

A Novelette Thesis
A Year of Grade Two: An Autoethnographic Study
on (re)inventing (my)self as Teacher

by

Taryn Louise Mah
B.Ed., University of Victoria, 2001

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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University of Victoria

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ABSTRACT

This M.A. thesis is an autoethnographic study of my personal experiences teaching Grade Two after ten years of teaching middle school. It takes place over a five year span from 2007 to 2012. It is presented as a series of fictional, performative, and narrative pieces, where the reader is invited along on my journey to discover who I am (becoming) as Teacher, and the (re)invention of myself as Teacher. The study takes a creative, arts-based approach, presented as a curriculum lab book that is formatted differently than a traditional thesis. On the right side of each page is a novelette comprised of narratives, stories, dialogue, and poems; on the left side of the page are literature links and implications, definitions, reflections, and recursive segments. Areas that are highlighted in this thesis include living in the hybridity of culture, dwelling in the spaces of planned and lived curriculum, and the pedagogy of reinvention. The focus of this research story is reflection and practice, ways to approach change in our pedagogy, and to demonstrate autoethnography as a methodology for the exploration of Teacher identity.

Table of Contents

	Notes	Novelette
Title Page		i
Supervisory Committee		ii
Abstract		iii
Table of Contents		iv
List of Figures		vi
Acknowledgements		vii
Letter to the Reader		1
A Summer Online Course		4
Dictionary Definitions	6	
O Me! O Life!	11	
My Intentions	13	
Autoethnography	14	
Hermeneutics Leading to Identity	16	
Dictionary Terms	24	
The Implications of Reflective Analysis	26	
Implications of the Literature	32	
Curriculum-as-Planned	38	
Curriculum-as-Lived	40	
Dwelling in the Zone of Between	42	
Constructed Definition of Living Pedagogy	53	
Why Narratives?	54	
A Final Assignment		63
Reflexivity	64	
Identity as Teacher	68	
Universal Design Learning Theory	70	
Binary Oppositions	72	
A Year of Grade Two		72
Place	76	
Pedagogy of Reinvention	80	
Ethnicity, Self, What about Me?	84	
<i>The Joy Luck Club</i>	89	
What am I Going to Wear?	94	
Image and Teacher Identity	98	
Classroom Management Songs for the Primary Classroom	108	
Interviews	110	
Leadership	117	
Report Cards	120	
Living in the Planned (BC Elementary Music Curriculum)	122	
Living and Negotiating Culture and Curriculum	125	
Life Happens – A Commercial Break	128	
Complexity in Action	132	
A Letter to my Principal – admitting defeat	137	

Recursion	142		
Postscript	150		
References	152		

List of Figures

		Notes	Novelette
Figure 1	My Intentions	13	
Figure 2	Autoethnography	14	
Figure 3	Hermeneutic Circle	18	
Figure 4	Haagen-Dazs Ice Cream	23	
Figure 5	Constructed Definition of Living Pedagogy	53	
Figure 6	Crocus Hill Notebook	58	
Figure 7	Field Trip to the Chinese Cemetery	63	
Figure 8	Universal Design for Learning	70	
Figure 9	The Queen of Hearts	91	
Figure 10	Meet the Teacher Dress	93	
Figure 11	Usual Clothing	93	
Figure 12	Reflecting on a Grey Winter	131	
Figure 13	Releasing Fry		139

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The University of Victoria's Curriculum and Instruction faculty is one rich with truly thought provoking professors, and curriculum scholars. To Dr. Ted Riecken, Dr. Donna Truet, Dr. William Doll, Dr. Jennifer Thom, Dr. Timothy Pelton, Dr. David Blades, Dr. Catherine Etmanski, and, of course, Dr. Wanda Hurren, thank you for your guidance and your places in this thesis.

Thank you to School District #63 and my colleagues, for allowing me to "dwell" in your classrooms, with your staff and your families, as we strive together to make "Great places to learn, safe places to be."

Last, but most importantly, I dedicate this thesis to my family, my parents James and Mary Ann, my brother, Derek, and my loving husband, Scott. Without their generous support and encouragement, I could not be who I am now.

Dear Reader,

What you are about to read is my autoethnographic journey exploring my search for my Teacher identity. It will begin with a fictional online course, then move through reflections on my year of teaching Grade 2, and end with the completion of the online course. Through autobiography, autoethnography, and narratives, it is my hope that a new understanding of (my) teaching self will emerge. Who am I (becoming) as Teacher?

This novelette is formatted to accomplish two goals and appeal to a variety of audiences. Firstly it is a story of my personal change and growth; as such it is a research story. The focus of this research story is on reflection and practice and ways to approach change in our pedagogy. It is my hope that I can provide fertile ground for others who are entering the teaching field, or who have been here for a while, to reflect back again at their own curricular world with new insight.

The format of what you are about to read is different than

a traditional novelette. On the right side of the page, I have written the novelette as it would appeal to a wider audience, mostly narratives, stories, dialogue, and poems. Obviously, pseudonyms have been used for names of schools, teachers, students and positions. On the left side of the page, I have included the literature links and implications of the literature, lingering quotes, definitions, reflective and recursive segments and interpretations. My inspiration for this format comes from university Sciences lab books, where we were required to write the formal labs on the lined right hand side of the page and include graphs, charts and illustrations on the left hand side of the page, alternating between graph and blank pages. You could say this novelette is my Curriculum Lab book!

Curriculum has been described as “the medium in and through which generations struggle to define themselves and the world” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995, p. 848). How can we understand and contribute curriculum to understandings while acknowledging the uniqueness of every

teaching situation? Who am I (becoming) as Teacher? How does autoethnography as a research process help with my search for Teacher identity? These are all thoughts that motivated me to present this thesis to you.

Yours Sincerely,

Taryn Mah

A SUMMER ONLINE COURSE

EDCI 591 – A0X

SELECTED TOPICS IN EDUCATION: Autoethnography as a pedagogical research method.

ASSOCIATED TERM: Summer Session: July-August 2010

PROFESSOR: Dr. X

LEVELS: Graduate, Undergraduate

OFF CAMPUS, CAMPUS

1.5 Credits

“This will have to be the last course I need to reignite the forward momentum on my thesis. Get this out of the way, and I’m \$7000.00 a year richer. Sounds perfect.” I manage to convince my ‘Master’s-Partner-In-Crime,’ Fuller, to join me.

This is my fourth summer of grad studies. My fourth summer. Even just typing it twice makes me feel inadequate. My fourth summer since Fuller and I began this journey in July of 2007. Time has passed too quickly, as I’m sure it often does

when teaching full-time and completing grad studies.

Four years have passed since our first day of classes, yet to us, our lives have not been stagnant. Fuller had a year off due to an achilles injury, and after a year of numerous surgeries, recovery, physiotherapy, sports counseling, and learning how to walk again, she finds the only thing that has been stagnant in her life is the completion of her final project. As for myself, I've taught four different grades at three different schools, experienced a ruptured appendix, a broken heart, a death in the family, the eldest brother's traditional Chinese wedding, and a new love life. The endless drama of my last four years could have soap opera writers knocking on my door, never mind the many, many excuses all that drama provided for not finishing my thesis.

Fuller: Really, Mah, I just don't think my heart is in this

anymore. I'm done. My supervisor just doesn't believe in this research method. Why should we take a class on this 'new' research method? It's too hard to defend!

Me: We've gone this far. Our ethics has already been

I have included some definitions from internet websites, including Collins and Wikipedia. These definitions will help situate the structural definition of some terms used in this thesis. Where appropriate I have juxtaposed other definitions and connections to the term.

Dictionary Definitions

Novelette:

1. an extended prose narrative story or short novel
2. a novel that is regarded as being slight, trivial or sentimental

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/novelette>

Thesis:

1. a dissertation resulting from original research, especially when submitted by a candidate for a degree or diploma
2. a subject for a discussion or essay
3. an unproved statement, especially one put forward as a premise in an argument

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/thesis?s=t>

approved and extended for another year! We can't go this far and not finish. Come on. We've already completed two of the three withdrawals! We've stalled enough! Don't you want to get rid of the albatross around our necks, once and for all? After this, we're home free! I know it's hard. I'm having a really hard time staying disciplined and motivated. Let's just hope this class will bring us back to some forward momentum. It couldn't be more scripted for us!

Fuller: Fine. This is it Mah. If we don't get this done after this, you're flying solo.

We click on "add course", register and check to make sure it's properly recorded online. I click on my banking bookmark and sign in. I hover my mouse on 'pay bills' and pay another round of \$1800.00, declaring to myself that this has to be my last.

An Email:

Dear Students of EDCI 591 – A0X

Autoethnography:

no dictionary results found

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/autoethnography?s=t>

Laboratory Notebook is a primary record of research.

Researchers use a lab notebook to document their hypotheses, experiments and initial analysis or interpretation of these experiments. The notebook serves as an organizational tool, a memory aid, and can also play a role in protecting any intellectual property that comes from the research.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lab_book#cite_note-1

Teacher:

1. a person whose occupation is teaching others, especially children
2. a personified concept that teaches: *nature is a good teacher*

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Teacher?s=t>

Dr. Aoki reminds us poetically that 'living in the spaces is what

My name is Professor X and welcome to EDCI 591, Special Topics in Education: Autoethnography as a pedagogical research method.

This is an off-campus, online course where you will be expected to contribute your 'findings' and revelations in an online, web-based forum. I have attached a general outline for the course, as well as a reading list. Most of the journals are available via the UVic Libraries Gateway. If you cannot access an article or passage from the book, please email me and I will send you a PDF.

Due to the two-month nature of this course, be sure to check in weekly for assignments, blog updates, sharing from your colleagues, etc. Assignments will be posted on the website by Sunday noon, and I expect you will submit your assignments to me by the following Sunday, 11:35 pm. I will email my input and post your assignments (without my input) for sharing with your colleagues. If you are uncomfortable with sharing, please disclose this at the top of your submissions.

teaching is”

(The Teacher’s Way poem, written by Carl Leggo found:

<http://www.ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/archives/v04n01/postscri.html>)

Education:

1. the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgement, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life
2. the act or process of imparting or acquiring particular knowledge or skills, as for a profession

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Education?s=t>

Pedagogy:

1. the function or work of a teacher; teaching
2. the art or science of teaching; education; instructional methods

1580s, from Fr. *pédagogie* (16c.), from Gk. *Paidagogia*

“education, attendance on children,” from *paidagogos* “teacher”

My website address is

www.professorxautoethnography.com and my email address is, xprofessor@uvic.ca. The class website can be found by following this link, www.uvic.ca/autoethnography.edci591a0x.html.

To begin, log yourself in to the forum, create your log-in name and password, your profile, and please answer the SurveyMonkey Questionnaire. Again, if you are having difficulties, email me. I can also be found on Skype via my Uvic email account.

I look forward to (virtually) meeting you,

Professor X

“‘beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ – that is all / Ye know on earth,

and all ye need to know”

John Keats

I finish reading the email and start to panic. What have I signed us up for?

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Pedagogy?s=t>

Curriculum:

1. the aggregate of courses of study given in a school, college, university, etc,
2. the regular or a particular course of study in a school, college, etc

1824, modern coinage from L. curriculum "a running, course, career," from currere.

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Curriculum?s=t>

"The medium in and through which generations struggle to define themselves and the world" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995, p. 848).

Question: Is Teacher Curriculum?

Identity:

1. the state of having unique identifying characteristics held by no other person or thing
2. the individual characteristics by which a person or thing is recognized

I log on to the web forum, fill out my profile, and answer the professor's SurveyMonkey Questionnaire:

1. *Name: Taryn Mah*
2. *Student Number: 9714808*

Okay, easy enough.

3. *City you currently reside in: Victoria, BC*
4. *Occupation: Other than student, FULL TIME Elementary School Teacher*

I feel the need to emphasize the full time employment with caps, and my title with capital letters at the beginning of each noun.

5. *Department or Area of Study: Education, MA, Curriculum and Instruction*
6. *Where are you in your studies? I have completed all of my coursework. I am currently trying to complete the thesis portion of my MA.*

I am starting to hate this. My blinking curser has turned into a nagging curser, 'not done, not done, not done,' with every other blink.

3. Also called: qualitative identity the state of being the same in nature, quality, etc.
4. The state of being the same as a person or thing described or claimed
5. Identification of oneself
6. logic
 - a. that relation that holds only between any entity and itself
 - b. an assertion that that relation holds

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/identity?s=t>

Question: Who am I? What does it mean to be Teacher? Who am I (becoming) as Teacher?

7. *Why are you taking this course? What do you hope to gain from it?*

I am taking this course ~~because I have to. Because my supervisor told me to.~~ Because it is the method of research I am using for my thesis. ~~I hope to get my lit review completed by the time this course is finished and be seven thousand bucks closer to paying this off.~~ I hope to understand and confirm that autoethnography is a valid qualitative research method and that it will provide me with some 'truths' in my pedagogy.

8. *Do you keep a journal or practice some other forms of reflexivity?*

Yes. I keep a calendar, and a journal of my personal life journeys and struggles.

I sound like a hippie. Bring out the healing stones.

I also keep a professional blog with my classrooms and another blog recording my ups and downs of my thesis writing. Also, I've been known to walk into my colleagues' classrooms after school, email, or call other teacher friends to lament.

This is a poem by Walt Whitman (1900). I interpret that this poem is about the search for identity, and although the beginning the poem is pessimistic, the 'answer' is one of hope and optimism. By knowing and valuing our strengths, we bring out the best in ourselves and we can help create opportunities to bring the best out in those around us.

O Me! O Life!

By Walt Whitman

O Me! O Life!... of the questions of the recurring;
 Of the endless trains of the faithless – of cities fill'd with the
 foolish;
 Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than
 I, and who more faithless?)
 Of eyes that vainly crave the light – of objects mean – of the
 struggle ever renew'd;
 Of the poor results of all – of the plodding and sordid crowds I
 see around me;
 Of the empty and useless years of rest – with the rest me
 intertwined;

Too much?

9. *Have you taken an on-line course before? Are you familiar with technology?*

Yes and Yes

10. *What is your current definition of Autoethnography?*

How do I answer that? Should I Wikipedia this? X can't be expecting much, there's only a small text box to fill out!

Auto = self, as in autobiography, a story of self

Ethno = ethnic (?), culture (?), as in I am a Chinese-Canadian

Graphy = writing, like 'geography' is the writing of the earth

I hit the "submit" button. The phone rings. It's Fuller.

Fuller: Did you see the email?

Me: Yeah, I'm all done. Logged in, completed the profile, and finished the survey. Do you think everyone is going to see our answers to the survey?

Fuller: It's probably just for her records, you know, for her course development and such.

Me: I hope so. I'm the only one on the class list right now.

The question, o me! So sad, recurring – What good amid these,

O me, O life

Answer:

That you are here – that life exists, and identity;

That the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a verse.

Walt Whitman c. 1892 from his collection *Leaves of Grass*

Keener.

Fuller: Overachieving Asian!⁶ Give me a couple minutes, I'll log in too. I'll meet you in the chat room.

We hang up and in less than 10 minutes Fuller is in the chat room with me. After some pointless banter we make some arrangements to meet every Monday for our own little class together.

An email:

Assignment #1

You have now read a few selections about autoethnography from the required reading list. In one page, double-spaced, define Autoethnography. Be sure to include references (APA style) from, but not limited to, the reading list.

Fuller and I look at each other. Dread? Panic? Anxiety?

Me: Okay, we've got to make sure we include the heavy

⁶ This is a term of endearment many of my colleagues use with me.

My Intentions:

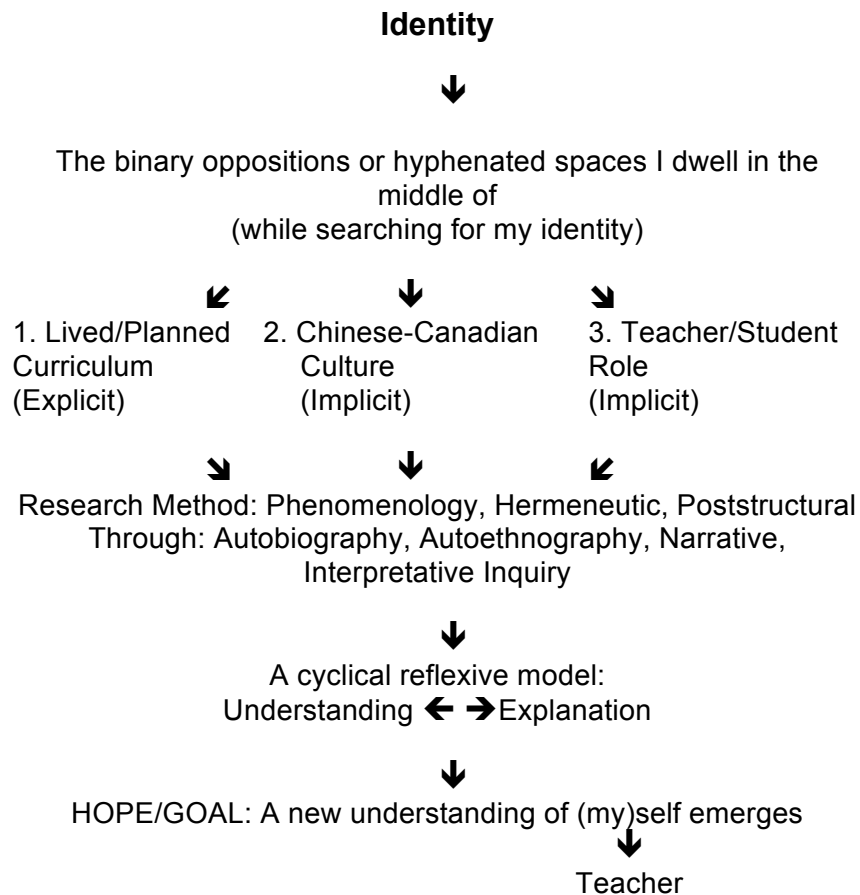


Figure 1

QUESTIONS:

1. Who am I (becoming) as Teacher
2. How does autoethnography help me to answer my search for my Teacher identity

hitters, obviously, Carolyn Ellis.

Fuller: And Heewon Chang. What do you think the gender of Chang is?

Me: Good question. We better get that right. Interesting that I remember the subjective, narrative, therapy voice of Ellis and you pick out the concrete, objective voice of Chang.

Fuller: And we need to get into the etymology.

Me: "... first introduced by Heider in 1975" but then there's Hayano in 1979 who used the term in a different way. To Heider 'self' meant the informants, to Hayano he identified himself as the 'self'"

Fuller: This is obviously something we've got to do on our own. Let's focus and get it done.

I begin the page like I typically begin all my papers. Writing the bones and questions, then filling in the flesh...

July 2010

Today I write about autoethnography.

I must:

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Maréchel (2010): Autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigations in the context of ethnography field work and writing (p.43)



Figure 2

- Focuses on the writer’s subjective experience rather than, or in interaction with, the beliefs and practices of others
- The **opposite** of theory-driven, hypothesis-testing research methods that are based on positivist epistemology (however it is ironic that this is my ‘curriculum lab book’)

1. *define it*
 2. *history of word*
 3. *validate it*
-ethnography is when the researcher immerses herself/himself in a particular culture and studies their language, customs and general way of being
-Auto means self
Afterwards I can make something nice for dinner as a reward.
 And within a few more minutes, my draft begins to take shape:

July 2010
 Assignment #1

I have been asked to define autoethnography. Originally, I had thought the term autoethnography was another scholarly term to describe personal narrative and storytelling. However, upon further investigation I recognize that autoethnography includes more than one’s personal story of self.

Autoethnography, while including self-narratives and storytelling, is the study of self, other, and culture. It includes

- A social constructionist project that rejects the binary oppositions researcher and researched, objectivity and subjectivity, process and product, self and others, art and science, and the personal and the political (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 450-459)

analysis and interpretation of the writer's subjective experiences. Chase (2005) locates autoethnography with narrative inquiry, "where researchers also turn the analytic lens on themselves and their interactions with others, but here researchers write, interpret, and/or perform their known narratives about culturally significant experiences"(p. 660).

Autoethnography, although quite controversial, is becoming more widely used as a post-modern, qualitative research method. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), the definition of autoethnography is an, "autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations" (p. 739).

This definition is congruent to the principle that the

Hermeneutics Leading to Identity

Hermeneutics might be understood simply as the process of interpretation. The notion of hermeneutics is often combined with the term ‘phenomenology’: the logic of the world as experienced (Brown, 2005, p. 293). In this perspective the focus is on how people experience the world and make sense of it rather than with any notion of underlying truth. The term moderate hermeneutics relates to how researchers experience the world and offer statements to encapsulate this experience.

Gallagher (1992), categorized four forms of hermeneutics in his book *Hermeneutics and Education*, offering an examination of how education offers a productive paradigm for work more for the social science:

1. Conservative Hermeneutics: the primary objective is to understand the author in the way the author intended (p. 212 -213)
2. Moderate Hermeneutics: the tradition is not fixed, but rather is being transformed through an educative process. Leaders Gadamer and Ricoeur (p. 220)
3. Critical Hermeneutics (or critical social theory): the

researcher’s story is intrinsic to the study. Autoethnographers engage in intense and transparent reflection and questioning of their own position, values, beliefs and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, there is much potential for self-articulation of self-awareness and reflexivity to be used in and to enrich the research.

It is obviously impossible to define autoethnography in one double-spaced typed page when there are entire books dedicated to defining this construct. However, this methodology, and using the conventions of literary writing, is playing a comfortable role in my thesis.

I attach the final draft to an email for Professor X. I hit send and ask Fuller if she’d like to stay for dinner.

