, how she lived with Anne-Marie and the additional children in the elementary music classroom, as now threaded into her identity as a teacher.

Alongside Anne-Marie's positive experience in music were her family's connections with, and support for, the arts.

Figure 4.4: Anne-Marie's visual representation



(Visual image shared by Anne-Marie, June 6, 2010)

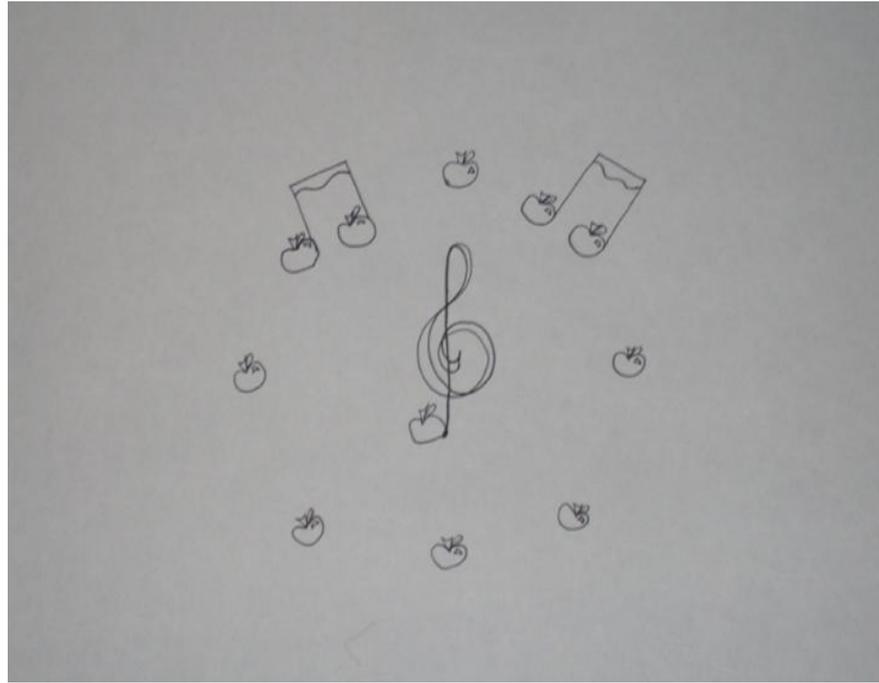
This is home. My parents sang, my dad and grandpa played guitar, my grandpa learned at 70 to play violin. I always grew up with a lot of music in my home. As far back as I can remember my dad always doodled, he was always drawing and doodling. Drawing was always big in my house. They always supported [the arts]. It was a very nurturing environment for someone who was artistic. (Audio taped research conversation, June 6, 2010)

Anne-Marie spoke of her family and their support of the arts many times. Not only were her parents supportive, but their interests and strengths in the arts helped her to feel confident and capable throughout her life:

My parents were my first teachers in the arts. They taught me to love music, to appreciate and try out art and they gave me the room I needed to be a little actress in the house. . . My mom was always a great influence in my art life. She was always singing. My love of music stems from her and dad. My first look at art was watching her colour. She was the person that supported anything artistic I wanted to do. . . My dad is a great poet. He wrote poems for all members of my family. One of my fondest memories as a little girl was watching him doodle on napkins. (Audio taped research conversation, April 7, 2010)

The support Anne-Marie found at home combined with the safety she felt in her elementary music classroom seemed to provide Anne-Marie with the confidence to find her way back to music when she became an arts education teacher. Despite her tensions experienced in high school, Anne-Marie remembered the joy she experienced as a child with her family and as she engaged in music making in elementary school. Anne-Marie wanted the students with whom she works to also experience good feelings about music and themselves as they engage in music making.

Figure 4.5: Anne-Marie's visual representation



(Visual image shared by Anne-Marie, June 6, 2010)

Music has become more positive now that I've started teaching. Anything to do with notes or theories always had such a negative connotation in the back of my head just from my experiences [in high school] but then last year I started teaching myself piano and just a little success with that made me feel a lot better. So I started teaching my kids how to read notes and they had success. It's becoming positive again. And I'm becoming more confident in music because I never ever have been. Even the negative experience in band, all those years in band where I hated it and had a rough time, the knowledge base has really helped me as an arts educator. If it wasn't for band, even though it was negative, I wouldn't be able to teach my kids. (Audio taped research conversation June 6, 2010)

4.6 Thinking Narratively with Anne-Marie's Stories: Exploring Possibilities for Making a Curriculum of Belonging in Schools

As we metaphorically brought Anne-Marie's stories about her family alongside my earlier puzzling over belonging in schools, I became drawn toward new questions about how I, as a teacher, need to consider student's familial backgrounds within school curriculum making. Attending to the stories lived on Anne-Marie's family landscape revealed an intergenerational connection with music. This intergenerational connection was passed to Anne-Marie from her grandfather to her mother and then, from her mother to her. Music has traveled with her family throughout generations and there is a sense that these intergenerational experiences shaped Anne-Marie's artistic identity as she grew older. Yet, Anne-Marie still struggled to belong to the music community within her school. So, how might intergenerational familial narratives weave into the making of a curriculum of belonging in school? How might I, as a teacher, attend to these narratives that exist in students' bodies via their experiences in their homes and communities so they feel connections between the stories they live in and outside of school? What might I learn from these intergenerational narratives that could support me to more closely connect students' diverse lives with our classroom curriculum making? By attending to possible connections between students' home, community, and school experiences, might students feel a stronger sense of belonging in schools?

Anne-Marie's storied experiences with her elementary music teacher seem to point to a relationship of belonging that shaped Anne-Marie's feelings of being a successful learner and maker of music. Anne-Marie, as a teacher, still draws on the memories she carries of her elementary music experiences. There is a sense that Anne-

Marie felt that who she was mattered in her music classroom, that is, that in this place in school she felt as though she belonged. So how might I, as a teacher, create such strong feelings of belonging within classrooms? Thinking with Anne-Marie's stories, the passion for music her teacher exuded to her class, day after day, seemed to foster an exciting and inspiring atmosphere. This teacher seemed to create a space of belonging within her classroom by engaging students to be part of the curriculum making that was occurring. How might we, as teachers, draw upon our passions to encourage students to express their passions? Would the opportunity to share individual interests and unique perspectives allow students to feel as if they are contributing to the curriculum making shaped in the meeting of teachers' and students' lives?

As we thought further about the tensions Anne-Marie experienced within her high school band class, we attended to how she seems to have experienced feelings of disconnection with the love of music she experienced both at home and in elementary school. Did support at school exist for Anne-Marie so that she could have given voice to the lack of belonging she felt within her band classroom? How might students name tensions that exist for them as they navigate school curriculum making? Is there a place for students to be open about the tensions that exist within particular classrooms and relationships with teachers?

Reflecting on Anne-Marie's reflections on her current teaching life, there is a sense that she connects her growing confidence with music to both her positive elementary music experience and her tension-filled experiences in high school. If I metaphorically take Anne-Marie's experiences with high school band and the technical knowledge she experienced there and place this alongside wonders about creating spaces

of belonging in schools, does technical subject matter knowledge build belonging? What about students who do not grasp or care about this subject matter knowledge? Anne-Marie's stories of experience seem to show that despite attempting to learn the mandated subject matter, this alone did not keep her in the class. What if the class was not an optional elective class, but a core class needed for graduation? How might Anne-Marie's stories, and her life, be different? In all of this I wonder how might I, as a teacher foster belonging alongside technical subject matter knowledge without isolating students who may not immediately (or ever) connect with this subject matter knowledge.