Fuller shows up at my condo every Monday for our ‘fake’ class. Over the next couple of Mondays, we sit at my dining room table, laptops open, wireless internet streaming and ‘attend’ class virtually. We are asked to add input and reply to our

human subject is trying to find ways of making things better from a deficit position. Leader Habermas (p. 240)

4. Radical Hermeneutics (or poststructuralism): the understandings of the present are conditioned by the media through which we receive depictions of it. Leaders Foucault and Derrida (p. 278)

This thesis intends to use all four forms of hermeneutics, with a final emphasis on moderate hermeneutics recognizing that although hermeneutics permits a range of interpretation, no interpretation is ever final, even though some interpretations may be seen as being closer to the truth (Brown, 2005). Using the left side of the pages, I will attempt to capture (and demonstrate) the continuity of understanding as explanations. These explanations then inform Me/You/Others of the continuous experience of understanding. While my own understanding may become 'fixed' in an explanation for that moment or narrative, that state is always contingent. It is my hope that my 'explanations', whether true or not, will give rise to new understanding, resulting in a revised explanation of what it means for me to be a teacher. This

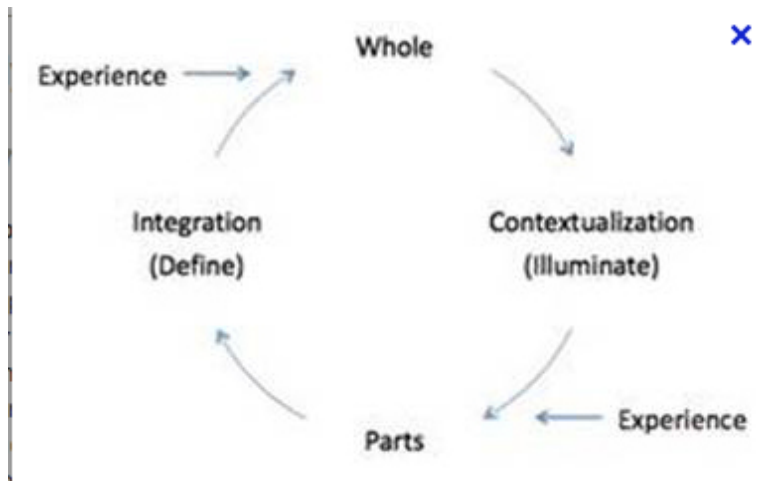
colleagues' submissions on our own. I wonder what the other students look like, what their backgrounds are. I can't help feeling inadequate when I read how the others have presented their papers. The tone of my paper is relaxed which makes me sound really stupid in comparison. I wonder if my last comment about not being able to sufficiently define autoethnography in one page comes across as a cop out or an excuse. Others wrote more than one page. I wonder if they received a lower grade because of it.

I know that it's important for us to acknowledge the personal connection we have with our research. It's the personal connection to our research that makes our voice relevant. Fuller and I make really general comments, not sure how to critique someone's connection to a subject we know so little about.

Assignment #2

You have now had the chance to constructively add input to each other's definitions and see how each of you has a slightly

is known as the Hermeneutic Circle:



(<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1448/3079>)

Figure 3: The Hermeneutic Circle

For this thesis, my narratives describe the experience and I will 'illuminate' a subtopic and situate it within the literature, thus breaking it into parts and attempting to define or provide explanations for the time being.

"If phenomenology is logic of world as experienced, how do we understand the 'person' 'experiencing'" (Brown, 2005, p. 294)? How do socially derived understandings provide a background for me to make sense of my own life? Jacques

different viewpoint, even though you are reading the same materials. In one page, double spaced, define and 'bring to light' the problems and questions of validity this type of research has encountered.

Fuller: This is a good one. I know a lot about these issues. My project has been rejected by my supervisor three times because I used this research method. Key words, Taryn, try self-indulgent, narcissistic, excessive, underdeveloped cultural analysis.

Me: Good points. This assignment should be much easier. It's always easier to poke holes and question than to just follow. There's a critic in every teacher!

Fuller: Question is, how are we going to limit our thoughts to just one page?

Me: You should use all of your supervisor's emails as your muse!

Fuller: Not funny, Mah. Get to work.

And I begin the 'bones' of my first draft:

Lacan (1977) sees the human subject as caught in a never ending attempt to capture an understanding of her self in relation to the world in which she lives. “The human subject is always incomplete and remains so, where identification of oneself is captured in a supposed image” (Brown, 2005, p. 295). However, Lacan insists that we should be careful; “Here the individual is forever on a quest to complete the picture she has of herself in relation to the world around her and the others who also inhabit it. She responds to the fantasy she has of the Other and the fantasy she imagines the Other having of her” (Brown, 2005, p. 295). I know that I have to be careful with my analysis and how I portray myself in the narratives you are about to read. I have to try to be objective in demonstrating my self as Teacher if I want to capture the understandings of myself in relation to my environment, one of the implications of this sort of reflexive analysis.

July 2010

Questioning validity and merit of autoethnography:

-validity of all post-modern research methods

-validity of all qualitative research methods

-“Do they own a story because they tell it?” Clandinin and Connelly (2000)

-Salzman (2002) is one of the critics of reflexivity, objectivity vs. subjectivity

-Chang’s “5 Pitfalls”, pg. 54-56

-Reflexivity: Researcher’s inability to be reflexive throughout the research process – Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997; Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Reinharz 1997.

-Hertz, 1997, pp. vii-viii: “implies a shift in our understanding of data and its collection – something that is accomplished through detachment, internal dialogue, and constant (and

A Lingerin Quote¹

All my books... are, if you like, little tool boxes, if people want to open them, or to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged... so much the better. (Foucault, cited in Brown, 2005, p. 294)

Two connections with this quote:

1. Foucault, a radical hermeneutic, rejecting the idea that there are universal principles and inviting others to break apart and bring new experiences to illuminate the integrations. In a sense, he is asking others to participate in the hermeneutic circle.
2. I want others to read this thesis and use my narratives,

intensive) scrutiny of “what I know” and “how I know it.”

To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment.

-Ellis & Bochner (2000): “Many feminist writers have advocated starting research from one’s own experience,” i.e.: researcher connected to research topic or else why would they research it?

-Do I mention congruency? Or too obvious? Or too scary?

What is congruent? Job and identity? Culture and job?

Younger self to older self?

After you finish this you can eat that Haagen Dazs Chocolate Ice Cream for dinner.

And with my thoughts on chocolate ice cream, I begin to flesh out my one pager.

July 2010

^{1 1} In many of Aoki’s papers, he often calls on us to “linger” and reflect upon curriculum. Mostly when he has stated a conclusion, we find that he will use the phrase “A lingering note.” These “lingerings” have often had me return to what I had just read and allowed me to dwell within the subject and my own personal curriculum. “In his ‘lingering notes’ he nurtures continuous inquiry through the passions that ground our dedication and curiosity” (Irwin, 2005 p. xxii). In using the term ‘lingering’ throughout my thesis, my hope is that the reader will dwell in what I have put forward.

situations, ideas, to create new ideas and systems of their own, therefore creating their own definitions of Teacher identity.

How I address those “Pitfalls”

1. In the “interviews” I tried to portray how different groups perceive me. I have also tried to include other ‘characters’ in my narratives, so that there is not an excessive sense of isolation.
2. The left side of the pages is used for analysis and interpretations of the right side (narratives)
3. I used my blogs, my journals, and accounts from other people, other colleagues.
4. It is not my intentions to harm others, nor be negligent of the ethical standards. In showing relationships with others, I am trying to portray my reactions and my responses to them.
5. Autoethnography shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles. As I undertake this research, this is what I'm doing.

Assignment #2

I have become aware that this post-modern research method, autoethnography, is not without its question of validity and merit. Autoethnographers have been criticized for being too self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey, 1999). Sparkes (2002) suggests that autoethnography is at the boundaries of academic research because such accounts do not sit comfortably with traditional criteria used to judge qualitative inquiries.

In her book, *Autoethnography as Method*, Chang (2008) outlines, “5 Pitfalls to avoid doing in Autoethnography:

1. Excessive focus on self-isolation from others;
2. Overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation;
3. Exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source;
4. Negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives; and
5. Inappropriate application of the label autoethnography”

(p. 54)

It can, therefore, become a research method with little social impact.

I think the most challenging part of autoethnography is the writing, using literary devices to write and enhance your story so that others will read it. Even with the massive and numerous ways to have your voice heard, the writer not only has to engage the reader, but they then must give up their stories for public scrutiny. Carl Leggo is convinced, "...that by writing about our experiences, and ruminating on those experiences, we can become more effective teachers as well as teachers motivated by more joy and hope" (2005, p. 441).

At this moment, I am having a challenging time recognizing what is worth reading and learning from, and what is purely narcissistic. Do people really want to read what I have to say about my changing curriculum practices? Does the 'scholarly' world want to analyze and interpret my autoethnographic voice? And if they do, what will they say?

There was a picture of a pint of Haagen Dazs Ice Cream here. It was removed for publication purposes.

Figure 4

http://www.bloomingtonneeds.com/images/haagen_dazs_chocolate.jpg

Will I still want to teach after I defend my autoethnographic worth? How do you tell someone that exposing their autoethnographic self has no validity or merit?

However, what I know is this: I know that there are thousands of books, articles, blogs, websites, and other publications full of other people's stories that are being read. If only one person reads my thesis, even if that one person is myself, and that person learns from it, then my story was 'worth' telling. "In our language uses, we are constantly shaped, informed and defined, and we are constantly shaping, informing and defining. We are the words we speak, write, think, hear, read, sing, play, dance and breathe. We speak, write, think, hear, read, sing, play, dance and breathe ourselves into being and becoming" (Leggo, 2005, p. 444).

I wonder if I've added too much personal opinion and not referenced enough. I attach the document to an email and hope that I've been able to properly communicate my opinions. I hit send. My last concern for the night is whether I'll eat ice cream

Dictionary Terms

Bias:

1. mental tendency or inclination, especially an irrational preference or prejudice
(...)

<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/bias>

Subjective:

1. belonging to, proceeding from, or relating to the mind of the thinking subject and not the nature of the object being considered
2. of, relating to, or emanating from a person's emotions, prejudices, etc
3. relating to the inherent nature of a person or thing; essential

from a bowl or straight out of the carton. I think I'll go for the carton.

An addition to my posting:

Question: Does studying your own experience make you biased and subjective?

I'm defensive when I read that someone has posted this to my space. Of course studying my own experiences makes me biased and subjective. I'm not sure what tone I should take with this one, so I try to couch it rationally, or objectively.

I'm not sure of the tone of this question. I did not mention subjectivity/objectivity in my essay, because I believe that it is an obvious answer. Researcher "bias" is what I am looking for. I don't claim that my thesis is going to be objective. The idea that there is only one objective truth, 'one black and white answer, is a perspective that does not sit comfortably with me. By telling, writing, editing, reviewing and then sharing my story, I hope that a realm of differing perspectives can be heard, rather than

- existing only as perceived and not as a thing in itself

<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/subjective>

Objective:

- existing independently of perception or an individual's conceptions
- undistorted by emotion or personal bias
- of or relating to actual and external phenomena as opposed to thoughts, feelings, etc

<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/objective>

categorized.

I read through my colleagues' posts and realize that I have totally missed the mark on this assignment. One of their posts references 'social constructivism,' which makes sense, since this is about making meaning within a social context. I connect with what a colleague wrote:

I agree with Schwandt (2000) when he says, "we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge (...) we are self-interpreting beings and language constitutes this being" (p. 197-198). Social constructionists share the belief that "holds that human knowledge is socially and personally constructed, with no single view laying claim to universal validity and absolute truth where social realities are inherently multiplistic rather than singular, and the goal of researcher is less to generate incontestable 'facts' than to discover and explore the unique and common perspectives of the individuals being studied" (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001, p. 105).

After reading all of my colleagues' posts, it is now that I begin to

The Implications of Reflective Analysis

Reflective writing may provide a forum for building a narrative layer in which the researcher acts as her own analyst as it were (Brown & England, 2004). The images and narratives that I construct provide the materials that allow me to ‘interrogate’ myself. From this perspective it is my hope that there is a flow of narrative as an ongoing construction of a, “Reflective/constructive/disruptive layer that feeds while growing alongside the life [I] seek to portray” (Brown, 2005, p. 295)

However, while new images of self may emerge, “The version of events is perhaps haunted by the bits she chooses not to see. The relationship between word and image is not always straightforward, the image might be seen as a cover story for things the researcher is finding difficult to address. [While at the same time] the researcher has to reconcile her own image with the image others seem to have of her and also how the tasks she faces seem to be framed for her by others” (Brown, 2005, p. 295).

Therefore, while creating the narratives, I had to ask

realize that my ‘lived experience’ has nothing to do with loss, or death, or illness, like the others in my class. Does my story have enough worth to sit with the existing literature?

An email:

Thank you all for your input on your recent definitions of autoethnography. Let’s move forward now and start using autoethnography.

Assignment #3

“Considering your research focus, select and chronologically list major events or experiences from you life. Include the date and brief account of each item. Select one event/experience from your timeline that led to significant cultural self-discovery. Describe its circumstances and explain why it is important in your life.”

(Chang, 2008, Appendix B)

Me: I’m not sure my story is worth reading. No major ‘experiences’ in my life.

many questions of myself, such as the ones found in Brown & Jones (2001).

What versions of myself do I feel comfortable with?

What fantasies do I have about myself, the place I work and the people I work with?

How do I understand the broader social context within which this takes place?

What stories do I tell to justify my actions?

I hope that I have addressed these questions in my narratives and that in doing so, created an identity that evolves through a series of interpretations and analysis of those narratives.

Fuller: Mah, I'm not sure that's the point. I believe you have to let go and write without purpose in order to find your purpose. Does that make sense? Just get started and see where it goes.

Me: Yeah, but although I lead a pretty dramatic-like life, it's not really significant. And it's short. I can only imagine that some of the others in our class will have led much longer, and 'lived' lives.

Fuller: How about you just get started and see where it takes you? And with that, I edit as I go along, and complete the following writing assignment:

July 2010

Assignment #4

I have selected Education as the main focus of my autobiographical timeline because that is why I am here.

TARYN MAH

1978 Born into a Chinese-Canadian family. I am first generation. My maternal grandfather is a famous

A Lingering Foreword

The book *From Positivism to Interpretivism and Beyond* (1996, eds. Heshusius & Ballard) explores modes of awareness and modes of knowing that some educational thinkers experience. In the foreword, Elliot Eisner defends the process of examining personal experience.

To reveal so personal a feature of scholarly life requires a form that makes such revelation possible; enter narrative.

The story, a tale told over time, has the capacity to display intimacies....We gain access to personal moments because these moments of change, of doubt, of discomfort are woven into real tales about real people in real situations. The result is no analytical or formal display of data, no excursion into theoretical abstraction, but rather a personal biographical narrative.... (Eisner, 1996, p. x-xi)

My thesis is not definitive research. There will not be any formal displays of data. It is, rather, an autobiographical narrative of a search for identity, one I hope will build on existing literature.

Chinese calligraphist/poet and my paternal grandfather was a teacher. No one in my immediate family is a teacher, but education was always emphasized in my traditional Chinese home.

1981 Start two years of pre-school. Get accepted early due to my inability to communicate. Can't (don't/won't?) speak properly. On my BC school personal folder, a small, round, and red sticker next to my name.

1983 Enter into a typical Canadian public school, Manoah Steves Elementary in Richmond, BC. Older brother (by 4 years) is in charge of checking up (and communicating for) me. Typically known as, "Derek's little sister from the Mah household." Not many other Chinese kids in my classes. Also start Chinese School during the evenings.

1987 Am transferred to a different elementary school for

A Lingering Quote

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Men are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

(Freire, 1970, reprinted 2004, p. 125)

Connection

1. Freire's insistence on situating educational activity in the lived experience of teaching is congruent with my own teaching philosophy (or how I wish I teach/taught)
2. Freire's attention to naming the world has great significance to those educators who have traditionally worked with those who do not have a voice. I think this is the power of the teacher, the power of teaching, to give voice.

the start of Grade 4, Blundell Elementary. My parents built their dream home and the school was closer to home. Derek starts at junior high that year.

1987-1988

I have the best scholastic year. I love my new Grade 4 teacher. I love that no one knows my older brother. I love that Mrs. Staveley won't take no for an answer and makes us all love PE. The winter Olympics are held in Calgary. The whole year revolves around sports. I turn from girlie girl to PE loving girl!

1988-1989

Have the worst year of my elementary life. Hate school. Feel fat and am physically maturing faster than all the other girls in my class. Have Mr. Gubbe. Don't understand electricity to save my life. Go through three days of intellectual testing where I'm asked to fill out little dots on paper with the best answer and talk with lady with big glasses.

Lingering Quotes

Autobiography and life writing are “organic” genres in a state of perpetual flux, constantly transforming and interpenetrating the permeable borders around them.

Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 17

Narrative displays the goal and intentions of human actors; makes individuals, cultures, societies, and historical epochs comprehensible as wholes; humanizes times; allows us to contemplate the effects of our actions and to alter the directions of our lives.

Richardson, 1990, p. 20

Connection:

- The reflections and interpretations of the novelette have been in perpetual flux, much like my search for Teacher identity.
- The purpose of this thesis is to become a better teacher, to make changes in my practices. In writing the narratives on the right hand side, it has allowed me to become more present and more cognizant as well as

Wonder how I got so stupid after such a great year.

Look back and wonder if red dot is still following me.

1989-1990 Complete Grade 6 with Mr. Whitehead in a Grade 6/7 split class. Love PE again. Love that I’m not the biggest girl in class. Love school again.

1990-1991 Complete Grade 7 and elementary school with Mrs. Davies and Mrs. Tyllinen.

1991 Enter into Grade 8 at Hugh Boyd Junior Secondary, even after being denied entry into the lucrative Incentive Program. This is where my brother went. Derek reminds me that he kept all of his past assignments and worksheets. My parents remind me that I can excel and prove them wrong.

1994 Complete junior high school. Junior high = easy street. Go on a Japanese Exchange to attend school for two weeks. Accomplishments include Grade 9 English Award, Grade 10 PE award,

reflect upon how, what, and why I teach the way that I do.

My hopes are that this thesis does alter the direction of my own life, and the lives of other.

1994

Services award, and top all-around Grade 10 Allen Fletcher award.

Enter into Grade 11 at Steveston Senior Secondary. Take summer courses in order to have a smaller load during the school year and not have to have a summer job. (My parents always say school comes first.)

1996

Graduate and realize that participating in services, athletics and scholarly classes are not easy. Fail French 11, a humbling experience. Still win a scholarship for UBC. Accepted to every university I apply to. Dad decides I'm attending his alma mater UBC, and I do. I am not cut out for UBC and UBC agrees.

1997

Apply to attend UVic and pre-start the Education program. Get accepted. Parents are not happy at my bombing UBC and now attending UVic, too far away from home, and known as third choice to

Implications of the Literature

The following theorists, researchers and scholars have been key in creating and interpreting my study. They have provided me with insights, perspectives, philosophies, ideas, and questions that have informed my search for identity. From many of these scholars, I have borrowed a moment of their work, a small idea, and allowed it to reside next to a portion of narrative, to allow the reader (or an older self) to reflect and connect the quote with this teacher's everyday experience. In this section, I introduce the major contributors whose thoughts and ideas have been interspersed and interpreted throughout my search for identity as Teacher.

Autoethnography as Method

Carolyn Ellis

Ellis is the leading proponent of autoethnography. Much of her research has been situated in interpretive and artistic representation of qualitative research and focuses on writing and revisioning autoethnographic stories as a way to understand and

many Chinese families.

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1997-2001 | <p>Complete my Bachelor of Education degree. Trade the red dot to “with distinction.” Love every minute of it. Practicum Team-Teach Grade 5. My class is a huge double room with 52 kids. Awesome Practicum. This feels right. Start a career as a teacher with the Vancouver Island School District #00, even before I complete all of the credits.</p> |
| 2001-2002 | <p>Substitute teach with the District. Spend a summer in Africa and teach in a one-room school house for a week.</p> |
| 2002-2003 | <p>Win my first temporary contract position. Grade 7 at Oakridge Middle School, while continuing to TOC.</p> |
| 2003-2004 | <p>Win another temporary contract position. Grade 6 PE at Oakridge Middle School, while continuing to TOC.</p> |

interpret culture and live a meaningful life. Her book, *The Ethnographic I* (2004), weaves both methodological advice and her own personal stories into an intriguing narrative about a fictional graduate course. This is, of course, where my own inspiration for this thesis began.

Heewon Chang

Chang is a Korean-American Professor who has a background in Education and Anthropology. Her book, *Autoethnography as Method* (2008), served as my guide through the process of conducting and producing an autoethnographic study through the understanding of (my)self, other, and culture. I used many of her exercises, data collecting strategies, and analysis and interpretation tools to create my self-reflexive narratives.

(Re)conceptualizing Curriculum

Ted Aoki

Aoki, a Japanese-Canadian, is considered to be one of the most

2004-2006	Win various continuing and temporary contract positions. Various Grades and subjects making me a ‘Cart Teacher’ ⁷ at Oakridge Middle School. Continue to TOC also. Teach a week in Auckland, New Zealand.
2007	Sent to Eagle Ridge Middle School to teach Grade 7 core subjects and Grade 8 Leadership. Big, influential change to see the different middle schools in the same district run so differently. That summer I am accepted into the M.Ed. (Curriculum and Instruction) program at UVic.
2007-2008	Sent to Eastwood Middle School to teach Grade 8 (Core and PE).
2008-2009	Apply and win a continuing-contract position at Seaview Elementary, teaching Grade 2. Change my M.Ed. to an M.A (Curriculum and Instruction) program.

⁷ Cart Teacher is a teacher who does not have a homeroom classroom and carries all of her/his materials and resources with her on a wheeled cart as she/he moves from classroom to classroom.

prominent curriculum scholars around the world. In *Curriculum in a New Key* (2005), Aoki reconceptualizes curriculum under the themes of language, culture, music, and narrative. His interpretation of the differences between curriculum-as-planned / curriculum-as-lived, and of the teacher as residing in the middle, in the hyphenated space, is a main subtopic in the search for identity. His works suggest that curriculum is not only what the government tells us to teach, but that it is also an integrated learning process of *being* and *presence*.