Thinking of Anne-Marie's stories, I wonder about redefining how teachers are positioned in schools. Cook-Sather (2007) explores the idea of "redefining responsibilities and relationships within classroom and school contexts" (p. 840) in order to seek out a more balanced definition of "teacher", which may have "preconceived limits or parameters that are assumed and often unquestioned" (p. 840). Ellis, Da Costa, Leroy, and Janzen (2007) address the role of mentors within schools as a way to connect students to the subject matter as well as the school milieu. They show, through their research, how mentors can benefit student learning and that

from a strong foundation of knowing each other well, being able to read each other's responses, and being friends, a mentor and student can also work more comfortably and effectively with various learning or growth needs the student may have. (p. 258)

Cook-Sather (2007) also notes that Ellis et al. (2007) offer new ways of understanding mentorship, ways that are more closely shaped by students' experiences. Cook-Sather highlights that the term "mentor" seems to imply "that we should focus in

extra-classroom contexts (and perhaps intra-classroom contexts as well) more on caring, respectful relationships to support learning and less on traditional, academic emphasis” (p. 841). Can I, as a teacher, redefine my role within a classroom to include both the “preconceived parameters” set out by government mandated curriculum documents but also include the role of mentor? In Anne-Marie’s experiences, the role of teacher as mentor, as shown with her Grade 4 teacher, and the “respectful relationship” formed with that teacher, seemed to contribute to her desire to include music within her own classroom. However, the knowledge gained through the “traditional, academic emphasis” alongside her high school band teacher prepared her for the technical music elements she appears to also share with students. Perhaps, as a teacher, I need to step back and first look at creating a sense of belonging within schools and classrooms. Maybe then, emerging from this curriculum making of belonging, students and I can collaboratively explore the mandated learning outcomes. In my earlier experiences in school it was through the encouragement of a teacher who recognized my abilities within the drama landscape that allowed me to begin to feel a sense of belonging in school. This teacher, or mentor, gave me the space to discover and develop my own creativity and in doing so, allowed me to take risks and feel safe to participate in drama. This feeling of safety and belonging has continued to shape me as a teacher within my own classroom settings.

Is school belonging more than just a temporary feeling of comradery created through teacher and student curriculum making? Perhaps belonging could be kinaesthetic, that is, a knowing that’s carried forward in our bodies, not just our minds. Anne-Marie’s vivid recollection of the feelings she had within her elementary music

classroom seemed to encourage her to look deeply at her own teaching experiences and to reflect on how she might draw upon those experiences to ensure students feel as safe and confident alongside her as she felt alongside her music teacher. This desire to create a safe space, a space where creativity is welcome and where all children are encouraged to express themselves appears to be much more deeply threaded in Anne-Marie's life than simply talking about the idea that belonging in school is significant. It is as if, living in Anne-Marie's body via her experiences at home and in music class, there is an ingrained knowing that now shapes her ways of connecting with students and makes her sensitive to students' multiple identities. This wakefulness to the multiplicity of student identities in classrooms seems to foreground Aoki's (1993) concept of the multiplicity of curricula being lived. Might the making of a curriculum of belonging, then, require that we, as teachers, not lose sight of the multiple identities of the multiple students as, together with them, we work to shape in between spaces which honour students' unique, diverse identities?

5. EXPLORING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FAMILIAL NARRATIVES AND EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL: SHAPING A CURRICULUM OF BELONGING

I am a teacher who has gradually begun to question the dominant narrative of curriculum shaping schools. Having gone through my B. Ed. experiences learning that “curriculum” was the government mandated subject matter documents, only in my M. Ed. experiences as I read the works of diverse curriculum scholars¹⁰ was I awakened to differing ways of understanding curriculum. In this awakening I was particularly drawn toward Clandinin and Connelly’s sense that the “teacher [is seen] not so much as a maker of curriculum but [exists] as a part of it” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 365). Further, they suggest that

curriculum be viewed as an account of teachers’ and children’s lives together in schools and classrooms. . . .[In this view of curriculum making] the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process. . . in which teacher, learners, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction. (p. 392)

I also resonated with Aoki’s (1993) thoughts about “lived curriculum” as a way to understand how students’ “stories of lived experience” (p. 257) are a vital aspect of the curriculum lived in a classroom. Further, Aoki writes how these stories come to shape the classroom curriculum and that within classrooms a “multiplicity of curricula” exists, not

¹⁰ See for example: Aoki, 1993; Ayers, Quinn, Stovall, & Scheiern, 2008; Battiste, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Cook-Sather, 2002; Craig, 2004; Sefa Dei, 2003; Dewey, 1938; Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Epstein & Oyler, 2008; Jackson, 1992; Miller, 2005; Miller Marsh, 2008; Noddings, 2005; Pinar, 2005; and Schwab, 1983.

only “between and among [the] curriculum-as-plan and the lived curricula” (p. 260) but between and among each child, the teacher, and all of the children. Another emergent insight about the meaning of curriculum was the idea of “curriculum making” (Ayers et al, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Schwab, 1983).

In these ways my earlier understanding of curriculum as a subject matter document was gradually shifted toward understanding curriculum as something dynamic, emergent, and lived. I now understand curriculum as a living entity that exists “between” teachers and students (Aoki, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). I also see that what lives in this between can change shape and focus depending upon the students who enter the classroom, who the teacher is who is living alongside the students, and their individual and collective interactions with social contexts which exist both inside and outside the classroom and off the school landscape (Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murray Orr, Pearce, & Steeves, 2006).

5.1 Situating Our Narrative Inquiry

Gradually awakening to these above understandings of curriculum I puzzled over many questions of belonging in schools. During my years as a teacher I became increasingly interested in the arts, particularly after school arts programs. My interest in these spaces was shaped as the youth I worked alongside storied these experiences as vital in shaping their sense of belonging in or with school.

As described in more detail elsewhere (Prystay Thiessen, 2012) as a student in high school I always auditioned for the extracurricular one act plays. I was given roles every year until Grade 12. That year, I had two teachers ask if I wanted to take on a different role. They asked if I wanted to be the stage manager for their production. Since

I had made a decision that theatre was to be my future I wanted to get experience in the different areas. For this reason, I accepted the role of stage manager and told my previous director that I would not be auditioning for his play. After auditions were completed and rehearsals started I learned that my production would be cancelled because of lack of interest from the actors. As a result, not only was I no longer able to be the stage manager but I was also not able to audition for any other plays. This was a very difficult situation to be in because drama was the one place in school where I felt safe. Grade 12 was a challenging year for me because of personal and academic issues. Not only did I have those issues to deal with but I suddenly no longer had a drama community upon which to depend. When this happened, I no longer looked forward to school.

This experience, alongside the experiences students storied to me as I taught, gradually led me to graduate studies and into a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) focused on understanding ways in which experiences with the arts shapes feelings of belonging in and with school.

5.1.1 Co-composing a narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry is a research methodology where researchers’ “first and foremost way of thinking about experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477) is through story. Exploring education by attending to experience “helps us to think through such matters as an individual child’s learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). As a research methodology, narrative inquiry focuses on the premise that experiences are ongoing, that is, that “experiences grow out of other

experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

As a starting place for a narrative inquiry with two teacher co-researchers, Lucy and Anne-Marie¹¹, I searched for participants who expressed a felt sense of connection to the arts within a school setting. After finding two willing co-researchers in Lucy and Anne-Marie I met with them to discuss the timeline of our inquiry. At this time, both Anne-Marie and Lucy signed a consent form. From this point forward in our narrative inquiry Lucy, Anne-Marie, and I storied and collaboratively inquired into the diverse connections we experienced between the arts and ways in which these experiences in school shaped our feelings of belonging. Lucy came to our narrative inquiry as a teacher who had specialized in arts education in university and was currently teaching in a Grade 6 homeroom. Her experiences within her own school landscape, as readers will see, shaped her current thinking and living as a teacher.

5.1.2 Entering into lived experience through field texts.

Prior to our first research conversation I asked Lucy and Anne-Marie to compose annals and chronicles of their experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe annals and chronicles as

a list of dates of memories, events, stories, and the like. ... [In this process, people] construct time lines. We think of *chronicles* as the sequence of events in and around a particular topic or narrative thread of interest. (p. 112)

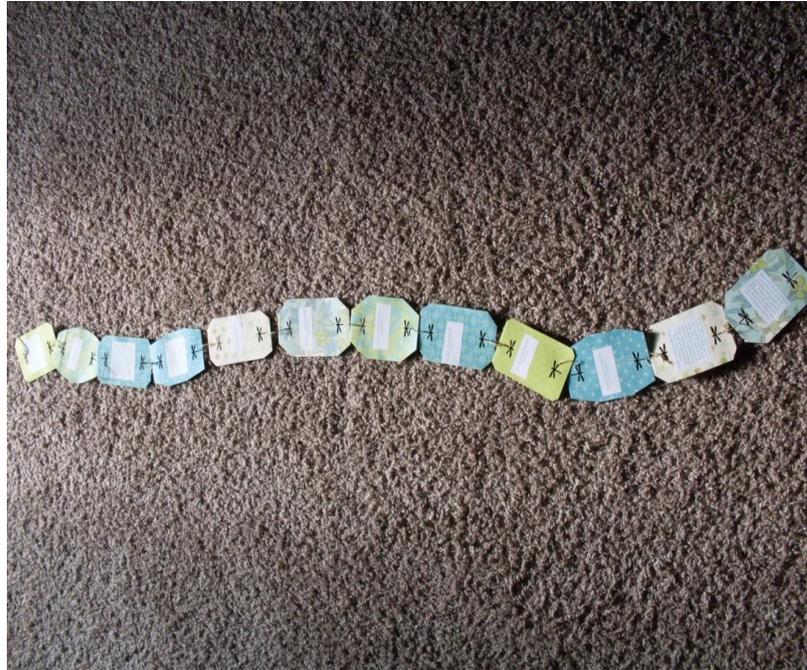
Further, Clandinin & Connelly explain that “through the process of composing annals and chronicles, participants begin to recollect their experiences and construct the outlines

¹¹ Both names are pseudonyms.

of a personal narrative. . .Annals and chronicles may be thought as the rudimentary shaping and narrating of personal and social histories” (p.112).

Lucy’s annals and chronicles took on the form of a visual timeline, as shown below:

Figure 5.1: A sample of Lucy’s annals and chronicles



(Visual Image, shared by Lucy, May 13, 2010)

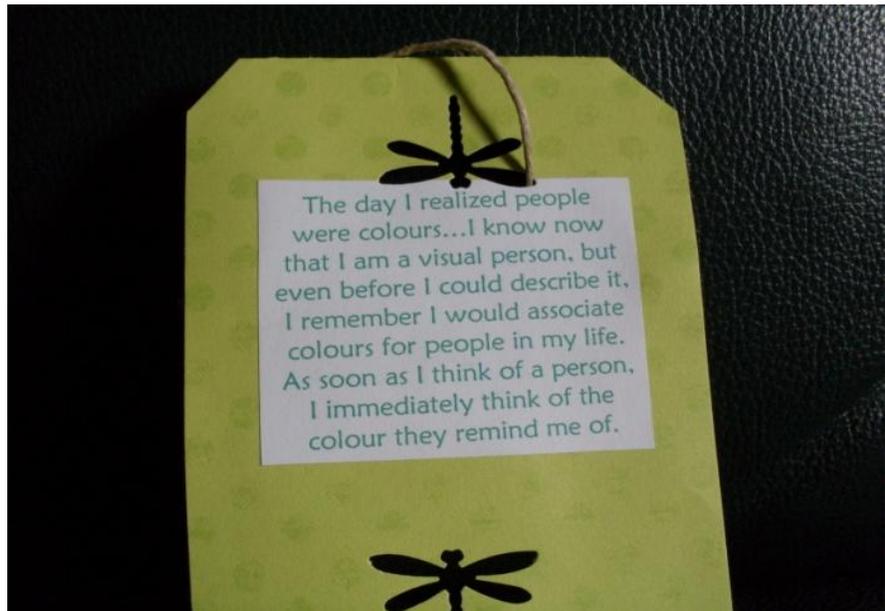
As she talked about her annals and chronicles Lucy explained that she “made a timeline of significant events that basically made me an artist and I connected them all. The title of my work is called “The Day” (Audio taped research conversation, May 13, 2010).

Although Lucy did not explicitly explain her reasoning for the title of her piece, as we continued to explore and discuss her annals and chronicles it became clearer to me that Lucy had chosen significant days, significant experiences, that she felt shaped her identity as an artist. As I looked more closely at Lucy’s annals I saw they consisted of pieces of paper containing the title of a specific day and the beginning of the story of

experience she lived that day. For example, on one side of a piece of paper, Lucy titled her story “The Day I realized people were colours.” On the other side of the paper Lucy wrote:

The day I realized people were colours. . .I know now that I am a visual person but, even before I could describe it, I remember I would associate colours for people in my life. As soon as I think of someone, I immediately think of the colour they remind me of.

Figure 5.2: A sample of Lucy’s annals and chronicles



(Visual Image, shared by Lucy, May 13, 2010)

Another piece of paper was entitled “The day my red crayon was gone,” followed by the story:

The day my red crayon was gone. . .I remember each year for school I had a brand new set of crayons. I loved to colour so much. My favourite colour was red. It

wasn't long before my red crayon was all gone. . .and I had to wait another long year for a new one.

Figure 5.3: A sample of Lucy's annals and chronicles



(Visual Image, shared by Lucy, May 13, 2010)

As I later listened to the audio recordings of our research conversations during which Lucy, Anne-Marie, and I shared our annals and chronicles a number of questions arose for me in relation with their and my storied experiences. Since I wanted to discuss specific experiences represented on their annals and chronicles our next research conversation became a space where we further inquired into these. At the end of this research conversation I asked Lucy and Anne-Marie to consider creating another field text, an artistic piece (visual, musical, dramatic, etc.) that, for them, spoke of or showed the transformative place of the arts in their experiences in school, particularly experiences they felt connected with aspects of belonging and identity. For Lucy, the painting below

showed the strong connections her experiences of belonging in school through the arts had in her unfolding life:

Figure 5.4: Lucy's visual representation



(Visual Image, shared by Lucy, June 6, 2010)

As Lucy shared her above artistic representation she read the following artist statement as a way of explaining her piece:

The title of my piece is “Crescendo”. My assignment was to create an artistic piece that spoke of the transformative place of the arts and my school experiences. I knew I wanted to create something visual as that is where I am most comfortable to reveal my story. At first I was going to use a picture of myself and use it in the picture but I changed my mind and decided to use the symbol of a tree. The tree represents me and my growth throughout my school experiences. I chose this symbol because a tree begins with the planting of a small seed. It only grows with

water and sunlight so some seeds might not have the chance to grow at all.