Hongyu Wang

Wang, a Chinese-American, presents her search for a new (third) curriculum in her book, *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home: Curriculum in a third space* (2004). The book is a cross-cultural, gendered study of both self and curriculum. Wang's East/West dialogue intrigued me a great deal because I am a Chinese-Canadian Woman. However. I have chosen instead to focus on the last chapter of Wang's book, which is about the third curriculum and on two of her articles dealing with the aesthetic experience.

2009-2010	Apply and win a temporary contract position at Seaview Elementary, teaching Grade 5.
2011-	Currently teaching at Rosehill Elementary (Grade 1) and continuing my M.A. Studies, trying to finish the Thesis portion.

Me: Wow Fuller! Did you finish your autobiographical chronology? I focused on my education and I am having a heck of a time. It is over three pages. Should I shorten?

Fuller: I don't think you should. You should be honest. Did you explain why it is important in your life?

Me: No. Not there yet.

And with a lot of searching for my 'narrative voice' the following narrative takes place:

Mrs. Staveley

It was all because of Mrs. Staveley, my Grade 4 teacher. She threw out the boring curriculum and incorporated everything into the Calgary Olympics. So excited that we were learning

William Doll Jr.

Doll, who was a professor between Louisiana State University and the University of Victoria, developed his educational ideas based on complexity theory. His work with the “4R’s” is integrated into this thesis with a focus on Recursion. According to his work, “recursion is the way one produces a sense of self, through reflective interaction with the environment, with others, with a culture” (1993, p. 178) As a former student of Dr. Doll, it is not only his published work but also his conversations, lectures and feedback that have influenced some of the subtopics generated in the narratives.

Teacher Identity

Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber

Mitchell and Weber have two books that have inspired me and informed this thesis. *That’s Funny, You Don’t Look Like a Teacher* (1995) and *Reinventing Ourselves as Teachers* (1999). Their books involve, “Tapping the creative power of images, memory work, and nostalgia in unexpected ways; the emphasis

something different, ideas not from a textbook, little did we realize that we were still learning.

I was a puffy-pink-dress-wearing little Chinese girl, new to the school, with absolutely no friends, and the flawless classroom discipline typical of any little girl raised in a traditional Chinese family. It was all about piano and ballet lessons, math class and Chinese school; conservative and competitive enough to compete with the other Chinese families we were friends with.

But Mrs. Staveley, she did it all! She instilled a new admiration for Physical Education, for keeping an open mind, for making me realize that I didn’t have to follow in my big brother’s footsteps, that I was capable of making my own path. Every class she taught I wanted to jump up and applaud! I wanted to yell, “YES!” and “I get it!” and “This is so COOL!” Many teachers were inspired by teachers in their own pasts. Mrs. Staveley is my inspiration. After one year in her class, I knew that I wanted to be just like her. I wanted to teach just like her! I wanted to motivate! I wanted to inspire! I wanted to throw out the textbook

is on reflective, inventive, even playful action” (1999, back cover).

They led me to a path of personal exploration that moved me, “...between the private and public, the personal and social, and between individual and collective change” (1999, back cover). Their books helped me reinterpret and reinvent my teacher identity.

In addition to the scholars listed above, I have also referenced others whose work has connections to the theoretical perspectives or subtopics throughout the narratives, juxtaposing them as ‘lingering quotes’ to connect the narrative with existing literature. For example, when using autobiography and narrative, I reference Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, Carl Leggo, Leah Fowler, Michael Connelly, Jean Clandinin, and Laurel Richardson. And when I discuss hermeneutics, I quote Tony Brown, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida.

curriculum too!

Fast forward to my senior high school years. It is Grade 11 and 12; years full of final exams, provincial, and university applications. Throughout high school, I tried everything I could to rebel against my upbringing. I quit ballet lessons to replace them with Cheerleading, Chinese school for Student Council, and piano lessons for day camp leader. While our other Chinese family friends’ kids were working in their parents’ restaurants and stores, I was volunteering at the CNIB and working at our local community centre. When I wasn’t cheering on our football team, I was helping organize our next school event as Student Council Vice-President. By day, I was your ‘All-American’ student, and by night, after a rice-filled family dinner, I would stay up studying math and the sciences my parents held in such high esteem.

University application forms were filled out by my father, signed and dated by myself. I applied to all the universities that my parents held in high regard, for a coveted space in their

A Lingering Quote

Some questions to ask yourself, the reader:

My current interest lies in the curricular space between the narrated difficulties of teaching and the pedagogical movement made possible by locating such difficulties at the site of teacher. What might be addressed in the space between narrative theory and the practice of teaching? What is the curriculum of a lost teacher, one in difficulty? What is it we need to learn/to study/to know/to ask/to say when we locate ourselves in language-scapes of difficulty? How can narrative research lead to an aesthetic and ethical inner government of a teaching self?

(Fowler, 2003, p. 159)

Sciences departments. Ignoring my career goal to be a teacher. Ignoring that I had a cheerleading scholarship to the University of Hilo, I was going to graduate with a degree in Sciences, and hopefully from UBC. On my 17th birthday, I learned two things. That I was going to UBC, under the assumption that I wanted to be in Sciences, and I was going to spend that summer in China visiting my father's family farm, to remember where I came from.

Let's move forward in time once more. After a tumultuous year at UBC, I moved to UVic, against my parents' wishes, to join the Faculty of Education. I had shamed my parents, and for a long while, they did not have a daughter. How could I go against my parents' wishes? They had worked so hard to bring me to where I was. If it weren't for my grandfather, who was once a distinguished university professor in China, I believe I would still be disowned. At UVic I took every Pacific Rim elective I could. I found myself clutching to the very identity I tried so hard to rebel against, and that had turned its back on me. My education curriculum unit plans centered around

Curriculum-as-Planned

Curriculum-as-planned: The curriculum-as-planned is the curriculum that the Ministry of Education tells me to teach. It is a Ministry document known as the *Integrated Resource Package* (IRP). For every subject and for every grade level it outlines prescribed learning outcomes and objectives. It is around these ministry documents that I based four years of my university career.

Aoki, in looking at the curriculum-as-planned, ponders over how this document can tell teachers how to teach. He wonders how this 'recipe' book can be placed in any teacher's hands, and thus enable him/her to 'teach' the curriculum assigned:

If the planners regard teachers as essentially installers of curriculum, implementing assumes an instrumental flavour. It becomes a process, making of teacher-installers, in the fashion of plumbers who install their wares. (...) Teachers are asked to be doers, and often they are asked to participate in implementation workshops on 'how to do this and that.'

Multiculturalism, Immigration, Ancient China, Diversity, and the Canadian Pacific Railway. At a place where everybody was building on the foundations of their identity, I was just discovering my own.

It is the day of the Vancouver Island School District internship interviews. It is the beginning of our last year at UVic and these practicum spots are coveted and not guaranteed. Applicants are interviewed for 30 minutes, in front of administration representing every school in the district. I sit on a small, squeaky, metal chair at the front of the room, while the administration asks me questions about my goals, application, and experience. I remember the scene exactly:

Administrator: Please tell me about your personal teaching philosophy. What would I see in your classroom? What are you all about?

Me: Structured chaos....

I wonder if my narrative is enough. My assumptions are that X is looking for more of an autobiographical narrative. We

Teachers are 'trained' and in becoming trained, they become effective in trained ways of 'doing' (2005, p. 160).

If my training has led me to 'become effective in trained ways of doing,' (p. 160) where/when does my background come into play? I find it interesting that in four years of methods courses at UVic, course objectives were related to grasping the IRP. It's also interesting that most of us in those classes followed it blindly, never questioning who decided upon it, or why. We were, in a sense, just doing, learning to become doers, and forgetting about just 'being.'

When a University requires four years of curriculum and instruction credits yet only three to six months (depending on program) of practicum experience, are we perpetuating the creation of teachers as doers?

...Ignored are the teachers' own skills that emerge from reflection on their experiences of teaching, and, more seriously, there is a forgetfulness that what matters deeply in the situated world of the classroom is how the teachers' 'doings' flow from who they are, their beings. That is, there is forgetfulness that teaching is

are not yet to make interpretations and assumptions about our narratives. I believe the purpose of this assignment is to collect data.

I send the seven pages to X and state that I do not want my timeline shared with others. In fact, I'm not sure I'm ready to share my narrative piece either. I ask X to hold off on publishing it on the webpage, thinking that once something is on the internet, it's always there and can't be taken away. I am uneasy knowing that some of my colleagues will be critical of my upbringing but there's also a part of me that is curious to see what others will write before I post my own. Is that sick?

Another email from X

I have enjoyed reading the different timelines and backgrounds all of you are submitting. We have a diverse group of backgrounds including education, social work, nursing, counseling, communication, and even anthropology! I acknowledge that we'll be able to bring different aspects to each

fundamentally a mode of being (2005, p. 160).

In the curriculum-as-planned, where is my 'being' reflected?

Where do I share my personal, related stories? Do I share them at all? At what point does my instruction and implementation reflect me?

Curriculum-as-Lived

Curriculum-as-lived experiences: The curriculum-as-lived-experiences consists of the everyday happenings in my classroom. It is the unique little human beings associated with the names on my roster. It is the everyday interactions with the kids, from our morning routines to my constant nagging, from my inherent knowledge of which kids I can use humour to which need compassion. The lived-experience is the reason I became a teacher. Every September marks the beginning of a new year full of challenge, every day a new adventure.

In Aoki's *Teaching as Indwelling Between Two Curriculum Worlds*, he references the experience of a conversation with a Richmond teacher named *Miss O*, as an analogy to make his point about the curriculum-lived space:

other to think about.

In the last writing assignment, I asked you to access your "Personal Memory Data." For the following, I am assigning writing exercises of self-observational and self-reflective data.

Assignment #5

I would like you to propose your final project or thesis. "Select a specific behavioral or cognitive topic on which you want to observe yourself. Select a manageable time frame for your self-observation and identify a recording method (narrative, structured format, or hybrid)." (Chang, 2008, p. 161)

Fuller: So what are your thoughts?

Me: Professor X is good. This is really making me focus. My specific topic is going to be "Curriculum as Lived," you know, all that stuff we got from Aoki, the REAL classroom stuff they don't teach you in undergrad studies. I'll be observing myself regarding how well I'm able to stay present in my teaching and the balancing act between

For Miss O it is a world of face-to-face living with Andrew, with his mop of red hair, who struggles hard to learn to read; with Sarah, whom Miss O can count on to tackle her language assignment with aplomb; with popular Margaret, who bubbles and who is quick to offer help to others (...); with Tom, a frequent daydreamer, who loves to allow his thoughts to roam beyond the windows of the classroom, and some 20 others in class, each living out a story of what it is to live school life as grade 5s.

(2005, p. 160)

This is the space where teachers struggle with the “mundane curriculum questions: What shall I teach tomorrow? How shall I teach? These are the quotidian questions of a teacher who knows, from having experienced life with her pupils, that there are immediate concerns she must address to keep the class alive and moving” (Aoki, 2005, p. 161).

Mrs. Staveley, my Grade 4 Teacher, is the teacher who resided in this space for me most transparently. She brought the curriculum to life, making it relevant to the Calgary Olympics. One of my best memories of elementary school is of Grade 4, when she told us to put our textbooks away on the shelf,

planned and lived curriculum. My manageable time frame was supposed to be about teaching Grade 2, but now I realize that I have to include my background teaching at the middle school level in order to have something for comparisons. Pathetic part is that it was over a year ago. Doesn't feel manageable now that I look back! My recording method will be narratives taken from my journal, blogs, and memories.

Fuller: Okay, but why are you doing your thesis? What do you hope to get out of it? What is the ‘truth’ you are trying to discover?

Me: To be a better teacher. Isn't that why we're all here? Is it an immature want? Is it something a thesis is going to accomplish or is it something that will only take years and years of teaching to get at? I wonder if I'm biting off more than I can chew. Maybe I should just scrap this whole thesis thing and do a project about something more practical, like girls and technology, or team teaching....

because we wouldn't need them. I remember her telling the class that this year we would learn together, all of us, both teacher and students, from each other.

Dwelling in the Zone of Between

Dwelling in the Zone of Between (Curriculum): The 'zone of between' is the hyphenated place between two binary oppositions. In my life I dwell in the hyphen most of all. In my pedagogy, it is the lived-planned curriculum, in my culture, it is Chinese-Canadian, in my grad studies, it is student-teacher, yet this hyphenated space is the space that I have the most difficulty defining, defending, and demonstrating in the interplay between subject and object.

Aoki describes the space of between, in regards to curriculum, as, "The horizon of the curriculum-as-plan as [the teacher] understands it and the horizon of the curriculum-as-lived experiences with [the teacher's] pupils" (2005, p. 161). There is a tension between these two spaces, and the teacher is the interpreter of this tension. "And she knows that inevitably the quality of life lived within the tensionality depends much on the

Fuller: It would be easier. But this is your type of thing Mah.

This is your identity. You wear your heart on your sleeve, which is ironic because of your upbringing. Maybe you are still rebelling? Who says you won't read this five, ten, even twenty years from now and still need to improve to be a better teacher? Teaching isn't static. We have good years, we have bad ones. And it probably won't be until our retirement year that we'll look back and finally give ourselves a pat on the back and think we finally figured it out!

I let Fuller's words resonate before I respond. Identity. This is my identity. Could I possibly be re-inventing my identity as teacher in my quest to become more present in my teaching, to be one with the "in-between" space? Am I being too narrow in my focus? Is it possible to recognize my curriculum practices without first examining my identity? Will all of this personal exploration, through practical exploration, actually lead me to re-inventing myself? This has all become too big for me to handle.

quality of the pedagogic being that she *is*" (Aoki, 2005, p. 161). This tension is not meant to have negative connotations, but in fact, "it is the tensionality that allows good thoughts and actions to arise when properly tensioned chords are struck, and that tensionless strings are not only unable to give voice to songs, but also unable to allow a song to be sung" (Aoki, 2005, p. 162). Awareness of this tension, and welcoming this tension, are aspects of living in the zone of between.

Hongyu Wang defines this zone of tension as the "aesthetic experience" and the third space. In her journal article, *Aesthetic Experience, the Unexpected, and Curriculum*, Wang explores how curriculum and teaching should be conducted in ways where openness to the unexpected, the emergent, and the imaginative are cultivated. "To make curriculum come alive with spontaneity, surprise, and creativity, we are called upon to teach in an aesthetic way, putting the education of the imagination at the heart of curriculum" (2001, p. 92). She pleads with educators to make curriculum meaningful through experience and creativity,

*To be open to this possibility of emergent creativity,
children need to be given more time and opportunities to*

I don't even know where to begin to articulate to Fuller what is whirling at high speeds and in different directions in my head.

Me: I just want to put my story out there. To let others know that there's more to this teaching thing than all day daycare and implementing IRPs. Maybe I have to change my focus from switching grade levels to a wider scope of my first ten years of teaching.

Fuller: Ay carumba! Sounds like you're rewriting your thesis.

Me: Ay carumba indeed!

July 2010

Assignment #5

At this moment, I reside in a liminal space in my career, in my grad studies, and in my personal life. This space, this in-between place, is one that we are often in, but do not necessarily acknowledge. The thesis will be a reflective journal, recording my switch in teaching assignments from the upper intermediate Grades (6, 7 and 8), to the lower elementary Grades (2). My teaching career is and always has been with the Vancouver Island

play with various patterns in subject matters so they can find new ways of participating in the creation and re-creation of the world. It is through play that children feel free to explore, to experiment, and even to 'fail.' It is also through play that children absorb themselves in educational events to make new connections and meanings. (2001, p. 94)

In my own teaching practices, I aspire to Wang's 'aesthetic experience.' I try to keep my lessons active, moving, and relatable to real life. Wherever I can, I try to guide my students to make meaningful connections. However, not unlike my colleagues, I struggle with tensions between time constraints, parental pressures, and administrator resistance. The 'aesthetic experience' is not an easy strategy to implement in the classroom. It requires more than just an IRP curriculum, and more than just an experienced, 'lived' teacher, and more than just the two combined. This 'more' is why I began this journey in the first place. What does it mean to dwell in the tensions of the third space? What does it mean to be a good teacher? Who am I (becoming) as Teacher?

District (#00). I have moved from all three Vancouver Island Middle Schools to Seaview Elementary School. So why did I switch to Grade 2? Because on the cusp of my 30th birthday, I realized I didn't want to be just a middle school teacher for the rest of my life.

Therefore, this will be an autobiographical narrative representing one teacher's desire to change her teaching practice so that it could be more rewarding for her, and more worthwhile for her students. My questions are Who am I (becoming) as Teacher? How does autoethnography help me in my search for my Teacher identity? The thesis will be a story of my personal change and growth, rather than a presentation of definitive research. The focus is on reflection and practice and ways to approach change in our practice. It is my hope that I can provide fertile grounds for others who are entering the field or who have been here for a while, to reflect back on their own curricular world with new insights.

I'm not ready yet to tell Professor X about the mess the word

'identity' has started in my head. For now I'm letting that one sit on the back burner.

Me: Okay, I copied and pasted something from my thesis proposal. Pretty safe to keep looking back at my proposal so that I don't get too far away from my purpose.

Fuller: Good idea. I think I'll do the same!

Again, I email and attach my assignment to X. I wonder if I'll get 'caught' for not putting in the same amount of time and effort that some of my colleagues must be doing.

An Email:

I appreciate everybody's honesty and the diligence reflected in your assignments. I notice that many of you are looking to find the balance between subjectivity and objectivity, a task that most autoethnographers juggle. For the previous two writing samples we examined our memory data and our self-observational data. In the next assignment we will collect self-reflective data.

A Lingering Quote

Narrative suggests an answer to the questions (...) how and for whom should we write? If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experience, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experience of people (...) if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we need to foreground, not suppress, the narratives within the human sciences. How and for whom we write lives matters.

(Richardson, 1990, p. 65)

Assignment #6

List five values, in order of importance, that you consider important in your life. Give a brief definition of each in your own terms. Select the most important one and explain why it is important. (Chang, 2008, p. 170)

Fuller: Phew, this one sounds a lot easier. I'm going to make a list. I'll be out of here within the hour!

Me: Good idea. I'm going to do the same. Are values similar to things like the 'Restitution' program, or 'Social Responsibility Beliefs,' or like the 'Tribes' and 'Attributes' programs?

Fuller: I think so. I think they can encapsulate any of those. I don't think they have to be biblical. Just what standards you hold yourself to.

Me: You know the interesting thing about going to all the different schools is that I had to learn all the different methods of how they taught Social Responsibility. It has

A Lingering Quote

As a path into curriculum, nested within William Pinar's series of complicated conversations, this journey invites us to bring forth our lives and our learning into this "third space," one where we converse with the otherness of our Other – our tests, our teachers, our students, our peers, our values, ourselves.

(Doll, 2004, Preface for Hongyu Wang)

now become a jumble of all the good stuff from each in my Social Responsibility unit.

Fuller: Get to it and let's see who can get this done first.

August 2010

Assignment #6

Five values, in order of importance, that I consider important in my life.

5. Commitment to "the glass is half full" theory – Make the best of every situation and stick with it until the end. The more I participate the more I gain.
4. Growth – No one is perfect, including myself. There is always room for change and for improvement.
3. Different/Unique – Who am I? What do I do that makes me different? How can I be different than everyone else? I want to come up with the different answer or the different platform. I do not want to be like everyone else.
2. Loyalty – To be loyal and faithful to my family, friends, colleagues and students, and truly loyal to myself.

1. Balance – to balance work and play, physical and emotional health, and head and heart.

I notice that my values overlap each other and for that reason, I cannot distinctly expand on the most important value, balance. However, I do believe that the most important ‘way of being’ is to be a whole person, embodying all positive attributes, being open to change and growth, and willing to learn from experiences and from those people around us.

I assume that Professor X is going to receive similar lists to my own. No one is going to say they value cynicism or inequality. Whatever the case, this is one time I don’t mind my post sounding like the others.

The next assignment:

“Given that autoethnography is self-centric in some ways, the primary source of data is your past and present. As I discussed in the two previous chapters, personal memory data engenders the physical evidence of memory and self-

Lingering Quotes About Identity

In Confucianism... the identity of each person is not in his or her independent existence, but in his or her relations to the cosmic principles, to the other people, to social communities, and to his or her own moral cultivation by which the self is brought into maturity.

(Yao Xinzong, 1996, p. 83)

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of origin and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating selfhood –

observational and self-reflective data from the present capture the trace of your current perspectives. In either case, data are heavily anchored on your “lived experience” and perspectives (...)” (Chang, 2008, p. 103).

Interviewing is another staple data collection technique employed in ethnographic field-work. When applied to autoethnography, interviews provide external data that give contextual information to confirm, complement or reject data. Therefore, the next writing exercise is as follows:

Assignment #7

Make a list of interview questions you would like to ask others about yourself, the context of your life, or other topics relevant to your study. Make a list of potential interviewees who are able to answer these questions (Chang, 2008, p. 103).

Me: I didn't do this. I didn't collect external data. I didn't even apply for it during my ethics application.

Fuller: Me either.

singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 1-2)

Me: Should we just go along with this? I'm going to write a list of people who I would have interviewed and what interview questions I would have asked. I wonder if our meetings with our committee count. I wonder if our conversations now count!

Fuller: I doubt it. I'm going to jump through this hoop now and deal with the repercussions later.

Me: Okay. Me too. Hey, do you think I could count emails and thank you letters from parents from the end of the year? Or too contrived?

Noticing that Fuller wasn't answering me, I take that as a cue to get started. Our grad studies have made us even closer friends that I thought we would ever be when I first TOC-ed for her in September 2001. She puts up with my endless, self-conscious banter, my need to excel, and my hyperactive attention span.