However, some do receive what they need to grow. I see this connecting to children in school because some receive encouragement and support from certain experiences or teachers. This supports a child's growth in the arts. My tree is placed in the centre of the painting but the ground that is supporting it has circles of bubbles. The bubbles are not a stable base for the tree. When I was in elementary school I had very little support from teachers in the arts. I did not have a strong foundation of encouragement for my growth. It wasn't until my middle year's school that I found a [band] teacher who gave me the experience and support that I needed to truly grow in the arts. The music staff (found in white in the background of the picture) represents my growth at this time. On the painting, the staff grows larger and larger. This is why I chose to name my painting "Crescendo". There is no better word to describe the growth in my life at that time than the dynamic that means "to grow". To this day, I continue to think of my own life as a crescendo. The notes on the music staff represent my own melody as I work my way through various experiences. The choices I make create the pathway on the five staff lines. The notes grow larger as I become more confident with myself as a person and as an artist. Lastly, the buttons on the tree are a reminder that all of my experiences have made me who I am. They are sewn into me. They are part of me. With the addition of the buttons my tree is complete. The melody surrounds the tree and each is part of the other. (Audio taped research conversation, June 6, 2010)

5.1.3 Inquiring into field texts of experience.

Throughout our research conversations and as Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I later inquired into the field texts which Lucy created and shared, such as those above, we attended to the three dimensions or commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). These dimensions describe a “three dimensional space, in which narrative inquirers. . .find themselves, using a set of terms that [point] them backward and forward, inward and outward, and [locate] them in place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 54). Clandinin and Connelly “saw these dimensions as directions or avenues to be pursued in a narrative inquiry” (p. 54). As I thought about this multidimensionality of Lucy’s experiences I attempted to understand Lucy’s stories as existing on a temporal plane that moved from the past and into the present and, in this way, that held potential to shape her future experiences. Lucy’s stories also revealed her inward feelings and thoughts as well as the social conditions that surrounded her as she lived through the experiences she storied. Finally, “all events take place some place. . .the specificity of location is crucial. . . Place may change as the inquiry delves into temporality” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480).

It was in this way that my work as a narrative inquirer led me to consider the impact of each dimension, and the interconnections among them, on Lucy’s unfolding life. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), attending to the temporal, social, and place dimensions of stories of experience shapes an unfolding process of “thinking narratively” (p. 41). “Thinking narratively” is further described by Mitton-Kükner, Nelson, and Desrochers (2010) as

entailing “a subtle twist of mind on behalf of the enquirer” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4) in which questions shaped by the dimensions of an inquiry space composed of temporality, sociality and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) are asked, and re-asked, about the actions of participants, with whom we are in relationship, and of ourselves as researchers in the midst of a relational inquiry. (p.1)

Additionally, they write that “thinking narratively. . .helps to ensure that crucial learning moments are not missed” (p. 6).

As I reflected upon my earlier described awakenings in relation with curriculum alongside Lucy’s storied experiences of her life as a student in school, I began to wonder how the experiences a student lives outside of school with her or his family might connect with her or his curriculum making in school. This wonder emerged as I was in the midst of writing my thesis and as I found myself returning, again and again, to Lucy’s stories. For example, one story I often returned to was Lucy’s story of her mom’s participation in a special day in Lucy’s Kindergarten:

She stood at the front and drew pictures on paper for all the kids to colour. I never knew my mom was so cool. I remember that day because it was my kindergarten star day which is kind of like your birthday and everything that day is about you. So we got to have a treat and I remember we had chocolate fondue with fruit. (Interim Research Text based on Audio Taped Research Conversations, April 25 and May 13, 2010)

Both this above story and the following story filled me with questions:

I just really wanted . . . [my mom] [at school] because she was a single mom and was always working so I never ever got time with her so it was really special that I got to spend the day with her in my class. (Interim Research Text based on Audio Taped Research Conversations, April 25 and May 13, 2010)

Even in our research conversations as Lucy shared these stories of her experience I felt drawn toward wanting to further understand their significance in her life. As I listened to Lucy I sensed deep connections among her relationship with her mom, her school curriculum making experiences, and her experiences of belonging in school. As mothers are not often common characters in school curriculum making, Lucy's stories drew me toward wanting to understand the connections she seemed to feel between experiencing feelings of belonging in school with experiences she lived in and with her family.

Lucy's memories of children not wanting to play with her because her parents were divorced led me to wonder how to support students to feel they are part of school curriculum making, that is, for all students, given their many differences, to experience feelings of belonging in and through their curriculum making in school. This wonder led me to Chung and Clandinin's (2010) narrative inquiry with a student, Ji-Sook, and her mother, Mrs. Han, in which they attended to the "interwoven stories between teachers, families, and children" (p. 179). They write that the identities of teachers, families, and children seem to "ripple and shift as they bump against social, cultural, and institutional narratives" (p. 179) as their lives meet in classrooms and schools. Through living alongside Ji-Sook and Mrs. Han, Chung and Clandinin saw that both Ji-Sook's and Mrs. Han's "stories shaped [the] in-classroom curriculum making" (p. 180). They also saw that "the in-classroom curriculum making shaped the lives of this child and her mother" (p.

180). As a result, Chung and Clandinin “wondered how children’s and families’ stories were given space in curriculum making in schools” (p. 180) so that the diverse lives that meet within a classroom are valued and respected. Until reading Chung and Clandinin I had not yet considered that families’ stories could have a place in curriculum making. Yet, this idea made sense to me, especially alongside Lucy’s story of her experiences in Kindergarten on her “star day” when her mom’s gifts as an artist shaped the afternoon.

This idea also made sense to me as I thought about my own experiences. As I considered my experiences in school I recalled many occasions in which I shared my in school experiences at home. As I remembered sharing about my day at school with my family, I remembered us being around the kitchen table. I also remembered that my stories of school typically centred on the subject area I liked the best, an activity in which we engaged, or a classmate or teacher about whom I told a story. However, as I reflected on experiences where I might have been asked to share my familial experiences in a classroom, short of describing my family members, I cannot recall a time where I felt invited, or safe enough, to share much more than the locations of our family holidays.

Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) continued to extend my growing and more complex understandings of curriculum making as they focused not only on “school curriculum making” but, also, on “familial curriculum making” (p. 14). They describe familial curriculum making as “the process negotiated between [children] and . . . family members as they interact on their home and community landscapes” (p.14). Working from Clandinin and Connelly’s (1992) view of curriculum as “a course of life” (p. 393), Huber et al write that as they held their focus on children’s lives in school they gradually “began to understand the interwoven nature of children’s narrative identity making, their

stories to live by and the curriculum making they negotiated with teachers and children” (pp. 10-11). In a more recent narrative inquiry in which they participated alongside Loyla, a four-year-old girl and her mother, Orié, they describe “attending to who Loyla was, and who she was becoming”(p. 7) as they participated alongside Loyla and her mother on their familial landscape as Loyla’s year in Kindergarten unfolded. Through this participation Huber et al explain how they

 somewhat abruptly, began to realize that, to this point, [they] had understood curriculum making as occurring only in schools. However, through attending to the relationships of Loyla’s life, we saw multiple instances of ways she engaged in relation with others in curriculum making at home and in the community. (p.7)

As they subsequently brought their earlier understandings of curriculum making as interwoven with identity making to their more current narrative inquiry alongside children and families, both in their school and in their home and community contexts, Huber et al conceptualized familial curriculum making as

 an account of parents’/families/and children’s lives together in homes and communities where the parents and families are an integral part of the curricular process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieus are in dynamic interaction. (p. 14)

5.2 Thinking Narratively with Lucy’s Stories: Exploring New Questions of the Meeting of Two Curriculum-Making Worlds

In this section I continue to think narratively with Lucy’s stories in relation with the above ideas of “familial and school curriculum making” and that these two kinds of curriculum making “compris[e] two worlds” (Huber et al, 2011, p. 108). As I return to

Lucy's unfolding stories of her Kindergarten star day which were shared in the earlier section, I see that in Lucy's familial curriculum making world she had grown to know her mom as an artist. It was not, however, until Lucy's mom came to school and her gifts as an artist became part of the school curriculum making that Lucy seemed to understand her mom as an artist who was "incredibly awesome" and "cool." Through Lucy's telling of the importance for her of her mom's presence in school I also saw something of the school curriculum making in the Kindergarten classroom. In her story Lucy characterized star day as a time when individual children were celebrated. While I do not know if all of the children's parents came to school on their child's star day, this day was clearly special, special like a birthday, which was also a day, at least for Lucy, when "everything that day is about you." Not only did star day seem to include "a treat" but, for Lucy, that the children thought of her mom as "cool" also greatly mattered.

As Lucy continued telling more of her story of the curriculum she experienced during her star day at school I learned something more of the experiences that shaped her young life, both in her familial curriculum making world and in her school curriculum making world. Given that Lucy's mom was a "single mom" who was "always working", Lucy remembered her childhood yearning for she and her mom to have more time together. Lucy's Kindergarten star day seemed to shape an opportunity where Lucy and her mom could spend the afternoon together. But, as Lucy's story shows, the star day also seemed to shape a space where something else, something also of deep importance to Lucy, became reshaped. Until this day in school Lucy lived as a child who felt "different" because her parents were divorced. Lucy remembered this difference as separating her from the other children whom she remembered as not wanting to play with her. She

described these experiences as “heart breaking”. However, when Lucy’s mom came to school and interacted with the children in Lucy’s classroom through a form of art making, Lucy’s relationship with the children shifted as they not only began to play but, to talk more with her. This change in Lucy’s and the children’s interactions seemed to also reshape Lucy’s sense of her difference. No longer did she seem to see her family difference as separating her from friendships, but Lucy also remembered becoming “proud of . . . [her] family”. In the midst of Lucy’s and the children’s shifting stories Lucy remembered school becoming a place she better liked:

[Until this day, I always felt different in school because] my parents [were] divorced. [This always made me feel as though] I was the different kid in the class. Kids literally didn’t want to play with me because my parents were divorced and that broke my heart but then when my mom came to school kids were playing with me and talking with me about her. That made me feel so special and it made me feel proud of my family. It made me like school better. (Audio taped research conversation, June 6, 2010)

Lucy’s stories of her feelings of being accepted by her peers after her mother spent time in her classroom resonate with my memories of my school experiences. My father, a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, was invited into my Grade 8 classroom to speak about his job. I can recall my first impression being one of nervousness. I did not want my father to embarrass me in front of my classmates. I remember a sense of needing him to be accepted by my peers. Once I saw my peers accept my father’s humour and easy going nature I remember relaxing because my peers seemed to connect with my father.

I also remember that because my mother's job was as the vice principal of my high school there were times when expectations were made based on my mom's job. For example, I remember that teachers trusted me to be honest, allowed me certain leniencies on timelines for homework, and they also expected "good" behaviour from me within their class. I now wonder, because of both my mother's and my existence on this school landscape if more of our familial curriculum making became visible in school. If so, did this potential deeper awareness or knowing of our familial curriculum making, for example, as my teachers saw my mother's and my positive relationship with one another, shape how they interacted with me?

As I think with these stories of my earlier experiences, I realize that while I carried my familial curriculum making in my body as I went to school a kind of taken for grantedness (Greene, 1995) seemed to shape my experiences in school. It was as though little, if anything, about my life outside of school mattered. Yet, why was it, I wonder, that what happened in school seemed to enter onto my familial landscape. Being the daughter of the high school vice principal I remember experiencing tension around certain expectations from teachers and while I remember sharing these tensions with my family I cannot recall a time when these tensions were given a voice at school.

As I continue to reflect on the potential shaped in the bringing together of the two worlds of curriculum making, familial and school, I realize that this does not often happen within classrooms and schools. Yet, I wonder, if these two worlds could weave together might students feel a deeper connection with school, with peers, and with teachers. I wonder if the senses of belonging which teachers often seem to want to instil within classrooms could be strengthened if students' familial curriculum making was

respected in their school curriculum making. Could we then, as teachers, gradually understand ways of honouring students' worlds outside of school? What might this meeting of these two curriculum making worlds shape in relation with a student's feelings of acceptance and understanding of themselves and of peers?

Remembering these earlier experiences in my life causes me to wonder why school curriculum making often enters a student's home but students' familial curriculum making does not often seem to travel into the classroom.

5.3 Re-Imagining the Making of a Curriculum of Belonging

Considering both types of curriculum making, familial and school, I wonder how these two worlds of curriculum making might contribute to belonging in schools. Within a classroom, a sense of community, safety, and connection may be aspects that need to be created in order for belonging to occur. If community "cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict. . .it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common" (Greene, 1995, p. 39), then students may need an opportunity to discover what they might have in common. This sense of connection may become shaped or even strengthened through opportunities to learn about and from one another's familial curriculum making. Can a "meaningful connection to the school institution and the people associated with it" (Barrera, 2006, p. 1) be created through an understanding of each individual's familial curriculum making? Perhaps this kind of community building or "bonding may [also] include a sense of belonging" (Barrera, 2006, p. 1)?

Thinking with Lucy's stories while being mindful of the three narrative inquiry commonplaces, this Kindergarten star day experience within Lucy's early life in school

seemed to be the first in which Lucy's perception of her mother changed from the mother who existed in the place of their familial world to one where her mother existed differently in the place of Lucy's Kindergarten classroom. As it was a day for Lucy to bring her stories forward, was the meaning of the star day to honour Lucy in her other world, her familial world? If so, I wonder if the teacher aware of, or awake to, what she or he was doing. On this day, Lucy's mother literally traveled with her into the world of the Kindergarten classroom where the presence of her mom was honoured for who she was in that space. The star day made a space where Lucy developed a new story of her mom as she was able to view her mother in a different space surrounded by different people. This caused me to wonder if this sense of knowing reverberated back into the familial curriculum making, that is, if Lucy's newly created story of her mother continued within the spaces of her home and community.

It seems as though the Kindergarten teacher created a moment where each Kindergarten student was valued as a person, and was no longer just another face in the classroom.

I remember that day because it was my Kindergarten star day which is kind of like your birthday and everything that day is about you. (Audio taped research conversation, June 6, 2010)

Through the experience of this star day it seemed as though space was created where Lucy's familial curriculum making was given voice and her two worlds of curriculum making were able to weave together in ways that honoured who Lucy was and who Lucy was becoming. The silences around her "different" family life seemed momentarily forgotten as Lucy was able to bring her familial curriculum making to school through the

presence of her mother. I wonder how often Lucy felt this sense of pride in bringing her familial curriculum making to school. She related this day as similar to her birthday: a celebration usually experienced at home with family or friends and often away from school. This day seemed to be a way to create a connection between the worlds outside of school with Lucy's classroom curriculum making; it also seemed to allow other students an opportunity to learn about Lucy's familial curriculum making:

She had white bristle board and in our groups we got to decide what [picture] she was going to draw so we could colour and my group decided we were going to get her to draw a clown. Then she drew it in front of us, which was amazing to me. . . It was seeing my mom in a different way and all of the other kids said, "Oh your mom is so cool. She can make these cool drawings" and that was what made it so special; discovering that part of my mom that I didn't know before. (Audio taped research conversation, June 6, 2010)

In her above story of her experience, Lucy remembered her mother's drawing of the clown as a moment where she connected the importance of her classmates' opinions with the visions they had of her mother. Again, Lucy felt that her mother was honoured as a person and because of that honouring, Lucy, too, saw her mother in a different light, both in and outside of school. In this way the earlier perceptions children had of Lucy and of Lucy's mother as a "single mother" seemed to become altered.