August 2010

Assignment #7

External data collections: interviews

I'm not sure how comfortable (or honest) people would be if I interviewed them to discuss my teaching and facilitations in the classroom. However, there are 4 groups I would interview:

1. Colleagues and Administrators – teachers and principals from the middle and elementary levels
2. Students – The ones who watch and hopefully learn from me every day, including middle, elementary, and past students who have had some time to be exposed to many more teachers.
3. Parents – Of the students I have taught. For some, I have taught their one child in Grade 2 and then their other child in Grade 5.

Some of the questions I would ask are:

- Please describe what you remember about me, the teacher, and my teaching style.
- What are some words you would use to describe me?
- What are some aspects/traits of my teaching style that you appreciated? Found difficult?
- If you wished your child were in the “other” class, please tell me

A Lingering Exercise

From Weber and Mitchell, 1995, p. 20:

Quick! Think of 'teacher'. What do you see? What does what you see mean? Where does what you see come from? Quick! Think of 'doctor'. What do you see? What does it mean? Where does it come from? What is the taste, smell, look, touch, and meaning of 'teacher' these days? What does it matter? How people think about teaching may be shaped in many ways by the images of teacher in popular culture that they encounter in their daily lives.

why.

-Did your perspective of me change from the beginning of the year to the end? Could you explain?

-Reminisce about your own favorite teacher, favorite year/grade, or your favourite subject. Explain.

Fuller finishes before me and turns on the TV. I email my initial draft and hope that it's enough for now. I wonder if not including external data will make my thesis less valid. And then I wonder if I had interviewed anyone if they would say anything critical to me in a face-to-face interview. I'm not sure I could be critical of my colleagues in a similar situation.

An email:

Congratulations! This is our last and final assignment for this class. I am pleased to see how all of you have started to refine and distinguish your autoethnographic voices! The final assignment should help many of you with your final project or thesis:

Constructed Definition of Living Pedagogy:
Collins Dictionary

↙	↘
<p>Living:</p> <p>adjective</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a. possessing life; not dead b. ((as collective <p>noun preceded by (preceded by the) ⇒ “the living ”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. having the characteristics of life 3. currently in use or valid 4. seeming to be real 5. <i>geology another word for live</i> 6. presented by actors before a live audience <p>noun</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the condition of being alive 2. the manner in which one conducts one's life 3. (modifier) of, involving, or characteristic of everyday life 	<p>Pedagogy:</p> <p>noun</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the principles, practice, or profession of teaching

Figure 5

<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/living>

<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pedagogy>

Assignment #8

On the research topic you selected, make a list of subtopics on which you plan to obtain contextual information. Draft a literature review plan, including your main research topic and subtopics. If necessary, modify your literature review plan along the way. If you are comfortable, hand in the drafts of your autoethnographic voice that have led you to these interpretations.

Me: This is a doozy. This is the hardest part for me. I'm

having a really hard time defining my 'research topic.'

And subtopics? What are my subtopics? Fuller, discuss this with me! I still can't define this.

Fuller: Okay, let's discuss this. What's your topic again?

Me: It's the balance and tension between planned and lived

curriculum. Living Pedagogy. You know, all the

philosophical notions that Dr. Aoki brought to light for us during our first couple of grad classes.

Fuller: Okay, don't panic. Let's think about this. Some of your

Why Narratives?

A narrative is a text, composed in any medium, which describes a sequence of real or unreal events. In education, we are surrounded by narrative. As teachers we narrate the stories of collected pasts and global issues as we try to make connections for our students. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out:

The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the way humans experience the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories (p. 2).

When I stand in front of my class, and lead my students to think about Ancient China, for example, I weave in stories about the Great Wall, my own personal connection with the culture, and my

subtopics could be the 'connectedness' or relationships between the teacher, student, parents, and support staff.

Me: So, look for literature that talks about 'connectedness?'

Fuller: And you could look at perception, how you are perceived by these different groups?

Me: But what about my 'culture'? Like, what is my context for my autoethnography?

Fuller: Isn't teaching, or the classroom, your context?

Me: But how am I to connect my private story with the outer world?

Fuller: Your private story is your outer world. Unfortunately, because your thesis is philosophical you can't 'recipe' your literature review, or put it into neat little boxes or headings. The literature review, in your case, is going to bring the objectivity, but it shouldn't dominate your thesis. Remember, it is just one of many data collection strategies.

Me: Okay. Let me hear about your subtopics.

first-hand experiences with the Terra Cotta Warriors. I am using narration and storytelling to connect with the prescribed learning outcomes in the hope that my students will be able to construct their own images and connections with my stories and their new activities about Ancient China.

However, narratives are not just a way of connecting with our students and the curriculum. They can also provide an opportunity to understand why people do what they do. As Fowler (2003) expresses, “Whenever I heard, read or wrote narratives, meaning took shape. I could understand why people did what they did, that what happened to people made them the way they were. I learned that narratives were the places where people had freedom and responsibility to tell the truth, however difficult” (p. 162). Narrative inquiry, therefore, is qualitative research because it focuses on the experiences of life. “Narrative is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study which is appropriate to many social fields” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). It is through “narrative inquiry” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) or “narrative research” (Fowler, 2003) that one can make meaning of life, the process,

Fuller: Remember, though, my project is the gendered (boys) Language Arts class. Therefore my literature review is going to be pros/cons of an all-boys language arts class, social dynamics, and then strategies. But again, my literature review is much more practical than philosophical.

Me: Yes, now I see. I think I’m going to have to do my literature review on one big topic: living pedagogy and then later refine it to see if I can figure out any subtopics.

Fuller: Okay, let’s start by looking up literature review on the internet. Okay, “Firstly, what do you think will be some of the inclusion and exclusion criteria incorporated in your research?”

Me: Well, when I search all of the curriculum journals, including ERIC, I’ve been using the terms of “Curriculum as lived” and “Living Pedagogy.” I want to include articles and novels about teachers who teach in the real world, in the public school system, and I want to find

and answer questions of difficulty.

In Fowler's, *A Curriculum of Difficulty and The Anger in Our Miss Maple* (2001a & 2001b), Fowler defines narrative by comparing it with storytelling, reminding us that there is a difference between the two. She expresses concern for what passes in the narrative domain:

I am becoming increasingly concerned about what is happening with narrative research in education. The narrative knot for researchers does not constitute the whole of the research. Stories as data are sufficient perhaps as stories, but they are not sufficient as research and are not inherent analyses of a compelling research question. The mis/use of narrative in education research has me worried.

In Fowler's discussion, narrative research can be "authentic, (...) requiring ethical stewardship, literary skill (...) [or it can also be] a narcissistic, banal project (...) (2001a & 2001b). When using narrative as a research tool, one must be sure to think critically and question the narrative. Question, "Who am I?" "Where do I go from here?" "How does this connect to my professional

authors/people/curricular scholars who are as real as me. I'm not trying to answer or hypothesize towards a generalization, I just want to know that I'm not alone in searching for my presence or 'being' of teaching. And honestly, I want to know if by being Chinese, my background makes a difference to the way I relate my story. I don't mean to exclude Caucasian authors or Western scholars, but I'm sure I'll lean more towards authors of Asian background.

When I first started on this Thesis journey, Dr. Hurren lent me a small, yellow book titled *The Crocus Hill Notebook*, and I connected instantly with the author, Garry Jones (1991). I knew that I wanted my thesis to have a similar feel. When I read his book, I realized that I wanted to show more of the human and emotional aspects of teaching. Teaching can't exist without the teacher, who is a human being delicately balancing life, work, students,

being?”

So what does this have to do with curriculum, pedagogy and identity? When we create personal narratives, beyond naïve storying, of our pedagogical practices, it allows us to reflect and become more aware of our relationships with our environment, our students, and ourselves: “These serve to ground a reflective practitioner, who is able to call one’s shadow (Jungian interpretation of that term) to “heel,” to leave practices of unhealthy transference outside the door and to dwell in embodied action with one’s students” (Fowler, 2001a & 2001b).

parents, family, all of it. In Jones’ book, I felt like I got to see how his year of teaching went, but I didn’t learn very much about him as a person. And surely the person influences how one teaches? Jones’ book had honest ‘truths’ in it. So often I’m just like him, lying awake at night, planning tomorrow, remembering ‘to do’ lists, and worrying about students.

So I wonder, if Jones can write and publish a book about ‘real’ teaching, and Dr. Hurren and I will read and can reference it, can’t my thesis about the search for Teacher identity have value too?

Fuller: Good points, Mah. I’m just glad I’m not in your position.

Not concrete enough for me. Best of luck finding whatever it is you’re looking for and the resources to help you. I think you’ll find that at the end of all this, your sub topics are your topics and your topic is actually

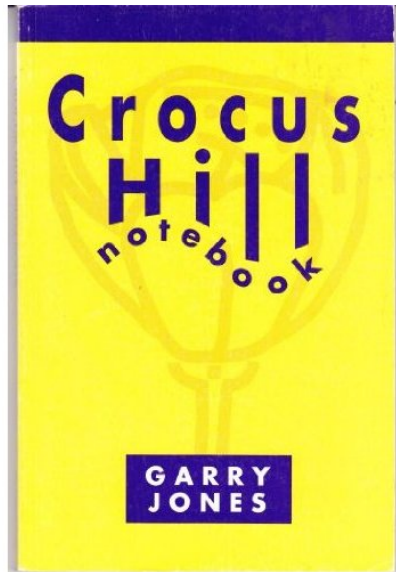


Figure 6

<http://www.amazon.com/CROCUS-HILL-NOTEBOOK-Garry-Jones/dp/0920354300>

discovering your identity through reflective practices. I'm going to go home to finish this. I don't think we can help each other much on this one. We can do this, Mah Mah!

We fist bump each other and Fuller heads out the door. I open up the folder on my desktop called "Journal Entries" and start to look at what I've written. I can't stop thinking about Fuller's use of the word identity again. What is my identity? Every year I am changing grades, changing schools, tweaking my classroom management, and always learning something new, whether curriculum, or the 'other stuff'. It's ironic to be back at Rosehill Elementary, ten years after I started my internship there, only to hear that the colleagues who remember me from back then, believe I'm not the same person in front of them now. Have I really re-invented myself in those ten years? And if I have, why have I?

I decide that this assignment is going to be my draft thesis. I have my journal and blog entries, now all I need to do is create

my story through narratives. I play around with formats, wondering how I will discuss my interpretations and analysis of those narratives. I want to show Professor X the ugliness of the handwritten notes in the margins of my entries. I want the narratives to feel like stories, in different fonts and formats, like textures on a loud painting, layers of different media, collaging and intertwining the images and texts that make up my reflective pedagogy. But I wonder if the University (and Professor X) are just not ready for it. How do I walk the precipice without falling off?

I gather a bunch of magazines, some old photos, a blank canvas from my craft closet, some glue sticks, some paints, some permanent markers, and a pair of scissors. I settle down on the floor of my living room, surround myself with my gathered materials and do the only thing that will comfort me at this moment. I start to create my story.

An email:

August 2010

Final Assignment (#8)

Dear Professor X,

I hope you are well. I am submitting and attaching my final assignment for your viewing only. Of course I appreciate any of your feedback, however, I am uncomfortable with it being posted on the internet because it is my draft thesis.

I have come up with many different topic choices, going back and forth, then realizing I was stuck in my own little hermeneutic circle, explaining to understanding, understanding to explaining. Actually, it was more like a hermeneutic brainstorm! I was/am having difficulty pinpointing a focus, when I realize(d) that this reflexive thinking is doing exactly what the 'Deconstructionists' said would happen! Therefore, my 'big picture' topic is identity. My subtopics are going to revolve around my identity as a teacher and the binaries in the middle of which I dwell: Lived / Planned Curriculum, Chinese / Canadian,

Teacher / Student, Self / Other. I will be researching in moderate hermeneutics, using autoethnography, and narratives. I will “(de)construct” or situate and comment on the literature in connection with the (my) narrative - following the cyclical reflexive model - and hope that new understandings of (my)self emerge. The research questions guiding this study are: Who am I (becoming) as Teacher? How does autoethnography as a research method help me to investigate this search for Teacher identity?

Also, the names of schools, people, and titles have been changed, even though I know you won't be posting it, to respect the confidentiality of my district. I have also included some images to help in the construction of the narratives.

Kindest regards,

Taryn

A Year of Grade Two
(Final Assignment)

Submitted by: Taryn Mah

EDCI 591

Section A0X

August 2010



Figure 7: Field Trip to the Chinese Cemetery

The Field Trip

It is just over a month before the end of the school year and I have decided to take my Grade 7 class of 29 students on a full-day field trip. It's one of my favorite field trips in my 'bag of tricks,' so much so that I do not necessarily take every homeroom class I teach.

This year is different. This year, we have worked together and united unlike any other class in my young, but experienced, teaching career. This year we celebrated our differences, from gender to race, from economic to family background, and from our losses to our successes.

I am Chinese-Canadian and I will not hesitate to tell you that it is one of the first things I mention proudly to my class. I incorporate it into my Social Studies, Language Arts, Visual Arts, Physical Education, and Health & Career Education (HACE) curriculum, sometimes without even realizing it.

So you can understand my frustration when the school's administration questioned my curriculum values regarding this

Reflexivity

Reflexivity: There is something to be said about being the younger one in a graduate class. On the one hand, the papers, the rhetoric, and the routines of my undergrad years weren't so long ago. But on the other hand, the new language, the philosophies, and the experience seem so far away. Living pedagogy is not an easy concept to illustrate. How do I represent a concept that I only have ten years of experience in? Does the concept of 'living pedagogy' truly represent my own, current living pedagogy? Does it represent my future? Does it represent my past? It will be interesting to come back to this thesis, and Aoki's work, and re-interpret living pedagogy after I have accumulated more experience.

Reflexivity, as defined by Bullock and Stallibrass in the *New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought (2000)* is, *Combining the process of reflection with self-critical analysis. It is highly valued as a means whereby social sciences researchers are able to explore their own subjectivity, be more aware of the impact they necessarily*

field trip. "What does this really have to do with curriculum?

Are you sure you need to take the whole day?"

Our conversations did not go well. The principal, Ken, worried that other teachers would see my field trip as a 'free day' so close to the end of the year, and he thought it would be unfair to grant us permission to go. He questioned whether I was going too far with my personal biases and wondered about the curricular value of a trip to a Chinese Cemetery, lunch, Buddhist Temple, and Chinatown. I mean, after all, wasn't I teaching *ANCIENT* China? He did not initially grant us approval to go.

I told the kids the trip was cancelled. They told their parents. The parents then emailed the principal, Ken. It took only one email for my administrator to change his mind.

It is the day of our field trip. We start off our morning at Harling Point, the Chinese Cemetery of Victoria. We discuss the historical significance. I take out the Joss sticks and explain 'offerings.' The kids want to join in, as do the parents. We all line up to light our yellow, powdery, sandalwood sticks, pay our

have on the research data they collect and increase the sensitivity of their analysis and interpretations of data.

(2000, p. 348)

It is difficult to be self-critical in a context in which you are already unsure. I explore my subjectivity in my narratives. In this exploration I realized that my childhood teachers and my rebellious nature influenced me against my family's traditional educational views. I realized that everything that makes up my 'self' as a unique individual also hinders my ability to be unbiased when analyzing that 'self'. My culture, my past, my mode of being in the world, all influence my analysis of my self as teacher and how I interpret the needs of my classroom. Is it possible to be unbiased in your pedagogy? Is it necessary?

The point of the preface, *The Field Trip*, is to illustrate the daily struggle I, as teacher, have with my own living pedagogy. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I am disillusioned with teaching and curriculum, and yet I wouldn't say that I am still enchanted with them either. I decided to pursue a Master's degree because I am searching for more, more than just a 'bag full of tricks.' I couldn't quite put my finger on what I was looking for but once I

respects, bow three times in front of the two towers, and then, without a word, we each take a carnation and seek out an overgrown or weathered gravestone. The Chinese students in the class take the broom and dustpan and start sweeping - it is inherent to them. The other students take garden sheers to the weedy and neglected gravestones. Afterwards, they all migrate towards the beach.

What a sight. Not one student is alone. Some are posing for pictures on rocks. Some are looking for crabs. Others are sharing insights on the ecology of the beach. Here my student with Asperger is socializing with the athletes, my student with English as his second language, with a group of Caucasian students, my troubled student with my top student.

For the rest of the field trip, through lunch, through touring Chinatown, through free time downtown, labels and boundaries dissolve as the students continue to work together, socializing with and learning from each other. At the end of the trip, the parents and I gather together and remark on how well the

read Aoki's work, I began to question, think, reflect, and realize that *the* curriculum is not the final answer to all questions; I felt encouraged/felt compelled to open my eyes and see what the light shines on.

kids did, as though we feel a need to assess them on their behavior in order to be able to defend that we did something worthwhile, worthy of the curriculum.

When we get back to the school, the principal and vice-principals are waiting for me. No child was lost, no child was hurt, and no parent complained. So imagine my confusion at receiving a tag-team reprimand for the field trip's 'lack of curricular links.' I decide / I am told I will not be going on that field trip again.

Fast forward to one month later. I'm sitting in my first Master's class at the University, with my supervisor as my professor, who is instructing us on *Emerging Trends and Topics in Curriculum*. She asks us to read a chapter in a book by Dr. Ted Aoki, and warns us not to be alarmed if we do not understand what we are reading.

Curriculum as planned? Curriculum as lived? Dwelling in the midst of? Living pedagogy? I can't believe it; someone is actually describing what I want my teaching to be. I read it again.

Then I read it for a third time.

The Pink Slip

Did you know that the ominous ‘pink slip’ isn’t really pink? In fact, it is more of an ivory or buff colour. A bland, not-quite-white, not-quite-yellow, piece of paper on official school district letterhead, with my name at the top, in a slightly different colour of toner, and the signature at the bottom has the slight corner impression left by a rubber stamp. It outlines, in three short paragraphs, that I do not have official employment with the district anymore, and the procedure, if I choose to do so, on how to apply for any ‘new’ and now ‘open’ September positions. Every May around my birthday, for the last seven years, I have received one of these letters. And every June, I apply for the slew of middle school positions, each year getting higher in seniority, getting closer to being the first to pick from a barrel of opportunities that are ever-diminishing due to low enrollment.

Identity as Teacher

Identity as Teacher: Mitchell and Weber's, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Like a Teacher* (1995) and *Reinventing Ourselves as Teachers, Beyond Nostalgia* (1999) provide a unique and critical insight into, the relationship between schooling, gender, teacher identity and children's pop culture. "Teachers are often aware of the preconceptions and images others hold of them" (1995, p. 2). I decided to switch grade levels because I did not want to be what it was that my administrator had defined for me. I wanted my autonomy and not to be influenced in such a way that *my* facilitation of the curriculum wasn't repeatedly questioned. Britzman (1986) explores how the students influence and construct the images of the teacher's world, however, in this sense, it was my principal who was constructing the image. If we replace Britzman's use of the word 'student' with 'administrators' we could gather that the following is also true:

[Administration] construct images of the teacher's world...

On the classroom level, it is a rare teacher who lends

[administration] insight into her/his own teaching

Each year I am reminded that I am not 'specialized,' nor do I have a 'concentration' deemed worthy of being circled or exempted from this process. Like my degree says, I am *just* an elementary generalist.

I think where I am not, therefore I am not where I think

-Jacques Lacan (1966, p. 1)

In the past six years, I have taught at all three of our district's middle schools. From Grade 6 to Grade 8, from Physical Education to Mathematics, from Language Arts to the Sciences, from Leadership Studies to Robotics. I have been flexible in moving to wherever the district had room for me. However, this last year proved to be very different.

I am not sure if those differences are due to the experience of yet another move to yet another school and starting over again, or if they are because I am gaining new perspectives due to my graduate studies. Either way, what follows is an outline of how

struggles. Consequently, what [administration] tend to observe is a pattern that results from the hidden influences of teacher preparation, school policy, curricular mandates and state law... Years of classroom experience allow [administrators] to have very specific expectations of how teachers should act in the classroom... in this sense, [administrators] do coach their teachers in ways which reinforce school structure and, as such, constitute an immediate source of teacher socialization. (p. 445)

I was not willing to play the part of middle school teacher any longer if it meant that I was just an implementer of UDL IRP PLOs². I was becoming someone that I didn't like, I had lost my passion, felt disconnected with curriculum, and did not want my legacy to be what Ken had set out for me.

those differences evolved into the starting point for this thesis; how they led to my decision to stop being a middle school teacher and to become an elementary school teacher (Grade 2).

At the beginning of this past school year, teaching at another new middle school, the administration asked us to hand in our year plan overviews. I had never worked at a school where I was asked to submit the *Prescribed Learning Outcomes* I would be achieving and how I planned to teach them. My plan included the checklists and thematic topics, outlining briefly the type of lessons, texts, and resources I would like to acquire. One week later, my administrator, Ken handed it back to me with a pile of literature to review and one comment: “We teach Universal Design for Learning (UDL) here.”

I found it ironic that I was being asked to create my year plan overviews only to be reminded that, “UDL provides a blueprint for creating flexible goals, methods, materials and assessments that accommodate learner differences”

² IRP PLO or Integrated Resource Package Prescribed Learning Outcome (A British Columbia Government documented curriculum)

An example of 'Curriculum-as-Planned': Universal Design Learning Theory (UDL)

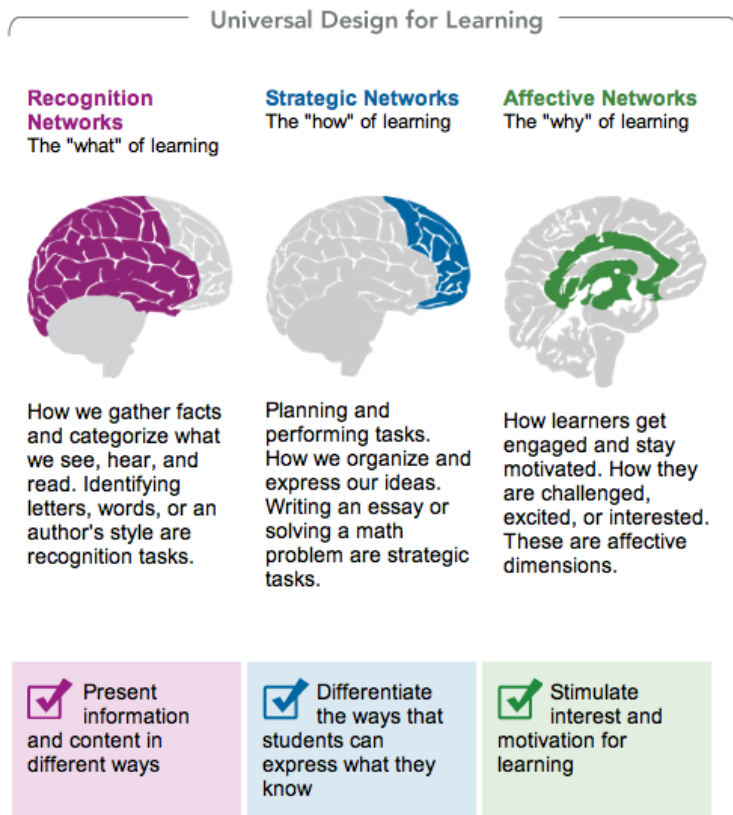


Figure 8

<http://www.cast.org/udl/>

Connection:

My argument for leaving Eastwood Middle School was not because I disagree with Universal Design Learning Theory. In

(<http://www.cast.org/udl/index.html>).

Thus began a year of clashing personalities and clashing teaching philosophies. When I requested approval for field trips, I was reminded to include curricular values quoted from the *IRP*. A trip to Chinatown on Chinese New Year wasn't approved until my students' parents called and emailed. A team-building experience at a climbing wall was only approved after I said I was partnering with another class from another school, who already had approval. Pumpkin carving on Halloween, integrated into our oral storytelling unit on ghost stories, was cut short when Ken walked into our classroom and shut us down, in spite of the presence of parent volunteers. These were all field trips and activities that I had done before with previous classes at different schools. I didn't understand why they met with such resistance.

My focus became less about being a 'good' teacher, and more about coping with the conflicts of my employment situation. I kept remembering that ominous pink slip and realized it didn't seem so ominous anymore. Now I couldn't wait to get laid off to

fact, I don't disagree with it all; I support the idea that it gives all individuals equal opportunities to learn. What I found ironic, and my reason for leaving, was the personal conflicts I was having with the Principal, who believed my lessons were not representative of this model. His personal definition of my role as teacher was, ironically, a single, one-size-fits-all ideal, and not one that can be flexible, fluent, and customized, which contradicts the very blueprint of UDL.

find a new teaching position. My teaching was no longer about teaching but about delivering impersonal UDL lessons designed to attain prescribed learning outcomes.

So imagine my surprise in June, when Ken pulled me into his office to persuade me to take the 83% Grade 7 assignment at his school over a 100% elementary assignment teaching Grade 2 that I had applied for. He reminded me that I was a middle school teacher, that this was what I would and should be doing for the rest of my teaching career. That *this was me*. This was who I was meant to be. I was even more surprised when he started to persuade me in the Chinese language we both share. And, for a brief moment, amid the clash of our Taishan dialects, and in the middle of traditional Chinese patriarchal metaphors and roles, I believed him.

Understanding is like an adventure,

And like any adventure, it always involves some risk.

-Gadamer (1983, p. 141)

Binary Oppositions

Binary Oppositions (Leading to Power?): “Deconstruction is difficult to define because such definitions presuppose some kind of contract between words and meanings...deconstruction tangles with, and tangles up, pairings such as word/meaning. It provides a sustained philosophical interrogation of this and other binary oppositions” (Burman & MacLure, 2005, p. 284 –found in Research methods in social science text book). There is a natural hierarchy in binary oppositions, “Where one term seems to represent a higher principle, while the other is a kind of supplement – something lesser and subordinate” (Burman & MacLure, 2005, p. 284). In the juxtaposed narratives the binary oppositions I have introduced are: Lived/Planned Curriculum, Male/Female, Chinese/English (Language). Following Western thought and its tendency to organize everything into a hierarchal structure, terms and concepts are distinguished between the presence-absence dichotomy, and positive-negative, without apparent leeway for deviation. In this narrative, planned curriculum held power over the lived curriculum, male

A YEAR OF GRADE TWO

August

It is the third week in August and I drive into the small parking lot of my new school, Seaview Elementary. There are about twenty spots, a difference from the fifty parking spots at the middle schools I’ve taught at. The sun is beating down on the black asphalt, the playgrounds are empty and full of new woodchips, the hopscotch lines freshly painted.

I walk into the little school and am greeted by an aquarium of tropical fish, small benches, an office window lowered so that smaller students can see our administrative assistant, and bulletin boards that are closer to the ground. Everything seems smaller, shorter, and with my own stature reaching a whopping five feet, I feel quite at home.

From the front door I turn right at the aquarium and start my walk towards what will be my new classroom. Everyone is busy putting up September bulletin boards, catching up, complaining about the mess, and moving the desks and chairs

(administrator) had power over female (teacher), and the Chinese language held power over the English language.

Derrida shows how the binary law of presence always contains the seeds of its own undoing. It will always break down under pressure. Indeed, deconstruction could be described as the act of bringing pressure to bear on the cherished oppositions that are woven into texts, forcing/allowing them to reveal their blind spots or aporias... where the integrity of the oppositions is fatally compromised, and an excess of disorderly and contradictory meanings and resonances is released (Burman & Maclure, p. 285).

Derrida's argument is that the binary hierarchies of presence are always "violent" (Derrida, 1972 from Burman & Maclure). "The stability that is temporarily achieved is at the cost of suppressing some "other", of whatever is banished to the 'wrong side' of the binary [and that] there is always power, authority and violence at play in the stratagems of presence. This is not to say we can ever entirely escape it... But we can continually try to glimpse the trace of what has been silenced [...] in order to provide us with

from the halls into our own rooms.

My new school was selected to be painted over the summer, along with fire sprinkler and electrical upgrades. I'm ecstatic to see that I have more than one electrical plug, but my excitement is short lived as I see the dust, old paint, and all my boxed supplies that will have to be moved and unpacked.

I can't handle it. I'm starting to feel really overwhelmed. I walk out. I think to myself, "What am I doing here?"

My new colleagues, as if noticing my fear, start coming out of their classrooms to re-introduce themselves and say hello. Big warm smiles ask me about my summer. As they talk, they roll up their sleeves and effortlessly start moving desks and chairs labeled 'Room 5' from the hall into my room. By the time I've heard about their summers, the room is already looking full.

The four of us then start to talk about classroom layout and they each tell me about the time they have spent in the same classroom, and what works for them. We start to discuss what would be an ideal floor plan and before I know it, the bones have

our metaphysical 'comforts of mastery' (Johnson, 1987, p. 13).

As an ethical teacher I need to live in the tensions of this 'violent' presence without suppressing or banishing one side of the binary, revealing their aporias wherever I can.

been put into place. My carpet has been laid, desks arranged in front of the whiteboards, and filing cabinets placed next to the teacher's desks. A rainbow table is next to the sink. Bookshelves, fake plants, and bean bag chairs are in the corner for a library. Room 5 is looking ready. I learn my first elementary lesson: never underestimate the power of four primary teachers with twenty minutes to spare.

Labour Day

Labour Day. I spend the day before school starts in my new classroom, finalizing where the rest of the posters should go, cementing my calendar routines, walking (or is it more like pacing?) around the room. A couple of my seasoned colleagues pop in and out, but most of them are gone by noon. This is not how they want to enjoy their last day of summer vacation.

I'm here to calm myself, to feel prepared for the new school year. I am not seasoned. I am a newbie, to both the school

Lingering Quotes about Place

How we know and what we know is always within a context of who we are and where we are. I am reminded now of Vipassana insight meditation and the practice of mindfulness. Becoming aware of where our bodies touch the earth is part of this practice and it is this same awareness - being mindful of where our bodies touch the earth and noting the sensations that arise - that I want to bring to the practice of curriculum.

(Hurren, 2003, p. 120)

Acknowledging this sense of being lost in the familiar opens up the possibility of reaching deeply inside the rememorize what is not recognized. This asks us to travel out and come back with new eyes.

(Wang, 2004, p. 168)

and to Grade 2. Am I regretting switching grade levels? Am I regretting leaving middle school?

I think back to the last four years and remember activities done and lessons taught. The same jokes and connections I would use year after year. Intermediate classrooms were bare, just some dusting and recycling of old materials and handouts. I remember taking Labour Day off. I remember feeling ‘seasoned.’

The new school is empty now. It’s just me. There’s a weird sense of haunting.

I take one last look over the room. The areas like ‘Carpet’ and ‘Calendar’ are in one corner of the room. My desk and filing cabinet are against the rattling air vent (which will later drive me crazy, inspiring about seven moves to seven different places over the course of the year). The knee-high desks and their accompanying miniature chairs are arranged in groups of four in the middle of the room, in front of a green chalkboard. Labels ready for names are above coat and backpack hooks. Books are stacked in the classroom library. Bare walls wait, ready for Grade

Place

Place: I recognize that my thesis is not focused on “place,” however, I cannot ignore the importance of ‘place’ in a teacher’s world and to her identity. The classroom is to teacher as home is to family, and because of this, I will briefly review a small amount of literature pertaining to “place.” While I don’t intend to explore place and pedagogy in great detail, I do believe at this point in the narratives it is important to recognize the significance of creating this ‘place’ (classroom) for the students, as well as being a part of a ‘place’ that is already established (the school), and the ‘place’ where head and heart reside (identity); for ‘place’ and ‘space’ are connected and the in-between space is where this thesis hopes to tread.

In David Gruenewald’s (2003a) paper, *The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place*, he explores the connection between lived experiences and place by quoting Freire:

People as beings “in a situation,” find themselves in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own

2 pride. Clean chart paper stands on the easel. My big yellow posters are up; homemade, reminding the class of the ‘5 Mutual Agreements.’

I shut my blinds and windows. Take a photocopy of my daybook for tomorrow. I’ll look it over later, before I head to bed for an excited, anxious, and sleepless night. I decide to put just one more cutesy-monkey poster up. Then I grab my bags, shut off the lights, and close the door behind me.

First Day of School

The routines of the first day of school in an elementary school are very different than at the middle school level. Instead of a huge mass in the gym, a call out by the principal over the microphone of yearly expectations, and some mispronounced last names of student, the last year’s class is greeted by their last year’s teacher in the same classroom.

I freeze. The teacher before me has moved schools, so I

“situationality” to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. (Freire 1970/1995, p. 90, as quoted in Gruenewald 2003a p. 4)

Gruenewald explores the significance of people reflecting on their “situationality,” including recognizing that “being in a situation has spatial, geographical, contextual dimensions” (2003a, p. 4).

Similarly, Sonya Martin (2010) calls attention to the importance of place in “how we understand ourselves and each other as members of a larger community, and how we situate our practices of [...] teaching” (p. 258).

“Writing about worlds reveals as much about those writing as it does about the worlds represented” (Chambers, found in Pinar, 2003, p. 234). Hasebe-Ludt and Hurren invite curricular scholars to be aware of the “peculiarity and physicality of place,” questioning “If a [curricular] story can be placed anywhere and the story does not change, is place a determining factor in the outcome of the story? ... Is specificity of place important? And what about how we tell the story, or the words we choose? How might we read/write curricular stories if our curricular places [...] overlap or intersect or diverge?” (2003, p. xx). Hasebe-Ludt

am to greet this class of old Grade 2s, now Grade 3s, and ‘entertain’ them for the first half of the day. I start to call out the attendance. I fumble, much like the middle school administrators I’d just been remembering. I am corrected by a chorus of Grade 3s who have already established their community. I am the outsider here. It’s a feeling I have started to get too comfortable with. *“What am I doing here?”*

They start to laugh and make fun of the way I’m calling out their names. Then the tallest of the group starts to whisper to another and I see an old game being played. They’re about to switch names on me. I look over at the rest of the kids, evaluate some of the girls’ looks and quickly recognize the ploy. *“C’mon, Mah. Pull it together!”*

I stop everything I’m doing. Recover. I think, “Ah. Some things don’t change from middle school.” And I begin to pull out Middle School Miss Mah. I stop hiding behind the attendance list and I begin to tell them a little about me, where I have taught, what I did over the summer, where their last teacher

discovered that in poststructural discourses, classrooms, too, are places and landscapes are to be read and written. Hurren, using postmodern discourses to deconstruct notions of space and place, is,

Intent on exploring connections between autobiography, geography, and curriculum within teaching and learning and living and theory and research, and I want to explore these connections in ways that attend to embodied knowing: sounds, sights, smells, feelings, memories, gut reactions. I want to pay attention to the physicality of our various places and spaces: prairie or coast or river edge, classroom and hallways and offices and parking lots and conference rooms (2003, p.112)

To better understand my identity as teacher, I have to situate myself (and you, my audience), and in this sense, part of my identity as teacher is the name above my door, my carpet on the floor, my posters on the walls; it is the space in which I physically and emotionally reside in from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. The classroom that I teach in also 'marks' me, locating me in my teacher identity. It is the place where I am in present in my lived

went, and I ask them to start talking to the person beside them about what they did for the summer. The attendance will have to wait. I have bigger things to establish here. I'm going to be seeing these faces in the halls and they are the first to develop their impressions of Miss Mah. How I react now will be spread through the school from these kids to siblings, to parents, to my colleagues. *"Pull up your skirt, Mah!"*

We gather at the carpet. Two teachers, also new to Seaview, walk into my room. They must have halos on their heads and wings under their blouses! We establish the community circle and begin again, talking about their partners and what they did over the summer. I sneakily listen for first names and quickly finish the attendance. A small victory, but I'll take it nonetheless.

Day One

It is the first full day of school but we still don't know our class composition yet. Instead, Kathy, the other Grade 2 teacher,

experiences.

Indwelling in the Zone of Between we see the teacher's dwelling place as a sanctified clearing where the teacher and students gather – somewhat like the place before the hearth of home-an extraordinary unique and precious place, a hopeful place, a trustful place, a careful place – essentially a human place dedicated to ventures devoted to a leading out, and authentic “e(out)/ducere(lead),” from the “is” to new possibilities yet unknown (Aoki, p. 164).

Every school year, and sometimes twice in a school year, I am moved to a new school and a new classroom where I have to establish my place. I design a new classroom for my students, I pick a seat at a lunch table in the staffroom, I am designated a chair for staff meetings. In each of these places I am establishing my 'dwelling place,' trusting that my new situation will bring me to new, exciting, and adventurous (Gadamer's sense of the term) possibilities.

who also happens to be Chinese, and I take the Grade 2s and do some team-teaching.

I adore this sort of teaching. Three years of my teaching career were spent teaching one or more subjects with another teacher, both classes, throughout the year. I am especially grateful for the three years of Grade 6 team-teaching with one of my now-closest friends.

However, this time I notice that my role is quite different. I am noticing that Kathy is less about the 'team' and more about directing the leadership. I recognize this and allow myself to be passive. She has taught at this school for 35 years. She is my cultural elder. Who am I to mess with her direction and leadership?

I also notice that she is not comfortable with this set up and we quickly divide the forty-eight students into two groups, by coloured Popsicle sticks. They sing a morning song as they line up single file, to follow as I lead them into my room.

Kathy has already given me the lesson plan and the

Pedagogy of Reinvention

Pedagogy of Reinvention: *to describe the process of making both the immediate and distant past usable. It is a process of going back over something in different ways and with new perspectives, of studying one's own experience with the insight and awareness of the present for the purposes of acting on the future. The idea of reinvention is relevant to both beginning and experienced teachers because it implies an approach to professional identity that is ongoing – we are perpetually becoming teachers so to speak. (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 8)*

Connection:

I am motivated by Mitchell and Weber's project and recognize that my own approach to my professional identity will be ongoing.

Questions of reinvention:

1. Am I a middle school teacher? Am I an elementary school teacher? Is there a difference?
2. Who was I ten years ago? Where do I see myself now?

worksheet with what she thinks would make our lessons cohesive and non-repetitive. I follow along, partly out of respecting her opinions and experience, and partly because I know it is much easier to follow along than to argue. She has planned the lesson so that I can repeat it in the afternoon when we switch the classes again.

Twenty-four little Grade 2s follow me into the room and sit down at my carpet area, cross-legged and a little bit giggly from nervousness. There are forty-eight little eyes staring up at me. This is not the same scene from yesterday with the Grade 3s. These students are smaller, wide eyed, and ready to absorb anything I throw at them. I am definitely the one with authority here. It makes me a little nervous. The circus song rings through my head and a quick image of a clown juggling while riding a unicycle starts to appear in the back of my mind.

Again, "Focus," and I shake the image from my head. I begin telling the students a little about me. I sense their nervousness. I am new to the school, with only an end-of-year

What do I want to embody or become?

3. How do I use my past to forge forward? Am I looking to become a 'better' teacher? A more 'present' teacher? A more 'conscious' teacher? 'Aesthetic' Teacher? 'Authentic Teacher?'

newsletter introduction. No connections here. Or so I thought:

Student: Do you know Rajeeta Bains? She lives across the street! She's my babysitter. She said you taught her in grade 7!

Me: Yeah, I know Rajeeta Bains! How is she doing? What grade is she in now?

Student: Grade 10!

A slew of hands go up and they begin to ask me if I know other older students. "*Uh oh, what have I started?*" I begin to define the ages of students I might know as they correspond to the years I taught at their feeder middle school. Turns out I know more cousins, babysitters, neighbours, and older siblings than I thought. Turns out they've already made some connections on their own.

I quickly change the subject and begin teaching Kathy's lesson. It feels awkward and abrupt. This is what happens when you teach to the style of someone else. I hear Kathy's voice, as per our earlier discussion, of how she would script the lesson. I

A LINGERING QUOTE

... I ask: What 'is' teaching?, emphasizing 'is.'

So placed, I may be allowed to hear better the voice of what teaching essentially is. The question understood in this way urges me to be attuned to a teacher's presence with children. The presence, if authentic, is being. I find that teaching so understood is attuned to the place where care dwells, a place of ingatherings and belonging, where the indwelling of teacher and students is made possible by the presence of care that each has for the other.

(Aoki, 2005, p. 191)

try to copy her and realize quickly that this is not my lesson. This is not me.

The day is not a total loss. I do recover some of my own teaching style when transitioning and in the short spaces where we digress from the lesson. I wonder, though, if this is how the rest of the year is going to feel. Not Me. And if it is, when will I be revealed as the fraud I really am?

The First Friday

It is still the first week of school and it is finally Friday. This means that by the afternoon, the classes and composition will be solidified and I will get to meet my class in its entirety!

There is definitely excitement in the air. Kathy calls out the names (again, when did I get this passive?) and tells them to stand and line up at the door. It is obvious that these students will not be in Kathy's class, but in mine. I try really hard not to infer

anything from the expressions on their faces. Disappointment?
Sadness? Hurt? Rejection?⁸

We line up single file at the door and walk into my
classroom. I ask them to sit in a circle on the carpet and begin
what will be our daily routine, the 'Community Circle.'

This is my class. The year has begun.

Monday Morning

Monday morning. First full day with my class. I get to
the school an hour and a half before the bell. I spend that time
sorting and resorting papers and books, labeling name tags,
numbering last minute items, and sitting nervously at my desk
reviewing my day plan. I haven't felt this nervous since my first
TOC day.

Brian, our principal, comes into my room with a big,
warm smile on his face. We haven't quite established our

⁸ Let me situate why I infer negative meaning in my students' expressions. Kathy has been teaching Grade 2 for a long time. In fact, she has taught some of the parents of the children that attend our school. She is a legend, known for her amazing competencies, patience, caring, understanding, and complete dedication to our students. My inferences here are purely due to my own feelings of insecurity and inadequacy.

Ethnicity, Self, What about Me?

In reading Wang and Aoki, I felt an immediate connection to something more than just their phenomenological inquiries or interpretations of emerging curriculum. Is it biased or racist to say that I was empowered by their ethnicity? That I was attracted to their racial background? That I felt a kinship with two Asian curricular theorists because I, too, am Asian?

What I thought would be a story about my rebellion against administration ended up layered with a strong need to share my cultural background with my students, centered around my (dis)connect from my self and my ethnicity. Am I Chinese-Canadian? Am I Canadian-Chinese? This then grew into a struggle with wondering what my cultural identity has to do with my (living) pedagogy.

Aoki, in *Reflections of a Japanese Canadian Teacher* (1979), regards his ethnicity as, "(...) experiencing subjectively one's lived situation from one's own ethnic perspective" (2005, p. 333). Because this is the only standpoint I can speak from, my ethnicity is part of my lived and now living being. Not without

relationship yet so there's some awkwardness when we speak to each other.

"Taryn, I'd like to discuss a student with you."

I feel nervous. I always do when administrators begin a sentence with my first name. Most middle school administrators endearingly call me Mah Mah, Mahi Mahi, or Miss Mah.

"Sure Brian. Shoot!" I say with a toothy grin that's too large for the situation. I'm often excessively casual when I'm trying to hide my nervousness.

"Barbara's mother came in to see me on Friday afternoon. I don't want you to feel like I'm not supporting you but she is quite concerned with Barbara being in your class. I know that the last time you taught Grade 2s was during your practicums, and I also realize that many of the other parents know this, too. She has asked that we switch Barbara out of your class into Kathy's."