5.3.1 The ongoing need to attend to webs of relationship.

The importance of creating spaces of belonging where children have the opportunity to share their familial curriculum making fits with Aoki's (1993) idea of the multiplicity of curriculum in classrooms, with Chung and Clandinin's (2010) wondering

about the interweaving of the stories of children, families, and teachers, and with the “webs of relationship” Greene (1993) explores. Greene sees these relationships as shaped by students having opportunities to tell “stories of what they are seeking, what they know and might not yet know, exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes” (p. 218). As she continues to explore the possibilities of creating webs of relationship in classrooms and schools, Greene further writes that:

It is when [students] begin disclosing who they are to one another that worldly things can be overgrown with such a web, with an entirely different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to people’s acting and speaking directly to each other. It is at moments like these that persons begin to recognize each other and, in the experience of recognition, feel the need to take responsibility for one another. (p. 218)

I wonder if it is in coming to live out this kind of responsibility for and with each other that a curriculum of belonging may be experienced, a curriculum of belonging which may allow students the freedom and safety to share their lived experiences, both those lived at home and at school, with the differing people in each of these places.

Is it possible for students to begin to feel a sense of “responsibility”, as Greene (1993) suggested, to their classmates and, in feeling this, to attend more closely to the familial curriculum making that allows each student to be unique? If so, is it possible to honour familial curriculum making while still attending to school curriculum making? Is it possible that by attending to both worlds of curriculum making that teachers, students, and families might, together, experience curriculum as “as a course of life, perhaps a

curriculum of lives” (Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Orr, Pearce & Steeves, 2006, p. 12) in which belonging matters as much as the mandated subject matter outcomes?

6. THINKING NARRATIVELY AND ITS POSSIBILITIES

Through narrative inquiry into Anne-Marie's, Lucy's, and my stories of experiences, each of our stories of ourselves, of who we each are and of who we are each becoming were gradually opened up to "retelling. . . and to reliving" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 251). However, the "the promise of storytelling emerges when we move beyond regarding a story as a fixed entity and engage in conversations with our stories" (p. 251). This shift for the three of us in relation with our stories of experience took shape through our ongoing inquiry, that is, it was "in our conversations with each other, with texts, with situations, and with other stories that we . . . [came] to retelling our stories" (p. 251). I highlighted this important aspect of narrative inquiry, of retelling and reliving stories of experience, in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 as I described Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) sense of "thinking narratively" by attending to the multidimensional nature of experience, through attentiveness to the temporal, social, and place aspects of experience. In Chapters 4 and 5 I showed my attention to this multidimensionality of Anne-Marie's, Lucy's, and my stories of experiences as I thought with our stories. As described by Clandinin, Huber, Steeves, and Li (2011):

When we speak of learning to think narratively we are speaking of learning to think with stories. The concept of thinking with stories is meant to oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking about stories. Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. . . When we begin to engage in narrative inquiry, we need to be attentive to thinking with stories in multiple ways: towards our stories, toward others' stories, toward all the social, institutional, cultural, familial and linguistic narratives in which we are

embedded as well as toward what begins to emerge in the sharing of our lived and told stories. (p. 34)

It is my reflections on experiencing the power of what began to emerge as Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I tried to move from retelling our stories to reliving them that shapes this final thesis chapter.

Through the narrative process which Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I lived I am profoundly awakened to “possibilities for growth and change” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 247). As earlier highlighted, awakening to these possibilities reshaped my earlier understandings of curriculum, community, and belonging. As Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I “learn[ed] to tell, to listen and to respond to . . . stories [as we thought with our stories, we] imagine[d] significant educational consequences” (p. 247). These consequences, or awakenings, surfaced in ways I had not anticipated. For example, as I began living this narrative inquiry I imagined a journey that would answer questions about community making and belonging within art making spaces in schools. To find these answers I invited Anne-Marie and Lucy into narrative inquiry. Together, we engaged in a number of research conversations focused on the arts and the place of the arts in their, and my, experiences in schools. However, as shown in Chapters 4 and 5, Lucy’s and Anne-Marie’s stories of their experiences with the arts, community, and belonging in and with school were entangled with their stories of family and friends in places in their lives outside of school. As our narrative inquiry proceeded I gradually realized that their, and my, experiences in and with family and community were not separate from experiences in and with school. In this way a different kind of learning occurred throughout our narrative inquiry than I initially imagined.

6.1 Narrative Beginnings

I began this narrative inquiry by first telling, and then through narrative inquiry, I moved toward retelling these stories of my experience. This inquiry is shown in Chapters 1 and 2. As readers are aware, it was through my own autobiographical narrative inquiry that I awakened to the understanding that, for me, my sense of belonging in school was shaped in relation with art making experiences. A further awakening was that these art-making experiences were lived out in extracurricular drama communities. Coming to these realizations as I inquired into my earlier experiences as a student in school, stories from my teaching experience came forward. As I continued to inquire into my stories of myself as a student and as a teacher it became clearer to me that my experiences as a student affected my identity as a teacher. For example, because I came to know the importance of belonging within an art making space as a student, today, as a teacher, I continually try to create communities of belonging through my interactions with students. In living this way with students my hope is that they will experience a sense of belonging in and with school.

When this narrative inquiry began I was an art education teacher who traveled from classroom to classroom alongside students in one school. I have since moved into a new position where I work for the school division as an arts education consultant. This job has challenged my abilities to co-create with students spaces of belonging. Today, I am typically only a guest within any given classroom for two or three class periods. Even so, I take what Anne-Marie and Lucy have taught me and try, where possible, to shape spaces with students where they experience opportunities to bring their stories of experiences in and with family and community members into school curriculum making.

6.2 Curriculum Making

In Chapters 1 and 2 my realizations about community and belonging within art making spaces drew me toward questions about curriculum within classrooms. These questions drew me toward the scholarship of philosophers, such as Greene (1995), curriculum scholars, such as Aoki (1993), and Aboriginal scholars, such as Brokenleg (1998). The ideas expressed by each of these people supported me to think about belonging both practically and philosophically. In connecting this literature with my stories of experiences, a new understanding about curriculum came forward. Through continued narrative inquiry, I slowly awakened to the idea that curriculum is not the document given to teachers by the Ministry of Education. Rather it is the intertwining of lives that meet within classrooms. The ideas of a “lived curriculum” (Aoki, 1993, p. 255) and of curriculum as “an account of children’s and teacher’s lives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 365) led me to new wonders about how this living, negotiated curriculum lives in schools. In these ways, I began this narrative inquiry wanting to discover if the experiences with the arts in school shape spaces where lived curricula is more consciously apparent to students and to teachers. Questions such as the following drew me toward thesis research: How can art making spaces be a place of belonging for students? What exists in art making spaces that allows a lived curriculum to thrive? What challenges exist for students in art making spaces that makes it difficult to feel a part of a community? As I held onto these questions I sought out participants with whom I could engage in narrative inquiry.

6.3 Co-inquiring with Two Participants: Anne-Marie and Lucy

Although the inquiry questions above seemed poised for inquiry alongside students, when I began looking for participants I eventually decided to ask teachers to engage in narrative inquiry. As my place of belonging was within art making spaces, I decided to connect with teachers who were currently teaching arts education. My reasoning lay in the assumption that if the arts were a part of their teaching life, there was likely a chance that it played a part in their earlier schooling experiences. Anne-Marie began her narrative journey with me by taking me through stories of her elementary and high school art making experiences. As made visible in Chapter 4, Anne-Marie thrived in the art making spaces she experienced in elementary school. Anne-Marie situated her music teacher, who was encouraging, open and caring, as central in her sense of herself as flourishing. Anne-Marie also attributed her love of the arts to her family as they were her first art making community and teachers. However, Anne-Marie's feelings of acceptance within the arts and as an art maker were dramatically altered in high school when she joined a band program and found herself interacting with a band teacher who ridiculed and embarrassed her to the point where she "dropped out" of the band class. Withdrawing from the band class reverberated into Anne-Marie's extracurricular communities as the band teacher was significantly involved in the musical production put on by the school. Although Anne-Marie joined the school musical as a chorus member, the same ridicule and embarrassment that caused her to leave the band class also caused her to leave the musical. These were difficult, painful experiences to live through as a young person. These experiences continue to live deeply in Anne-Marie as she is now a teacher, a teacher who tries to make arts education a positive experience for all students.

As Anne-Marie now engages students in the arts it is her earlier experiences lived alongside her earlier elementary music teacher that shapes how she lives. Anne-Marie's stories led me to awaken to the significance of relationship building that needs to occur in order to begin to create a community of belonging within a classroom.

Lucy's experiences within the arts became visible through her stories of her strongest art making memories. For example, Lucy storied her Grade 6 band teacher and how he helped her to successfully transition into a new school. Through encouragement and caring, this teacher made the band room a safe space for Lucy to be. Lucy also shared stories of her relationship with her mother and how her mother's time within her Kindergarten classroom transformed the perception of Lucy in the eyes of the children in the class. Through sharing her artistic talent, Lucy's mother inadvertently gave Lucy a place to belong within her Kindergarten classroom. Lucy's stories led me to awakenings about the impact of including family members and family stories in the classroom.

6.4 Counterstories, Found and Chosen Communities

As this narrative inquiry unfolded Nelson's concept of a "counterstory" (Nelson, 1995, p. 23) began to resonate with the tensions I was feeling around the dominant narratives of curriculum in schools, teacher education programs, and professional development initiatives. Nelson describes a counterstory as "a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing it and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions" (p. 23).

Thinking narratively with Anne-Marie's, Lucy's, and my stories of experiences, I began to see that the dominant narrative shaping the school experiences of the three of us was of the importance of subject matter documents, as well as, in Anne-Marie's stories of

experience, of fitting into the expectations created by the teacher without dialogue or input from students. Through small glimpses of a counterstory that lived within Lucy's band room and band teacher, as well as her Kindergarten experiences, I began to wonder how counterstories of curriculum making could change future students' stories of experiences and, therefore, their sense of participating in communities of belonging in classrooms and schools.

As she writes about the potential for counterstories to take shape Nelson (1995) differentiates between two types of communities: "found and chosen" (p. 24). Found communities are contexts which people simply happen to find themselves participating. For example, according to Nelson, my found communities would include the city in which I live, the colleagues with whom I work, the neighbourhood in which I live. Chosen communities, however, are framed around the idea of choice in relation with participation. According to Nelson, my chosen communities would include the friends with whom I choose to interact, the extracurricular drama community in which I participated and felt a sense of belonging when I was a student in school or the organizations in which I participate because I share a common goal or moral outlook with the people involved.

Furthermore, "a community requires moral space within it where members can come together to discern, construct, correct, and celebrate the community's story" (Nelson, 1995, p. 24). In part, I understand that as Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I came together to inquire into our stories of art making spaces and belonging within schools, which allowed us to "discern, construct, correct and celebrate" our stories of experience, we were creating a chosen community. Within this chosen community of our narrative

inquiry, as we told and inquired into our stories of experiences with the arts in relation to belonging, we gradually began to compose counterstories. Our counterstories are narratives of the importance of family members and stories becoming woven, in meaningful and respectful ways, into classrooms; the significance of relationship building that occurs within safe, art making spaces, and, also, of redefining curriculum to include student experiences beyond the subject matter content documents and beyond school curriculum making experiences. The idea of familial curriculum making, the learning that takes shape at home and in the community and the subsequent knowledge students carry from their stories of experience within their families and communities was a counterstory I had not expected. The impact of these counterstories within the lives of Anne-Marie and Lucy were evident in how they identify as teachers.

I cannot help but wonder what might have been different in each of our lives in school if these counterstories had been lived in Anne-Marie's experience and been absent from Lucy's and my experiences. For example, what might have been different in Anne-Marie's lived curriculum in the high school band classroom if a counterstory of belonging had been present? What if living and becoming awake to a counterstory of familial curriculum making did not happen for Lucy? What if I had not felt as though I belonged within my extracurricular drama community? As I thought further about how questions of belonging, community, art making, and curriculum making alongside Anne-Marie's, Lucy's, and my stories of experiences in school increased our awareness of counterstories, I was reminded of the book "*Imagine a Place*" (Thompson, 2008). In this book, a poem and powerful visual images unfold:

Imagine a place...

...where you bend and sway,

leap and land,

right where a story begins (p. 1)

As I read and reread “Imagine a Place”, I started to imagine how differently our stories of experience might have unfolded if these counterstories had either been attended to or neglected throughout our school experiences. In composing the upcoming “what if” poetic texts for Anne-Marie, Lucy, and me I drew upon both the annals and chronicles we composed of our experiences and the transcripts of our research conversations around our annals and chronicles. In Anne-Marie’s poetic text, readers should imagine the experience described in the poetic text as how her school experiences may have been lived out if the counterstory of community and belonging had existed within her high school band classroom. Lucy’s and my poetic texts differ as we both experienced counterstories of familial curriculum making and extracurricular communities of belonging. Therefore, readers should imagine the experience described in these two poetic texts as how our school experiences might have been if we had not lived out counterstories to the dominant narratives which shaped our experiences in school. For example, a dominant narrative shaping Lucy’s experience in school was that of a particular kind of family as acceptable or right whereas a dominant narrative shaping my experiences in school was that school was not a place of belonging in which student’s strengths and gifts mattered.

6.5 Imagine a Place

6.5.1 Anne-Marie.

Imagine a Place...

...where trumpets sound with confidence,
flutes sing sweetly,
all instruments play
and laughter is among them.

Imagine a place...

...where students are heard,
opinions expressed
as freely as wind
and every voice is validated.

Imagine a place...

...where fear is not master,
acceptance exists in abundance,
support given without question
by the person in front.

Imagine a place...

...where a student feels safe,
where she no longer hides,
or tries to be invisible
to escape the ridicule.

Imagine a place...

...where she glows like the sun,
warm with confidence,
shining with pride,
part of a home.

Imagine...here.

6.5.2 Lucy.

Imagine a place...

...where children are judged
for their parent's realities,
for not being the "same",
for being an outsider.

Imagine a place...

...where families are spoken of
in terms of names and ages,
not as people living,
or loving their children.

Imagine a place...

...where school stories travel,
from home to school and back,
but family stories stay home
where they "belong".

Imagine a place...

...where a student feels without

a connection to her class,

a stranger among friends,

alone in a group.

Imagine a place...

...where a student never escapes

the everlasting glances

of students in her classroom

who view her as “different”.

Imagine...here.

6.5.3 Tara.

Imagine a place...

...where the stage is empty,

the curtain is closed,

the audience is bare

permanently.

Imagine a place...

...where wings cannot grow,

smiles are not found,

laughter is not heard

silence reigns.

Imagine a place...

...where a student feels lost,

alone with no compass,

no one to guide her
to the path she was meant to travel.

Imagine a place...
...where this student has strayed,
a teacher no longer exists,
and standing in her place
is a stranger.

Imagine a place...
...where she faces the mirror,
A question lingers in her eyes,
her passion extinguished
since it never existed.

Imagine...here.

Through imagining what may have been without counterstories, my hope is to show that without these counterstories, the lives of Anne-Marie, Lucy, and me may have drastically changed. There is a way in which living these counterstories we can compose curricula of belonging with students, however, the question is, what is needed for counterstories to survive? How might these counterstories of belonging, of community, and of familial curriculum making forbear? What would need to happen?