"Okay! Great! Alrighty then! Barbara! Okay!" I respond too quickly, with too much, in rapid fire succession to prove that I'm flexible and that I can sympathize when I'm really

struggle, I have identified myself as a Chinese-Canadian, as living in the space in-between, in the hyphenated space. Aoki, in the same journal, describes how his ethnicity has added to his pedagogy:

For me, being and becoming a teacher and teacher educator has been an experience made richer by the fact of my ethnicity. I regard it as my personal world of my lived experiences, a world in which I participated with others in its very construction. (2005, p. 348)

I believe that if I hadn't experienced cultural struggles, my pedagogy wouldn't be as 'lived' as it is currently. Imagine if I had continued to passively accept my parents' traditional Chinese views of the direction my education should take. I wouldn't even be here! Imagine if I had continued to ignore my cultural background. I acknowledge the complexities and ambiguities of living in the hyphenated spaces. However, unlike during my childhood, I am now proud to call myself Chinese, and similarly, I am proud to be Canadian. In my adult life, I appreciate living in this cultural hyphenated space because it makes me unique and it gives me inner strength knowing where I have come from.

trying to hide the feeling of being punched in the gut.

“Whoa, hold on, Taryn. Just to let you know, normally I wouldn't give in to a parent's request like this, but if she's putting up this much resistance, this is not the year you want to have with this mother. I want you to have a great year at Seaview and to make this transition easy for everybody. Plus, I'm trading Victor for Barbara!” It's weird to hear Brian refer to the students like trading cards or a hockey draft.

I realize that Brian is right. The punch in the gut feels more like a cramp now. Victor is one of our very unique, gifted kids, with a personality that shone on the very first day. He's also Chinese and I am always very happy to have at least one Chinese student in the class. This year I'll have two!

I start trading names on tags and desks from Barbara to Victor. The bell is about to ring and I feel a different sort of queasy in the pit of my stomach.

Wang, in her publication *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home* (2004), touches on her culture and identity in two ways. First, culture and curriculum as her historical journey, and second, culture and curriculum as an in-between space, both of which contribute to her identity:

In my Chinese mind, though, culture is intricately related to the aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual realms of human life through its history, history which embodies multilayered and contradictory symbols of both transmission and transcendence, continuity and creativity. It can touch me profoundly and inspire me beyond what I can imagine; it can also upset and suffocate me beyond what I can bear to speak about (p. 167).

For Wang and Aoki, ethnicity and culture are part of their lived experiences and therefore, part of their identity, both arguing that without recognizing how one is situated culturally, it isn't "ever possible to become an individual capable of critically engaging one's life and making one's own choices" (Wang, 2004, p. 168).

As an example, Wang (2004) illustrates a classroom situation where she engages her students in a discussion about,

Division 5

Here I stand in front of twenty-four,
Wondering what the year has in store.

First impressions and past gossip,

Parents' whispers from lip to lip.

A class is different from year to year,

But some cliques remain, they persevere.

From "Behavioural" to "Gifted" and "Seat Filler" kids,

What will they become as they shed their Grade 2 chrysalides?

There will be big players, I can already tell.

Red and Green files, I don't want to dwell.

But let me introduce my class of grade twos

In poetry form, a Dr. Seuss muse.

There's Abbie who walks in with mom every day,

Who cries till she's passed off in a special way.

“whether or not culture counts” (p. 173). The students of minority ethnic backgrounds argue that race does matter and their Caucasian peers argue differently. In the end, the heated and emotional discussion “touches upon the tricky zone of achieving balance between understanding one’s situatedness in culture and one’s singularity as a person” (p. 173).

In one of the many drafts of this thesis, my supervisor commented that my Chinese identity references were not strong enough. I felt defensive and I’m sure that I did not listen to the rest of her comments following. I remember going home and highlighting how many times I referenced being Chinese, an immature effort to prove her wrong. I struggle with qualifying the fact that being a Chinese-Canadian teacher affects my teacher identity, without simply stating that it just ‘does’ or it just ‘is’. Having two Chinese students in my class meant that I could share our culture without feeling like I needed an IRP PLO, or feeling like I was sharing our culture in a classroom where it was not relevant. But the impact of my identity as Chinese-Canadian extends beyond the presence or absence of other Chinese-Canadians in my classroom, and the impact of that on my identity

There’s Adda as well, the only sister of six boys,
Who comes in late and has all the latest girl toys.

We have Leigha and Sophia who we’ll later discover
Don’t always make it to school, lost lessons not recovered.
Natasha, Kristen, Violet, the trio,
Best friends that do everything, at every scenario.

And Madison, who tries so hard to please,
Will lose a tooth in PE when she falls to her knees.
There’s Melissa who hugs me so hard every day,
She reminds me she loves me in every which way.

Marian’s the tallest of the entire group,
She’s famous for eating her lunch of just tomato soup.
And there’s always one girl, the mini-teacher in space,
Her name is Elske, the sweetest dimples on her face.

as teacher, as well as beyond what it means to be Chinese-Canadian; the “dwelling in tensionality” (p. 354) is what seduces me to the possibilities of a fuller identity.

Holly begins with the class at the start,
But misses four months, because of Dad’s heart.
And the whole school knows about Janelle whose folks,
Have divorced and argued, every detail provokes.

But let’s not forget that there are boys in our pack

Athletic abilities, none of them lack.

There’s Victor, who’s gifted in an odd sort of way,

Capital Bs and Ds litter his page until May.

Ollie who plays and remembers the score

Of every hockey player, our discussion’s never a bore!

And Jackson, oh Jackson, from motherless home,

Who’s older than others, whose hair needs a comb.

There’s Wyatt, who comes with an aid and smile,

He’s one of the class, not just an IEP file.

Timothy comes with a British accent,

When I was in high school Amy Tan's book, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) came out. I remember the book being a topic of conversation at our extended family dinners, among my mother and my aunties. When the movie was released, my Mother took me, her "rebellious, stubborn, teenaged daughter," to see it. I watched uncomfortably with her, engaged in the stories of four immigrant women from China –their hopes, fears, and pasts – and their relationships with their American-born daughters. Finally, in my adult life, I have read the book. What follows is a quote that I love and felt it had a place in this thesis as I continue to struggle to define identity as culture and inner self.

A Literary Quote

I asked myself, what is true about a person? Would I change in the same way the river changes colour but still be the same person? And then I saw the curtains blowing wildly, and outside rain was falling harder, causing everyone to scurry and shout. I smiled. And then I realized it was the first time I could see the power of the wind. I couldn't see the wind itself, but I

Competitive already, sugared lunches sent.

Tyler, our smallest, our quietest too,

He speaks into his chest, his drugs make him subdued.

And Justin, class favorite, who loves to make like a seal,

Whose mother gets ill, and we help out with meals.

There is another, very helpful student,

Benjamin's his name, thoughtful and prudent.

Conner comes with his heart on his sleeve,

Professing his affection and love, for me, he believes.

And Sawyer reminds us what it's like to be,

The son of a teacher, the 'Golden' spot, he.

And last, but not least, there's Michael, the one,

Who will take most of my time, but he's second to none.

We'll join together, our little community connect.

could see it carried the water that filled the rivers and shaped the countryside. It caused men to yelp and dance.

Amy Tan. *The Joy Luck Club, Part 1, chapter 3,*
paragraph 45

With each one a member, our differences collect.

We'll spend the year, a buzzing bee hive

This is my class, Miss Mah's Div 5!

The Hockey Pool

One gym. Twelve classes. Fifteen teachers. A newly mandated government curriculum: There must be thirty minutes of 'Daily Physical Activity' for every class at every grade level. At the elementary level, this means it's hockey pool time. We pick our cards from the shuffled deck, and like an NHL hockey pool we fight over our gym times. Administration stays out of it. It becomes apparent that even in our small school we will all have to teach outside once in the week. PE is my *forte*. PE is how I get my students on board. In the gym, I feel at ease. Whistle signals, rules, safety, large spaces to move, learn, practice, and play.

I try not to reflect on the middle school days. I miss the

The card I drew for my gymnasium schedule



Figure 9

http://tallahasseechess.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/queen_of_hearts.gif

administration just handing me my schedule. When to teach what. Where to teach what. On the other hand, here I have an opportunity to weasel some good gym times! I don't care what gym times I get, as long as they're all at the same time. I like a nice, easy, daily routine!

I get a good card. Sweet. I'm first. I pick some nice morning times. In the end, I get the same morning times for every day except Friday. *"How did I swindle that?"* I think, but then I realize the bigger question should be, *"Why do all the primary teachers want the afternoons?"* And, *"Am I missing something here?"*

We re-shuffle the deck and do the same with our Library times and our Computer times. I am astonished that this is the way they decide on a schedule, every year, every September. I remember being a little girl thinking that they must put it all in a computer program and some fancy algorithm figures it all out. I was surely wrong!

I go back to my classroom and finally, after the first full

A Lingering Quote

Somehow... she knows the significance for herself as a teacher of allowing space for stories, anecdote, and narratives that embody the lived dimension of curriculum life. As far as she is concerned, these narratively structured lived curricular have legitimacy in her class, even though the curriculum-as-plan is silent about lived curricula.

(Aoki, 2005, p. 209)

week of school, I am able to finalize my schedule and photocopy my daybook outlines for the rest of the year. This feeling of autonomy is starting to feel really comfortable, even though I'm going home at seven o'clock.

Meet the Creature Night

It's a Wednesday night and I have been at the school for over twelve hours now. I am wearing black heels and a *Banana Republic* 'Teacher appropriate' dress. I have styled and curled my hair. I have put on makeup. This is not my usual Miss Mah attire, as most of my colleagues are sure to point out. When asked where my *Lululemon pants* and *Nike Air Shock* runners are, I reply with, "Tonight is Meet the Teacher night, I've got to look the part!"

I hate *Meet the Creature* night. I hate being at the front of the room while adults try to suss out what they think of their child's teacher for the year.

At Seaview, there really is a sense of community,

My *Banana Republic* Teacher Dress:



Figure 10

My usual attire of *Lululemon* track pants and *Nike* Runners:



represented by a strong Parent Advisory Council. Parent Teacher night here is unique. It starts off with a family barbeque at the back of the school. Families mingle with teachers and CUPE staff, while the smell of barbequed hamburgers and hot dogs wafts through the air. Children's fingers, sticky from popsicles, mark new playground equipment that was financially subsidized by the PAC this past summer.

Brian, our principal, reminded us earlier to mingle with the families. I walk outside. All of my colleagues are in conversations. I don't know what to do. I stand at the wall and observe the whole thing. I pick up a couple of napkins that have fallen on the ground. Anything to look like I know what I'm doing. Finally, a good friend who I taught with last year, and who helped persuade/encourage me to come to Seaview, comes out. She's also new to Seaview. And then another new staff member joins us. We tell each other that we've got to rally together. We start a conversation when I am interrupted by one of my students, who introduces me to his dad. Game face begins

What am I Going to Wear?

Every morning while taking a shower I think to myself, *What am I going to wear?* I know that this must sound like it should not have a place in a thesis, but the clothes and how we choose to appear to our students and staff plays an important role in teacher identity. On the first day of school I am always thoughtful of how I plan to portray myself that year, usually wearing a dress or a skirt, even though I will rarely wear a skirt throughout the rest of the year,

When a teacher enters a classroom for the first time, it is not necessarily her or his ideas that first attract student's attention. It is the body and how it is adorned and clothed – how it looks, sounds, moves and smells. Whether or not we realize it, the image we project precedes us, introduces us, and inserts us into the communication we have with students. (Mitchell & Weber, p. 124)

For reasons I cannot explain, for important school events I tend to wear the clothes of what I think a teacher should look like, professional, semi-formal, while still wearing something that is

now.

The barbeque is about to shut down and Brian motions for parents to come into the gym and for 'After School Care' to look after the kids who are still at the school. This is not what I am accustomed to and very different from what families would experience at the middle school level. Brian expresses his appreciation and thanks, and then uses a student-drawn portrait of each teacher to introduce the staff. There is happiness and laughter in the air. My picture only exaggerates my squinty Asian eyes, pony tail, and pointy chin. The budding artist has decided to take some liberties by adding big, dangling earrings and what looks like Botox filled lips. But the resemblance is comical and endearing. It is me, with a coach's whistle lanyard, *Lululemon* track pants, and runners with springs on the bottom. My usual work uniform and a far cry from what I'm wearing tonight.

I start to feel sick as I quickly race to my classroom to get a head start. Parents start to file in and I ask them to have a seat at their child's desk and have a look inside while we wait for

still about me, still from my closet. I want to blend in enough with the other teachers to look like I am one of them, but different enough that I am still me. I know that my *Lululemon* attire does not look professional, or make me look like a teacher for events like the first day, or meet the teacher night.

But what people were also saying was that much of the imagery they used as a point of reference was somehow 'out there'. They were very conscious of what others thought a teacher ought to look like, or of what they 'thought' others thought (p.125).

However, for everyday teaching, I have become 'Coach Mah'. Instead of wearing dresses and skirts, I wear black *Lululemon* pants and colourful zip ups. My runners are always crisp and clean, my hair usually in a simple ponytail. I wear clothes that I can teach PE in and move easily from sitting on the carpet to sitting in small chairs. I have identified myself as that 'tomboy' teacher, whose teaching in the classroom is like coaching a team sport. I am more comfortable with my *Lululemon* attire and 'Coach Mah' identity than the other attires I have tried on in my teaching career.

everyone else. Then I begin, in my best thirty year old voice, to tell them all about my goals and hopes for the school year.

The parents' faces are expressionless. I can't read them at all. I get even more nervous. This is not what I am used to. I'm accustomed to having a positive reputation that precedes me. The reputation where being the young teacher equated to being a strong positive role model. Now my age has become a mark of inexperience, and the mark of someone unlikely to be nurturing. "Okay, okay... I need to pull this together," I think. "Might as well state the obvious, say out loud what everyone is thinking. So I begin.

"So, Parents, we will be asking for some of your help throughout the year! Please sign up on this list, under the topic or areas where we can count on you! We've got math and reading, even cooking and baking... and if any of you want to volunteer casseroles and dinners, I am a single girl usually eating eggs on toast for dinner!" Laughter. *Finally*. Later I notice that my list of parent volunteers is overflowing the page. And the next

However, the way the body and its various features are conceptualized, manifested, interpreted, and lived depends very much on prevailing cultural norms. Are teachers thought to be exempt from all of this? Is the body not essential to both our basic sense of self and our teaching identity and practice? Crucial to self-study, the body provides vital information on who we were and who we have become. (p. 125)

I have become the teacher that is known for teaching through movement and gym class. I can connect with my students through my hobbies of mountain biking, skiing, ultimate soccer, and hockey. I wear Canucks gear, FIFA world cup t-shirts, and Canada Olympic clothing, all when appropriate. I demonstrate through my clothing my identity as 'Coach Mah.'

Through my clothes of *Lululemon* pants, brightly coloured zip ups, and sports-related tops, I represent that I am the teacher who identifies with sports and athletics. I have dressed myself according to what it is that I want to represent to my classroom, and in doing so, I have created one aspect of my identity as Teacher.

morning, I have a plastic container on my desk filled with spaghetti and meatballs. *"This is going to be okay."*

Follow the Leader

Still September, still establishing routines and relationships. Kathy asked at the beginning of the year if she and I could do some trading with our classes and subjects. We decide that since I'm the PE teacher and she's the artist, we would trade for those subjects once a week. I'll teach her class PE, she'll teach my class art. I was very resistant to this idea at first, unable to define why. Was it because I wanted to have full autonomy with my class? Was it because we don't have similar teaching styles? Or was it because I didn't want to put myself in another cultural conflict, another cultural guilt trip? I'm not sure what was holding me back, but I later realized that my selfish, negative inflexibility was no reason to deprive my class of this thirty-five year veteran teacher's experience. And so begins an almost comical narrative of just how different Grade 2 teachers can really

be.

Alexandra, Kathy's intern teacher, runs into the gym and quickly informs me that Kathy needs the PE time to be extended because my class is taking longer than expected to finish their art projects. I stretch out our closure activities, after a very exciting game of Doctor Doctor Dodgeball. After asking for our three compliments, we notice that the other class is starting to line up outside the door, waiting for us to finish up with the gym. I quickly line up Kathy's kids single file and tell them we are about to play a game of Follow the Leader. "I am the leader and you must follow my actions and moves." We do three quick practice moves and start to head out of the gym.

I quietly crouch down as we exit into the hall and do a sort of spy-like skit. I motion that we are to be super quiet by putting one finger to my lips, and we start to crawl past the office window and out the front doors to a very sunny afternoon.

Once we get outside I start to jog up and over, around and through some of the obstacles of our front park. This makes

Image and Teacher Identity

I am going to investigate image and teacher identity in relation to popular (in this case, British Columbia) culture and as referenced in Weber and Mitchell's *That's Funny, You Don't Look Like a Teacher* (1995):

While images always maintain some connection to people, places, things, or events, their generative potential in a sense gives them a life of their own, so that we not only create images, but are also shaped by them (p. 21).

“Crazy Coach Mah.” I remember hearing this and thinking, “This is the image I want.” Believe it or not, I wanted to have the image of the teacher who broke the ‘Grade 2 door rule’ and the ‘outdoor/indoor shoes rule.’ This image made me think of my much-adored teacher, Mrs. Staveley, with her big long skirts and matching runners. It gives me a sense that I’m creating and being a model of a teacher that engaged me, and not of those teachers who are nameless. Connelly and Clandinin (1985) say that images become embodied in us, and are expressed in our

Kathy’s class go wild! They had never done something like this before! They start screaming out, “Coach Mah! I have my indoor shoes on! My indoor shoes!” And, “This isn’t the exit door we are allowed to go through!” And “Why are we going up and down on the benches?” It was like I was asking them to run through fire. I had never seen a class get so stressed about playing outside. I exchange quick eye contact with the class EA and we both start laughing out loud!

The active boys in the group are as happy as could be to follow me through the madness but the ‘pleaser girls’ can’t stop questioning the routine. Here I am, trying to lead them through some fun exercises outside and some of them are completely stressed about breaking the rules.

“These are my indoor shoes!”

“We can’t be outside with our indoor shoes!”

“Mrs. B is going to kill us!”

Kathy’s class sweats and pants as they try to keep up with me. The ‘hockey’ boys are laughing with delight. The ‘pleaser’

language and our actions. There were school years where I did not have PE on my timetable and I remember feeling like those years were incomplete, or that I was inadequate. In this way, I have imagined that a good teacher is good at PE and leads her classroom like a coach leads a team, someone who “breaks the curriculum rules” when there are bigger stories to tell. I have tried to reconstruct and re-interpret this image as my own.

Part of what drives my search for teacher identity is seeing how British Columbians view the role of teacher. Right now, BC public school teachers are going through job action and the government is legislating, against a Supreme Court decision, on the work conditions of teachers. When the teachers went on legal job action the government went to the media to persuade the public that they will have a hard time finding daycare for their children. Is my identity as teacher really just as baby-sitter? Is this the image that most British Columbians have of teacher, of me? Britzman (1991) as raises the connection between professional identity and stereotypes:

Stereotypes engender a static and hence repressed notion of identity as something already out there, a

girls are going crazy over breaking the routine. And the ‘seat filler’ kids are just following the leader. Comical and perhaps a bit analogous, too!

We get back into the classroom, my stalling tactic a success as Kathy and Alexandra are waiting to exchange classes. I quickly say thank you and give the class a big compliment in front of Kathy. As I’m walking away, I hear one of the students call out, “Mrs. Brown! Coach Mah is crazy! She made us go outside with our indoor shoes on! Our indoor shoes!” I can’t help but giggle as I walk back into my own room.

Thanksgiving Themed

I have officially become *the* photocopy teacher. Just call me Miss Xerox. Everything for the next two weeks has a Thanksgiving theme. This isn’t my planning. Let me preface this by letting you know that in the last week of September, my primary colleagues already had their September bulletin boards down and the first collage of handprint turkeys were up.

stability that can be assumed... trapped within these images, teachers come to resemble things or conditions; their identity assumes an essentialist quality and, as such, socially constructed meaning become known as innate and natural (p. 27).

In reading this quote, I read about teachers' images of themselves, students' images of teachers, but what about parents, taxpayers, the government, what are their images of a teacher? As a teenager I remember my own father's images of teachers; he commented that professional development days were a hoax, that teachers had it easy because they only worked for nine months of the year, and he couldn't believe that they were paid to be sick. Has part of my father's constructed image of teacher become innate in my own construction of my identity? I hope not. "It is one thing to utter the word 'teacher'; it is quite another to struggle to name what it is to be a teacher" (Provenzo et al., 1989, p. 552). What is it to be a teacher? How do I identify myself as teacher?

Everything is littered with turkeys, pilgrims, ships, or falling leaves. Thanksgiving Literacy worksheets, books, and lesson plans are created, Thanksgiving Numeracy sheets and problem solving exercises planned, and Thanksgiving Arts and Crafts activities are prepared, cut out, and ready.

I have planned turkey crafts made from Popsicle sticks and feathers, where I've improved the craft design by adding magnets to the back, with dreams of turkey art adorning stainless steel fridges.

I read my class turkey and Thanksgiving themed stories, recommended by our school librarian, as each child sits wide-eyed, edging to the front to see the pictures better, while I offer gentle reminders of sitting 'crisscross, applesauce,' so that everyone can see fairly.

We find different patterns of turkey feathers on big charts and circle the core patterns and discuss the feathers' attributes. We problem-solve Thanksgiving math issues such as who and how many will sit at the dinner table, and how many food items

A LINGERING QUOTE

What is equally important for teachers and students as they engage in interpretive acts is to be critically reflective not only of the transformed reality that is theirs to create, but also of their own selves. It is within this critical turn, a precious moment in praxis, that there exists possibilities for empowerment that can nourish transformation of the self and the curriculum reality. It is this critical turn that provides the power to affirm what is good in the reality experienced, to negate what is distorting therein, and to allow engagement in acts or reconstruction guided by an emancipatory interest.

(Aoki, 2005, p. 4)

we will need to cook to feed everybody.

The students are excited. After they've completed each sheet or activity they eagerly get their crayons out to bring their photocopied turkeys to life. They giggle, pleased by the pictures on each page and loving that everything has a Thanksgiving theme.

I have photocopied worksheets, gimmicky and tacky, including crosswords and word searches found in books from the 70s, mostly American, for those kids who finish their top priority assignments early. I struggle with the need to find 'curricular value' in these activities so I've tweaked every Thanksgiving assignment to make sure it addresses at least three IRP PLOs. I get out my Grade 2 IRPs and, with pencil in hand, start checking off PLOs as I fulfill them. Again, I have officially become the teacher that I did not want to become, the one focused on PLOs. And the worst part is, the students are loving it.

I have to let this moment go.

I reflect on what Dr. Riecken reminded me of during a

thesis proposal meeting- that essentially my role as their teacher is 1/7th of their life, that my influence is one year out of the seven that they have been alive. And these seven-year-olds have had only two teachers before me. I start to realize that I have to let go of wanting to show them the entire world when I really need to focus on showing them how to see.

Conversations

Everyone I knew perceived my decision to apply for the elementary Grade 2 position as very odd. In fact, I learned from different conversations with past administrators that they were shocked when they heard I was teaching Grade 2. What follows are conversations with three people who hold different roles in my life, about the first week of teaching Grade 2.

Phil East is the principal of Eagle Ridge Middle School. He has been one of my administrators from the very beginning of my career, first as my Vice Principal, then later as my Principal.

Our school is the feeder for his middle school. He endearingly calls me Mahi Mahi and I call him Easter.

PE: Mahi Mahi! What's this I hear? You're at Seaview?
Teaching Grade 2? What are you doing?

Me: Yup! Can you believe it, Easter? I am!

PE: So, how are you finding it?

Me: The staff is wonderful! There's a huge PAC! And it's so much smaller! Everything is so much smaller, with the exception of the spirit there. There's just this amazing, caring, school atmosphere. I really feel like I'm getting down to basics again!

PE: I know about that PAC. Remember those 'Stepford Moms' move up to become our PAC, too. Mah, I never knew you wanted to teach Grade 2. How is that going?

Me: Ah, you know me Easter, always looking for a full-time position, and since you couldn't offer me anything...!
And well, you know the district joke, right? I will teach every grade and at every school in this district before I

retire! Grade 2 is going really well! The kids are great and adorable. I am loving being with only twenty four kids all day long and not having to worry about bell schedules. I feel like I'm making a connection now, plus I'm sure it won't tear me up as much with only dividing my heart twenty four different ways versus the one hundred fifty-plus I usually teach.

PE: I've got to say, Mah, it was a shocker to all of us to see your name on the elementary list. You know that now you'll be 'NOILED'⁹ up until your fifteenth year of teaching, right? In middle school, you would have made the cut by next year for sure.

Me: I know, but the teaching assignments get fewer and fewer every year. And Easter, it was time for a change. I think this is what all middle school teachers should do. If anything, it will make me a better middle school teacher to see where these kids come from. Plus, I can always come

⁹ NOIL or Notice of Intent to Lay Off

back, especially if I'm being laid off for the next seven years!

PE: Aw, Mah, we'll miss you at the Middle School Conferences and the sports tournaments.

Me: Yeah, I'll miss you guys, too. But it's only for a year. Hey, someone's got to coach these kids properly before they get to you! And, there's always the district coaches' banquet! You can buy me a drink in June, *then* ask me how I like Grade 2!

PE: You're on!

Sheila Wong is a recently retired teacher who taught at Oakridge Middle School for about twenty-eight years. We taught together for the first five years of my career. She is also Chinese-Canadian and took me under her wing when I first started teaching there. I call her Wonger, a nickname that stuck, and she calls me Ting Ting, my Chinese name.

SW: Ting Ting! How's the Grade 2 gig? You must love it!

They must be so much better than what we have at Oakridge. Such good children at Seaview.

Me: Wonger, it's not as easy as it looks....

SW: Must be! Calendar! Sing songs! Printing! Do a little bit of counting! Centre time for playing! Drawing and colouring! Easy!

Me: We do other things that are challenging...

SW: Oh, yes, like?

ME: Literacy and Problem Solving, Restitution, Community Circle activities, that sort of stuff. Not only am I responsible for facilitating the IRPs, I'm also responsible for teaching them how to deal with social and 'play' situations.

SW: Ting Ting, you are being silly. Grade 2 is a snap! So much easier than Grade 8! I had it much harder than you and I didn't exit out! I taught Grade 8 for twenty eight years. I wish I could have a year like you're about to have. You are going to have a very relaxed year!

Me: Uh, it doesn't feel like that, Wonger.

Mason Miller is one of my most loyal and genuine friends.

He was the first to hire me as a TOC at Oakridge and our friendship has grown since then. We also team-taught for a couple of years and discovered that our teaching styles complimented each other extremely well. Teaching was not Mason's first career - it was, in fact, accounting - but he has taught impressively for over twelve years. I refer to him as my Victoria Big Bro, and Mill for short. There's a quiet 'good' about him, and I value and respect his opinions. With him, I am honest; he has seen all facets of my life.

MM: How's Grade 2, Mah Mah?

Me: Horrible, Mill. I wonder if it's too late to apply for other jobs.

MM: Ha, seriously, Mah Mah?

Me: Yes, horrible. Something funny, something sad - I can't sing. I think I suck because I can't sing. I have no clue

Classroom Management Songs for the Primary Classroom

#1

Teacher: 1, 2, 3, Eyes on Me

Students: 1, 2, Eyes on You

#2

Teacher: S – T

Students: O – P!

#3

(To the tune of “Frere Jacques”)

I hear talking,

I hear talking,

Is it you?

Is it you?

It’s time to be quiet,

It’s time to be quiet,

Shhhhh shhh shhhh!

Shhhhh shhh shhhh!

about these songs everyone is using as classroom management tools. “1, 2 eyes on you! 3, 4... heck if I know!” I suck, suck, suck at this! And the lame part is everyone keeps telling me how easy it should be!

MM: Are you kidding? I couldn’t teach Grade 2. Too hard. Too little. Too much work.

Me: I don’t care if you’re just saying that to make me feel better. It’s working. Thanks Mill.

MM: Have you made them cry yet? My biggest fear would be making them cry.

Me: Totally. In middle school, you sometimes want to make them cry but this is a whole different ball game. Dude, when they cry, they *really* cry!! I feel horrible. I was doing this cool art project with them, you know the one where they listen to music then draw how the music makes them feel? So I ask them to copy down the music types in the boxes on the paper. Guess I was going too fast and the next thing I know I have two crying boys on

#4

When our hands are by our sides,
 We're standing straight and tall,
 Mouths are closed,
 Eyes look ahead
 We're ready for the hall.

my hands. One's frustrated because I'm going too fast, the other's frustrated because he can't read what I'm writing! *Tears, Mill!* I'm making my kids cry. What kind of teacher makes her students cry before a lesson has even begun?

MM: I'm sure it's not as bad as you're making it out to be.

Me: Are you kidding? It is! I have no idea what I'm doing. I'm staying at the school until 6 every night so far. *Every night!* I can't keep that up. *And* it's only the third week of school! My timing is way off. I plan these wicked literacy lessons thinking it will take forty minutes, when they only take ten. And then there are these other lessons that should take ten and take forty. Ask a Grade 2 to draw a self-portrait and they'll be done, coloured and all, in ten minutes. Ask a middle school-er and they'll take at least thirty minutes, not even counting the colouring bits!

MM: Don't worry, you'll figure it out soon enough.

Me: Ha ha, Mill. Nice joke. And I didn't even mention the

Interviews

In the three conversations to the right of these pages, I tried to demonstrate three indirect conversations, an administrator, a colleague, and a friend, and how I am perceived differently to them all. To the administrator, obviously, I portrayed myself as calm and positive, talking about the politics of low seniority teachers, making light of the situation, trying to seem as if I was in control and confident with the situation I had put myself in, albeit the forced move of someone who didn't have a full time teaching opportunity elsewhere. In the second conversation with a Chinese colleague, I found I became quite passive, and even when I tried to speak up and defend the curricular values of the classroom, I found that I gave up quite easily, wanting her approval, and not wanting to speak up too much against the culturally intrinsic wisdom of my elder. Often I notice that when I teach with an older Chinese colleague, I tend to become more passive, assuming the role of child, or student, instead of speaking to them as if they were my equal. Even when I do not necessarily agree with the Chinese colleagues, I will often find

incompletion bits. In middle school, kid not done, we send it home for homework or study club, yeah? In Grade 2, kid not done, kid not done. So what do I do? Do I wait for the very last one as the rest of the kids pick their noses? Actually, first time that happened in our class, which by the way was the first day of class, my student actually suggested that I let him read a book, as in, he wanted to get his work done so that he could read a book! *Read a book, Mill!* They want to finish their work quickly and *read!*

MM: Wow! What happens to that when they get to middle school?

Me: I know. The drive to learn, please, and move forward with some of these kids is unbelievable.

MM: I know you. You won't be back to middle school next year, Mah Mah. You'll find your groove. It's only been a few weeks.

Me: Thanks, Mill. Let's order another beer.

myself acting and doing things in order to satisfy or please them, instead of thinking of myself first. I know that this has to do with my upbringing, being raised as a first generation Chinese-Canadian. In the third conversation, you see the truest side of me: scared, nervous, anxious, and worried about my teaching, my capabilities, and the situation I have placed myself in for the year. Ironically, with all three conversations I feel I have portrayed myself truly. I am all of these characteristics. I am neither disappointed nor fond of these characteristics, and for lack of better words, 'it just is what it is.'

A Full Cup Day

It is the middle of October and today was a good day.

Today, after teaching for over a month, I began the forward momentum in tiny baby steps. Today, I had three small successful events that made me like myself again, and perhaps recognize that I am meant to teach.

Successful event #1: The morning began, as it does every day, with getting to school too early, setting up, and checking and re-checking my agenda for the day. Then Miranda walked in. I taught Miranda in Grade 7. She's now in Grade 11 but she has a little sister who attends Seaview Elementary and she comes in every now and then to say hello after she drops off her sister. This morning she asked me if I had time for a serious conversation. I cringed at the thought that there might be something bad going on in Miranda's life and I put all my materials down to give her my undivided attention. What I assumed was the start of a conversation about family or boyfriend

A LINGERING QUOTE

Too often our work can be frustrating, boring, or even dangerous. There may even be times when we question why we chose teaching to begin with (if indeed we did choose it!), times when we don't feel like teaching, or times when we wonder if 'teacher' is an increasingly cumbersome mask that hides who we really are. These darker moments make the occasions when we feel quietly satisfied or even delighted by our work and students, the mornings we wake up eager to get into the classroom, or the times we feel pride and a sense of belonging in calling ourselves 'teacher' seem all the more significant.

(Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 1)

Connection:

I have asked myself, especially after a bad day, or when learning a new grade, why I became a teacher. It's the lived moments that keep me alive and keep me teaching. In middle school, it was the end of the year cards from my students and those who

issues became something entirely different. Miranda asked if she could shadow me at work for 'Bring your Kid to Work Day.' I don't have kids. I have students. I was humbled.

Successful event #2: Instead of having our usual block of buddy time today, we decided to spend the time working on our journals. These journals, a space where the students need not worry about spelling and sentence structure, are usually allotted twenty minutes to begin and complete. Today I gave them forty minutes. I was afraid it would be too much, that it would leave those who finished early too much time to play. But it turned out to be the most productive and calmest class of the entire week, and on a Friday afternoon. These journals were printed carefully, well illustrated, and full of great ideas. Such a simple activity, writing journals, was giving these Grade 2s such satisfaction and pride. I must remember that even in Grade 2, these kids, like adults, need time to reflect.

Successful event #3: After finishing after-school duty, I came into my classroom to see four of my former students! In

stayed after school to chat in my classroom with me. In the elementary school it is the picked dandelions and hand drawn pictures that litter my desk. These are the reasons why I don't mind waking up at six every morning to go to work. I value their presents/presence in my life.

Grade 10 now, they are students I taught four years ago. They discovered that I had made another teaching switch to their neighborhood and decided to stop in for a visit. This made my day, to see happy familiar faces of students who made the effort to see me! It was nice sitting on the carpet with them as they told me all their gossip and reported on their teachers and classes. And it made me so proud when they asked me about my change in teaching assignments. That I played a tiny part in the lives of these socially responsible, *good* kids makes me realize that I am doing something right; that I am meant to teach.

Parent Teacher Interviews

Parent teacher interviews, no matter the grade level, are always the same. You see the parents of the kids you don't worry much about and you never see the parents of the kids you worry about too much. No matter how much phoning and emailing I do, I have never met with of the parents of an entire class.

Michael's mom and dad have decided to do their meeting together. It has been three years since their separation and from what I hear from colleagues, this is the first time since then that they'll have a conference together. That fact makes me nervous as I am about to ask their permission to have some of the district's team investigate Michael's learning problems. By the middle school level, most of this paperwork and these designations have already occurred. Here in Grade 2, you're just beginning to see some of the differences between students. I try to take the perspective most parents might take when first told that their child is learning 'differently' than the rest of the class. My defenses are up, thinking that we'll have a conversation about my legitimacy.

Michael's dad is agreeing and following the conversation. Michael's mom looks at me and starts to cry. I don't know what to do except to hand her a tissue. Everybody agrees to move forward with having the district's team 'observe' Michael. Michael's mom wonders if it has anything to do with her difficulty with his labour. I feel helpless. *What have I done?* I

An Ambivalent Quote

Ambivalence in the third space is a generative site on which contradictory directions may move toward each other, without the demand that they meet in the middle, or move away from each other, without splitting. It is the tension of the movement that issues new ways of connecting and constructing. It is the process of trying to reach out for the other that stretches the boundary. Swinging in both directions simultaneously, one neither fully submits to the pull of any one pole, nor does one hold onto only one's own posture. One has to move with the swing but maintain balance. This is the teacher's position.

(Wang, 2005, p. 178)

Connection:

Ambivalence, the uncertainty and/or fluctuation, especially when caused by a simultaneous desire to say or do two conflicting or opposite things, should be the second title of this thesis. I agree with Wang. In my classroom I am always trying to balance my curriculum, trying to give my students guidance while still

try to comfort her and let her know that we are all working for/with Michael to make this right, but I still feel like the big, ugly monster that shot a puppy in front of them. I don't know what else to do. The buzzer signals that I have one minute to end the meeting and greet the next set of parents waiting in the hall.

Sophia's mom and step-dad walk in and take a seat. They are happy to have her in my class and apparently Sophia sings my praises at the end of the day. The parents have something to talk about. I can feel it. This time it is my turn to listen.

Sophia doesn't eat. She doesn't like to eat breakfast and is often coming home with her lunch pack still full. They ask me if this is normal for Grade 2. I have no idea but I lie. It can't be normal. They ask me if they can start using me in their 'threat' to have Sophia eat breakfast. "If she doesn't eat her breakfast at home, Miss Mah will make her eat breakfast at school with her." I agree and ask them to start packing me some pancakes, too. I make a mental note to start checking her lunch at eating time and encouraging her to eat something. Later, this becomes a daily

allowing them to 'play', trying to let them learn pride, while still demonstrating humility.

ritual with the whole class as I walk in during their eating time to ask them what they have had for their 'main meals.'

I have never seen or met Jackson's dad. Jackson comes from a single parent home and he attends morning and after school care with our school. He has the same peanut butter sandwich and banana lunch every single day. He cries if he thinks we're going to call his dad to bother him during his busy day, even after he has thrown up in our nurse's room. He is slow to read, methodical with his printing, does not sing during carpet time, and is taller and thinner than the rest of the boys his age. He comes to school with a pale complexion and with bags under his eyes. I know he stays up late and plays video games because his journal is always about staying up late and playing video games. Jackson doesn't have many play dates or go to many birthday parties.

Over the past two days I have met with twenty three of my twenty four students' families. Even the ones that come from blended family homes or separated ones. But I never met

Leadership

As I am looking back at the narrative, 'One Compliment is All I Need,' and reading with new eyes (another year later), I am reminded of Aoki's address, presented at the National Conference of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, *Revisiting the Notions of Leadership and Identity (1987)*. In this address, Aoki has two moments where he questions leadership and identity.

I am linking this address to my thesis as a way of planting the seeds of two notions, before continuing with the rest of the narrative. The first notion, "What is it to lead?", situates me in this Grade 2 teaching position, and the second, "What is my identity?", situates where and who I am now.

In this section of his address, Aoki questions British Columbia's political situation for educators, wherein the place of a school principal as leader has become an issue. He takes us through the (d)evolution of school leaders, from *principal teacher* to *principal* and ending with *administration*. "...The principal-became-administrator is endowed heavily with organization

Jackson's Dad.

One Compliment Is All I Need

Friday afternoon on Halloween day the primary teachers decided that we would work together and do some Halloween stations. In groups of eighteen kids, we mixed the grades together. My station was arts and crafts and I decided we would make 'Imagination Market' style masks. My colleagues thought I was crazy to take on such a big mess but I couldn't help it. It seemed like it would be a fun way to end the day.

I situated all of my desks to make a long banquet style table and let loose with different things you could put on a mask: feathers, sequins, shiny papers, upholstery, stickers, etc. It was a right mess, but the kids were totally into it.

Brian, the principal, walked in, just to check in on the 'rookie' and take some pictures. Later, after school, he dropped in again to pay me a compliment. He said that the kids were focused and happy, and it was so cool to see such calm and

theory, or leadership theory, each a part of management theory. In education, education leadership became couched heavily in the becoming of language of business and industry, and so education became a business, an educational enterprise to be managed” (p. 350). I share Aoki’s wonderment at how education has become a language of business and industry. And, to add to the education as business/industry model, on our district’s public website, our superintendent’s title begins with CEO. I’m reminded of the short time I taught in New Zealand, where the head administrator did not have any experience in education. He was, in fact, a businessman, a manager, and when his school did well on their quarterly standardized testing, he received a bonus.

Aoki then invokes us to understand the true essence of leadership by listening “... with care to a mother’s true leading of a child, a leading that follows the voice of the hand-in-hand of mother and child as they cross a busy street. Here, the leading is attuned to and follows the care that dwells between mother and child. And it is the following of this logos of care that allows mother to lead from where the child now is where the child is not yet” (2005, p. 351). I recognize Aoki’s call that leadership is not

imaginative attitudes on what could be the most hyper of all days.

One genuine compliment from my administrator made me think, “*I can do this after all.*”

Report Card Flu

It is the end of November, which means I have caught the report card flu. Our report cards are due out at the beginning of December and Brian has given us autonomy on when we want to hand them out in the two week time frame. The Grade 1 teachers have already completed theirs, and will be handing them out on the first school day in December.

This is when I really miss my middle school assessments. No letter grades here, no computer automated programs. No midnight deadlines and due dates for uploading to servers. I type a one-page document for each of my students, being careful of my language, providing grades absent of letters. Not working with the BCESIS program is a double-edged sword. This is when I feel that teaching elementary school is archaic. I don’t have a

simply leading, but the silent or absent touch, the forever metaphorical “leading of the hand,” that is the mark of authentic leadership.

In thinking about the many administrators that I have worked for, I realize that the leaders I have trusted and respected are those who have gained my authentic followership. And for those administrators who did not, I found myself looking toward new opportunities, such as the one I find myself in now. If this is how I feel in the role of Administrator/Teacher, I can only imagine how my students feel when I lead them. I hope that they trust and respect my guidance as I lead them to new experiences.

computer in my classroom, nor do I have internet, and it makes me wonder if there is an easier way to do this. While I appreciate the freedom and autonomy, I long for the standardized assessment and reporting tools.

I hate report cards. Let this be known. I hate report cards. How do I sum up what goes on in my classroom in 12 point, Times New Roman font, in one page, three times a year?

Taryn is Learning How to Play Well with Others

I have come this far, consciously omitting the difficult relationship I am having with a colleague.¹⁰

I had decided to assess my students using a different report card template than the others. I created a mind map, with the student’s name in the middle, and the subject areas and assessment information surrounding the child’s name, to represent the ‘whole’ picture. I hadn’t yet asked Brian to take a look at it

¹⁰ Later, I will discover how to manage it, and she will become one of my greatest mentors and friends

Report Cards

I dislike report cards. I dislike them so much because what I write on one child's report card has been copied and pasted for many of my other students. While I know that each child in my class is unique, they end up becoming faceless comments on pieces of paper. Aoki, in *Layered Voices of Teaching: The Uncannily Correct and the Elusively True* (2005), talks about the layers of understanding, where the outermost layer of understanding is teaching as a black box. I believe that these report cards fit into this black box analogy. "Likening the school to a factory or a knowledge industry, they assumed that what counts are effects and results in terms of the investments made" (2005, p. 188). At the end of each term our administrator gives us a data chart to fill out about the numbers in our class that are "meeting," "exceeding," or "not yet meeting" expectations. Then he logs this data into the district website. It scares me that my children are being scrutinized like this, and that perhaps, at a district level, my teaching may be, too. "They heed the call of the instrumental rules of tests and measurements

when my partner teacher, Kathy, asked if she could take a look.

I felt like I was ten years old, had failed a subject, and my Mom was asking to see my report card. I didn't know what else to do, so I opened them up to her. She took a pen to them, and showed me what I had done 'wrong' and what she would change about my format. In the end, my report cards had lots of well-meant red corrections, like a high school essay.

Kathy is first-generation Canadian, all Chinese. She has, like most elder Chinese women, taken it upon herself to 'take care of me.' This characteristic is ingrained in all Chinese elders, to take special care of new immigrants, or the younger. In turn, as they grow older, we will take good care of them. I've had my share of being taken care of by my cultural elders; at Oakridge Middle School it was Sheila Wong, at Eastwood Middle School it was Ken Wong. And my reaction to every Chinese elder is nothing short of feeling like I am ten years old and being scolded by my parents. Would I have had the same emotional reaction if a Caucasian colleague was challenging my report cards? I'm not

but ignore that call of teachers and students who dwell within the crucible of their own concretely lived situations” (2005, p. 188). I agree with Aoki in feeling “that this kind of willful ignoring reflects the hold of an attunement in life, including school life, governed by goals and objectives, and consequently by measures of successful achievement” (2005, p. 188), however, I am not so sure that I agree with Aoki in his belief that we/they are “less naïve in this matter today” (2005, p. 189).

so sure.