Nelson (1995) looks at what makes a counterstory effective and what is needed for a counterstory to be sustained. According to Nelson, in order for “a counterstory...to be effective, its telling will have to achieve a temporary stopping-point that permits the community to act. The stopping-point will be reached when the community agrees that

the story is truer than the dominant story” (p. 37). In the case of our chosen community, the stories told by Anne-Marie, Lucy, and me, and our awakenings to the impact of the arts within our school curriculum making experiences, seemed to create our stopping-point. The impact of teachers who valued relationships with students and building upon these, who valued community making within their classrooms, seems to live on within Anne-Marie, Lucy, and me as we each now compose our lives as teachers.

Another criteria needed for a counterstory to forbear is that the “communities within which the telling takes place are of different kinds, and nested within each other. This means that one community can look to another to help it tell its counterstories” (Nelson, 1995, pp. 37-38). For our counterstories of belonging to live on, the telling of the counterstories has to continue away from, yet together with, our chosen narrative community. For the three of us this may mean sharing these stories with colleagues, students, parents or others in our found communities of education. We may also share these stories with other chosen communities which may also have counterstories around education. Counterstories should be “told in dialogue with others” (p. 38) so as a chosen community, we should continue to dialogue together and with others in our found and chosen communities.

Taking these criteria into consideration, Nelson (1995) also gives a warning: to “overthrow a reigning interpreter only to put another in his place, is not as good as a counterstory that forbears” (p. 38). Instead of using counterstories to “invert existing orders of dominance and submission” (p. 38), it is more important to create a counterstory “that celebrates, and sometimes argues with those differences” (p. 38). That is to say, Anne-Marie, Lucy, and I should not presume to force our counterstory upon

others in a way that may turn our counterstories into a new dominant story. Rather, we should continue to engage in dialogue with one another and others so that in the sharing of our counterstories, they grow stronger, asking all of us to keep imagining “what if”. My hope is that this thesis, by bringing Anne-Marie’s, Lucy’s, and my lives alongside one another we will continue to breathe life into our and others’ counterstories.

6.6 Staying at the work of co-composing

As I reread this thesis work and continued to think with Anne-Marie’s, Lucy’s, and my stories of experience, I found myself imagining ways our counterstories might be lived out in classrooms. How might our counterstories become practically realized in schools? I believe that by continuing to think narratively about experiences we will come to find that this work is not easy. For me, it has been years of thinking about my own arts making experiences in school that encouraged me to stop and consider how to invite students into arts making spaces in ways that might support them to feel the sense of belonging like what I once felt. As I continue to teach I hope that I will carry Anne-Marie’s stories of student and teacher relationships alongside Lucy’s stories of familial curriculum making and continue to remember that students come into my classroom from different landscapes. As teachers, we must be attentive to the worlds (Lugones, 1987) students are traveling to and from each time they enter classrooms. Perhaps this can be done similar to Lucy’s Kindergarten experience, providing opportunities for families to be involved in their child’s in school education. Or, maybe, the first few days of each school year can focus on the student’s lives rather than launching into subject matter outcomes. Perhaps this can also be done on a daily basis through the idea of the “rock circle” talked about in Chapter 1. We, as teachers, could also take time to talk with our

students about how to incorporate their stories of experience into our lesson planning and, we could encourage and support one another to keep trying to stay open to exploring new ways of teaching that may be more in tune with student's diverse ways of learning and diverse lives.

Noddings (2005) writes about the "ethics of care" and the importance of students experiencing relationships in school throughout their education. Engaging in this narrative inquiry strengthened my belief in the importance of positive, caring relationships with students. I believe it is easy for us, as teachers, to get overwhelmed by the demands of subject matter requirements, but perhaps if we ensure to make time everyday to check in with students and to provide opportunities for students to give voice to their own education, to their own dreams, we might simultaneously realize opportunities to entwine in good ways the multiple worlds in which children and youth are composing their lives.

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8. APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix A: Research Ethics Board Approval



DATE: December 10, 2009

TO: Tara Prystay Thiessen
226 Lloyd Crescent
Regina, SK S4R 5W8

FROM: Dr. Bruce Plouffe
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: **Co-Constructing Spaces: A Narrative Inquiry into Belonging, Identity and Curriculum Making Within School (File # 26S0910)**

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F). **ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS.** Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.
2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **** Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.
3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **** Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.
4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.


Dr. Bruce Plouffe

cc: Dr. Janice Huber – Faculty of Education

** supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca

Phone: (306) 585-4775
Fax: (306) 585-4893
www.uregina.ca/research



Letter of Consent

Dear Potential Research Participant,

I am inviting you to participate in a series of research conversations as part of my thesis requirements for my Masters of Education degree at the University of Regina. The title of my thesis is **“Co-creating spaces: a Narrative inquiry into belonging, identity, and curriculum making in school”**.

Should you agree to participate in research conversations with me, we will agree to meet at a time and place that is appropriate and workable for you. The initial research conversation will last approximately two hours. It will be an informal conversation where we, together with 2-3 additional participants, begin to talk about our experiences with the arts and ways these experiences shaped our school experiences in relation with belonging and identity. At this first research conversation I will ask that you consider creating a representation (visual, musical, written, performance, or composed from a range of materials) that, for you, speaks of the transformative place of the arts in your school experiences, particularly in relation with aspects of belonging and identity. During our first research meeting we will also negotiate future research conversations. I am anticipating that in total we will engage in 4-5 whole group research conversations over a 4-6 month period. Each research conversation will take approximately 2 hours and will be audio recorded on a digital voice recorder.

To ensure your anonymity and confidentiality, I will use pseudonyms in the place of your actual name on all of the audio digital files as they are stored on my computer and when I type sections of our research conversations. I will also use pseudonyms for any references you may make to other people or places. I also ask for your permission to photograph, and to include in my thesis, your representations (described above). I will share with you any sections I type of the audio digital files of our research conversations and I will ask you to meet with me, individually, as I am writing my thesis so that I can negotiate my accounts with you. You will also have an opportunity to read as much of my completed thesis as you wish, prior to my sharing it with my thesis advisor or others, to ensure that you feel you have been represented in ways that feel respectful and ethical. I will keep the audio digital files and photographs on my home computer, which is password protected. Three years after the completion and acceptance of my thesis, I will destroy all of this research data.

At no time should you feel pressured to participate in this research. Your participation is both strictly voluntary and deeply appreciated. You can withdraw from the research at

any time by telling me, either verbally or in writing, that you have decided not to participate. If you do decide to withdraw from the research, in my thesis I will not draw upon any sections of the audio digital files where you spoke nor will I include the photographic images of your representation of your experiences.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this research please do not hesitate to contact me at: [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Yours truly,
Tara Prystay Thiessen

[REDACTED]

Supervisor:
Dr. Janice Huber

[REDACTED]

----- Please complete the following form and return it to me. -----

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

I hereby consent for Tara Prystay Thiessen to engage in 4-6 whole group audio recorded research conversations with me.

_____ I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary.

_____ I understand that I can opt out of this project at anytime.

_____ I have read this Letter of Consent and have had all my questions about the study answered.

_____ I understand that I have the right for the taping to be stopped at any point I request.

_____ I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions without having to terminate my involvement in this research project.

_____ I understand and agree to have my representation of my experiences photographed.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Witness Signature _____ **Date:** _____

This project was approved by the Research Ethics Board, University of Regina. If research subjects have any questions or concerns about their rights or treatment as subjects, they may contact the Chair of the

Research Ethics Board at 585-4775 or by e-mail:

research.ethics@uregina.ca