Kathy and I have had a strained relationship from the start. We are two very different teachers teaching the same grade. We are very different in age but we share the same culture and agree that being Chinese is something we teach within our classrooms. With Kathy, I feel the need to please and appease her, constantly looking for the re-assurance that many Chinese parents seldom give to their children. We are a culture that does not show affection in the same way that Canadian families do. Kathy feels the need to tell me how to teach this grade, as her way of helping me, and I struggle with wanting to teach things *my way, my style*, without offending her or disrespecting her offer to help.

In the end, I thank her for her time and efforts and go home deflated. I take a sick day the next day, afraid to show her any more of my report cards. Instead, I stay home and finish them off *my way*, and hand them into Brian the next morning.

Living in the Planned (BC Elementary Music) Curriculum

This narrative reminds me of some of Aoki's thoughts about the music curriculum. After teaching music, for the first time ever, I now understand why Aoki was fascinated with it:

Recall the BC elementary music curriculum, which speaks of two strands: (1) the "learning about music strand" in which children study "about music and the role of music in society past and present" and (2) the "living music strand" wherein children are "actually involved with music through activities involving singing, listening, playing, etc." (Aoki, 2005, p. 364).

In the music curriculum, student and teacher exist between the hyphenated space of lived and planned curriculum. For our Winter Concert presentation, we presented *The Adventures of Ging Gong the Cat*, a little play where we join the main character, Ging Gong, as he travels from country to country meeting famous composers and learning their music. We taught our students how to sing different notes (high, mid, low), at different volumes, using different breathing techniques (singing with their

Winter Concert

"Miss Mah? I don't have my red shirt here!"

"Miss Mah? Michael doesn't want to stand in the right line!"

"Miss Mah! Melissa is crying!"

"Miss Mah! I can't find my instrument for the beat part. Where's my drum?"

"Sticks high, sticks high, sticks low, sticks low..."

"Miss Mah, what if Wyatt doesn't come? Then what?"

"I feel sick Miss Mah"

Every other year, Seaview puts on a winter themed concert. This year, the primary grades are putting on a 'Ging Gong the Cat' production. Preparations have taken up at least one hour every school day. I follow my primary colleagues, taking a back seat, watching them lead my class and theirs through singing and instrumental practices, noticing that sometimes I'm not the only one who loses patience and looks to the ceiling for answers.

Each of us has been designated to lead the group through

diaphragm, standing straight), to sing in harmony, and how to play percussion instruments (rhythm), all while learning about the role and history of music. It could not have been a better representation of existing in the hyphenated space of lived and planned curriculum!

Although the curriculum calls for coexistence for the two strands, one senses which layer is the ground because the curriculum guide, leaning on Plato, states, "Education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else, rhythm and harmony find their way into the secret places of the soul." That in curriculum talk there is such interest in reclaiming the soul is excitingly satisfying" (Aoki, p. 364).

I have referenced Pinar & Irwin's collected works of Dr. Aoki quite a lot in this thesis. What I appreciate about the organization of this book is how the last section has a feeling of hopefulness and how we can look at curriculum differently. The idea of using music and the music curriculum as a way to "inspirit curriculum" is an analogy that one can't help but feel encouraged by. I am especially intrigued when Aoki poses two questions: "When does

two songs. I am more nervous than the children. This is my first primary production and I want to look like my seasoned colleagues.

Before I line up my children, Coach Mah comes out, and I give them all a pep talk to remind them that we're going to sing, have fun, and make our parents proud.

The gym is dark and warm. The stage is lit. I kneel on the floor in front of them and start to lead them through their song, singing (out of tune), mouthing the words, motioning to add volume, going through the motions, and conducting, all the while smiling at them to remind them to smile, too. What have I become? If my middle school colleagues could see me now they would laugh all the way through till next year. The only thing I'm missing is my ugly snowman sweater.

January

When teaching is just right

an instrument cease to be an instrument?” and “What is it to improvise? What is improvisation?” His answer:

First it reminds me more clearly that curriculum implementation asks teachers to be mainly installers, primarily interested in fidelity to the curriculum to be installed. The danger lies in the possibility of indifference to the lives of teachers and students in the situation. Second, “curriculum improvisation” rings differently. In curriculum improvisation teachers are asked to shift from being installers to being improvisers, sensitive to the ongoing life and experiences of themselves and students in the situation. The quality of the curriculum-as-lived becomes a leading concern (Aoki, 2005, p. 369-370).

Could you imagine how this would blow the minds of university students just entering into the world of Education? If we told our pre-service teachers to inspirit their curriculum where the quality of the curriculum-as-lived becomes the leading concern, how would education students at the university level take this? I know it would have blown my mind!

Doesn't matter what else is going on

Students rested

Back to class

Familiar Faces

Families

Colleagues

Routines

Environment

Abilities

Disabilities

Things are feeling right

Change

Repositioned furniture

Amended unit plans

Little creatures of habit

Second chance at a New Year

Living and Negotiating Culture and Curriculum

Homi Bhabha has played a central role in articulating the question: So where do we turn? His writings on colonialism, race, identity and difference have been an important influence on debates in cultural politics. In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha states that “the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211).

When I was sixteen, my parents took my brother and me to China, to show us where we came from. My parents’ families live in small, old, farm-like villages in the Taishan province. There are pictures of me in the village, wearing shiny new shorts, cheerleading t-shirts, and Nike runners, next to ‘family’ who are smoking long pipes, have weathered faces, and are wearing muted coloured clothing. The children are barefoot. If this is where I come from, why do I look and act so differently than my “family?” Allow me to juxtapose another picture: I must be in

Chinese New Year in Chinatown

Almost every year, no matter the grade, I take my class to Victoria’s Chinatown. It’s smaller than the one I grew up with in Vancouver and the one that has started to grow in my hometown of Richmond. My class and I have prepared for Chinese New Year even more than we prepared for Christmas. Each of the children is eager to learn Chinese songs and words, traditions, and celebratory feasts.

I am excited and not surprised that Kathy has also enjoyed teaching Chinese New Year to her class. While I teach her class some Chinese games in the gym, she teaches my class some Chinese Arts and Crafts. And when Kathy asks me if I would like to tag along for her Chinatown field trip, I tell her of my own ideas and am able to stand by my own decision. The other primary classes are excited to share our special holiday and I feel such honour that we do a whole afternoon of revolving stations with all of the primary classes. To be a part of a community that embraces my culture without resistance makes me reflect back to

Grade 2 or 3, it is a typical class photo of students and teacher, however, I am the only Chinese student, wearing a yellow sweat suit with *Hello Kitty* on the front. In this photo I do not look like I belong to this culture either. My situation, my first generation Chinese-Canadian status, has made me a hybrid. Neither all Chinese, nor all Canadian, I am a hybrid, without always recognizing it, negotiating this hyphenated space.

The notion of hybridity is about the fact that in any particular political struggle, new sites are always being opened up.... And we do negotiate even when we don't know we are negotiating ... We are always negotiating, in any situation. Subversion is negotiation; transgression is negotiation; negotiation is not just some kind of compromise or 'selling out' which people too easily understand it to be (Bhabha in an interview with Rutherford, 1990, p. 216).

In being a Chinese – Canadian, I am living in and negotiating that hyphenated space, not compromising or selling out either of the cultures that make me, me.

that middle school day when I was told that my culture does not have curricular value.

There is excitement in the air on the day of our field trip. I have many parent volunteers, as I always do,¹¹ willing to drive and chaperone. There is a two-child-to-one-parent ratio. Booster seats are set, name tags affixed, scavenger hunts on clipboard. Everything is in order.

We meet with the Chinese community, the one that has adopted me and now affectionately calls me by my Chinese name, Ting Ting. Les Chan, our Tour Guide and my good acquaintance, is delighted to see me again, as we are delighted to meet him.

I am reminded of those first few years that I took my class to Chinatown. I had only just moved off the University campus and was new to the community. I remember the shop owners asking me all sorts of questions, like where I was from, what was my family name, what dialect do I speak, and I remember feeling like a fake, telling my class all about this Chinatown that I knew

¹¹ Which I discover while teaching at another school, is very hard to come by!

Let's take Bhabha's idea about hybridity and negotiating and apply it to dwelling in the hyphenated space of lived – planned curriculum. In this sense, Bhabha reminds us that the lived – planned curriculum dwelling is not about subversion, nor transgression, nor just compromise, because when we dwell in the third space we are allowing for a place to extend and rethink our own "is",

Negotiation is a very important issue, and hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them
(Bhabha in an interview with Rutherford, 1990, p. 216).

only through books about Victoria and from what I'd been told by university history professors.

But the last couple of years have been different from the first. It's been eight years of field trips and I enjoy the strong Chinese accents as they ask my students all types of questions and make fun gestures towards me. They are even starting to make the scavenger hunt easier as they point out the Chinese vegetables and make the kids repeat the correct pronunciations. Now when I come into Chinatown without my class, I get one more orange or chasewbow¹² than everyone else. I get the best part of the barbeque duck and I am forced to eat moon cake (or something else horribly tasting but rich with culture) in front of the class and shop owners. This is my culture and I am so proud to share it with my class.

My class is amazing on the field trip. They always are. Respectful and polite, they clean their dishes of fried rice, chow mein, and spring rolls, much to 'auntie's' delight. They ooooooh

¹² Chasewbow is a white steamed bun filled with barbecue pork.



Life Happens - A Commercial Break

This is where recording my Grade 2 teaching year doesn't run as smoothly. At this moment, I am writing from a perspective of two years later and reflecting back on journal entries and narratives I wrote two years ago. At this point in the journaling, I wanted to give up on my thesis, take another course, and just go

and ahhh when they meet 'uncle' who owns the medicine shop, and are shocked when he holds up the flattened, dried squirrel on a stick. The parents laugh at all of Les's bad jokes, and take a digital memory card full of pictures of the Buddhist temple and architectural pagodas.

I teach because of these moments. These are the moments that keep me coming back to do it again. Today, it doesn't matter what grade we're in.

Oh, Michael

It is March. Paperwork for the District Team to observe Michael went in in November, two days after my parent-teacher conference with his parents. This has nothing to do with my identity and everything to do with, "The things they don't tell you at university."

Michael is different, in every sense of the word. He bangs his head against the wall when things don't go his way in PE. He

for the 'Five Plus'³ status.

But a keyword for categorizing this thesis is 'identity', and that school year from 2008-2009 was a ground-breaking year for the (re)invention of my identity. Taking a step back now is allowing me to recognize the whole picture.

There is an ugly messiness and loss of control sometimes in life. Perhaps that is the reason I love and take comfort in teaching so much. Yes, every day is a new day and comes with its challenges, but in each day there is a routine and scripted-ness that I control. I control the day, what I teach, how I teach it, how I act and react to the environment and the people around me. I am not debating or defending a life in law or medicine, I do not work with millions of dollars as in business or finance. However, in my little teaching/school world, I can usually hide the 'messiness' or find a way to organize the 'chaos' in pretty bins with neatly printed laminated labels. For the eight years prior to teaching Grade 2, I thought in black and white. It wasn't until that 2008-2009 school year that someone(s)/life showed me how to

can experience sensory overload or completely withdraw to read puzzle books. He cannot read at the Grade 2 level. He cannot print or use his fine motor skills. He is the only student who makes shooting noises and gun gestures at the other kids in the class while they are reading. He drains all of my attention. He needs a designation (and therefore the extra help) before he falls any further behind. Michael is *that* student. The student who is the bane of your existence for the school year, and the one with whom you eventually develop the fondest connection.

Michael has had me hold him down and drag him out of PE, kicking and screaming. Michael has had me call home, has had me get the principal, and has had me in tears of helplessness and frustration. Michael has tested my seriousness and my humor, from not making it fast enough to the bathroom to mooning everyone in the bathroom. Oh, Michael.

In the middle of March, our district Occupational Therapist (OT) finally makes her rounds to our school. She is

³ Category Five Plus is the pay allotment for a person who has completed acceptable programs totalling six or more years of academic and professional studies.

sit in the grey area, however uncomfortable.

Karma, life, fate, whatever you call it, threw me a couple of good curve balls that year, to remind me to reside in the tension, and isn't it funny how everything connects to one's physical health?

In that year, starting in November, I was diagnosed with the most horrible case of viral vertigo and walking pneumonia. Every now and then, for the next four months, I would fall in front of my class, or run to the bathroom to vomit. There was nothing more disturbing than feeling disoriented and falling through the floor, while knowing that I was standing still in the same place.

In that same month, during another routine physical exam, we discovered that I had a rare physical anomaly that made it unlikely I would ever bear children.⁴ I perceived myself as different from other women and questioned my femininity. I also questioned the/my 'archaic role of woman,' to have children. If this meant I couldn't biologically have children, what is/was my purpose? My boyfriend of two years, my friend for five, knew he wanted to have a family of his own, and with that, another part of

actually here for another student, but I plead with her to fast-track Michael's file. She observes him for two separate, fifteen minute observations, during coloring and running the field, and makes a formal conclusion that this is not a sensory issue; this is a social-emotional issue.

I don't believe this is the right conclusion. I would not have made this recommendation if I didn't think this was a sensory issue and if I had not spoken to Michael's kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers. I have their support, Brian's, as well as that of our district counselor. The OT's conclusion makes me angry. Is it that we are so afraid to 'label' our students? Is it that if we give Michael an IEP I will exceed the IEP limit per class? Is it because the OT has an enormous schedule already?

What have I done? Have I created a file when there is nothing more than personality differences? Is it just me? I recognize that I am not a doctor, but how do two fifteen-minute observations trump a six month observation? Why is there such a

⁴ This has been left out of the teaching narratives on purpose. I was/am not ready to include this in my search for teacher identity.

my identity, 'girlfriend,' was lost and changed to 'single.'

And then my appendix ruptured. I remember lying in the hospital and thinking, "Seriously? All this, in one year?" And, as if fate was playing with me, I got an ulcer and a pinched a nerve from going back to work too soon, ironically because I didn't have any sick days left.

It was a really grey winter. I questioned my validity and my purpose, in all parts of my being: Single-Woman-Teacher.



Figure 12: Reflecting on a Grey Winter

stigmatism associated with seeking more help, and why are we so afraid to give it?¹³

Parent-Teachers are the Toughest Critics

Sawyer's mother is a Grade 1/2 Teacher in the Sooke District. She often comes to our school with her camera and notebook and copies some of the activities from the bulletin boards. She never asks permission and she even admits that she uses the same lessons that she sees posted on our blogs.

I am not sure what to think or how to feel about all this. While I understand her position, being new myself, I feel a sense of violation, of having something stolen. It would be nice if she simply asked. If she had, I would have given it to her freely or negotiated some kind of trade or exchange.

I was very surprised when she called me on a Friday

¹³ When Michael returns in September, he gives me the biggest hug that makes both his mom and me tear up. A year later, when he's in Grade 3, Michael has a full IEP and designation, including hearing problems. He also becomes my 'buddy,' a staff connection program. Today, he and his family still send me email updates.

Complexity in Action

A transformative curriculum, then, is one that allows for, encourages, and develops this natural capacity for complex organizations; and through this process of transformation the curriculum continually regenerates itself and those involved with it (Doll, 1993, p. 87).

While I was a Grad student at Uvic, Fuller and I attended a course taught by Dr. Donna Truet and Dr. William Doll. It was in the first summer of my Grad studies and I will admit that perhaps I was not quite ready for the conversations that occurred for three hours each hot August day. One of the conversations Dr. Doll led was one about chaos and complexity theory. Now, I do not wish to admit this, but most of it went over my head, for I thought I was that teacher who taught through cause and effect, through direct transmission from expert (me) to novice (students).

But let me take you on a much simpler journey than the one Dr. Doll and Dr. Truet weaved with us in our Grad studies and relate to you a (very) small educational implication of how

afternoon to ask me to validate a lesson about negative numbers.

In a summary, we took a really cool teachable moment, negative numbers, and incorporated them with our calendar and our Science Units (i.e. temperature of our salmon tank) and I asked the students, as a bonus question, to describe what is 10 less than zero. I wrote, "If this morning the temperature was at 0, is it possible to get below zero? Is it possible to have 10 less than zero? Half of the kids were able to use pictures or words, using a salmon thermometer or froggy number line to describe that 10 less than zero is -10.

Sawyer's mother was quite upset that I was teaching them something above what the IRP recommended. In fact (with lots of volume), she asked me to quote the IRP. One has to remember that some parents believe their child is perfect and brilliant and you, the teacher, are there to make sure you remember that. I thanked her for her input and let her know it will never happen again. This was not a battle I wanted to fight.

chaos and complexity theory plays a role in my classroom and my identity.

In Doll's article, *Complexity and the Culture of Curriculum* (2008), he outlines two main foci, the first being history of curriculum design, the second, implications of chaos and complexity for the development of new forms of curriculum design and teaching implementations. This latter focus is the one which will help me demonstrate complexity theory at play, "the new sciences of chaos and complexity to develop different senses of curriculum and instruction – open, dynamic, relational, creative, and systems oriented" (2008, p. 2). I agree with Doll in that:

Interpreting the single connection in terms of direct instruction from teacher to student as producing 'mindlessly dull behaviour.' From too much richness in curriculum, a chaotic frame emerges. What one needs (...) are networks (or curricular structures) that achieve both stability and flexibility (2008, p. 2)

Let us remember the Mrs. Staveley narrative, where I naively used the term 'structured chaos' in order describe that although

Spring Break

A time of reflection,

Catch up

And finish writing the second term report cards.

Spring Break is rarely a break.

All the things I haven't taught yet.

Those parents I still have not yet met.

The kids whose light bulbs have not yet turned on.

Those bulbs which have not yet bloomed.

Jr. Wonger

It is April and the class is starting to run so smoothly that it doesn't even need me there anymore. A student teacher who has been shadowing the other Grade 2 class asks if she can come teach a lesson or two to my class.

At first I'm honored that she would like to shadow me, especially after shadowing the most experienced teacher at our

my classroom would look chaotic to the untrained eye, real learning would be occurring. There would be purpose and complexity going on in my classroom: groups of students at different stations, playing with materials, having conversations, making their own observations and connections with curriculum and each other. In Doll's article he relates the same "richness" with his university syllabus where he engages his students to "combine closure with openness," "embrace complexity", "cross fertilization, pollination, catalyzation of ideas", where "connections and interconnections become more and more webbed" (2008, p. 8). I take back my assumption that I was a "cause and effect" teacher and recognize that the implications of complexity theory play a major role in how I want to define myself as teacher.

Take for example, Sawyer's mother and our Salmon/Science unit. In this instance, we recorded daily the temperature of our salmon tank and were told that the ideal incubating temperature for raising our salmon was seven degrees celsius. As well, every morning, during our calendar time, the helper of the day would look out the window and record

school, and then I feel a twinge of something; jealousy or power issues, not wanting to give up my classroom when it's just now really starting to come together. I push the feeling aside and remember that closing the door on this kind of opportunity isn't my way of doing things.

As background information, I should tell you a bit about this student teacher and how I think having student teachers in a classroom is relevant to this thesis.

Alexandra is a twenty-something PDPP student from the University of Victoria. She is Chinese and the daughter of Sheila Wong. Sheila, as I mentioned earlier in this text, is now a retired teacher from our district, who taught home economics and Grade 8 humanities for most of her career.

When I first started teaching at Oakridge Middle School, Sheila, like most other elder Chinese Canadians, took it upon herself to take me under her wing. With Sheila's daughter coming into my classroom, I feel my Chinese duties and responsibilities calling me.

the morning temperature on the chart. During the winter months, we had some record low temperatures, including temperatures that were below zero. Then we would incorporate our adding and subtraction tools for recording the differences between each day. I enjoyed the day when Victor questioned, in front of the class, if we could get less than zero! And instead of just telling them, we worked together to find out how we could get less than zero! We made and added to our number line at the front of the classroom, including now a section of negative numbers to illustrate our new level of learning. We redrew our thermometer and related it back to the number line, drawing a primary version of a Cartesian Plane. Then we looked at temperatures of freezing and made the connection that we always needed to keep an eye on our tank so that our salmon eggs did not freeze. In this instance our classroom was alive in the tensions, dwelling in the midst of living and planned curriculum, with “the right amount of interaction among students, teachers, [and] ideas” (2008, p. 8) where we explored (complexity) and raised the curriculum to a new level. Without complexity theory, I would have not seen this - where “this” can be twofold, my identity as

During the week we teach together, Alexandra reminds me of other ways to manage and facilitate and it is like a breath of fresh air. I sometimes forget all the different strategies and I am excited to be reminded of them again. And, just as any typical, good Chinese elder does, I feed her all through the week and bring her a pair of shoes I’ve never worn. Giving used clothes may sound unusual but, like being forced to eat a moon cake, it’s another Chinese form of showing affection. I suspect it may have something to do with village thriftiness and ‘passing on the wealth.’

At the end of each day, Alexandra and I do a lot of reflecting, talking about the lesson, and she asks me a lot of questions about my TOC days, the union, and how seniority works. I feel humbled that she is valuing my opinion in this way.

Let me stand on my soap box here. I have turned over a new leaf. From this point, I will always try to get a student teacher in my classroom. Don’t get me wrong, I’ve had student teachers in the past but until this year, I failed to see how a

teacher and how I play with the curriculum with my students – it is complexity theory that has helped me to see beyond the obvious into that not yet seen.

student teacher made me a better teacher. Other years, student teachers would blow in and blow out, saying that teaching is something they decided to do because that's all that they could think of after graduating with a degree in History, or English, or PE, and I would feel deflated because I was mentoring people who didn't share my love of the profession. Alexandra was so very different.

I am lucky to have had Alexandra teach in my classroom. I have not seen anyone with so much drive and love for the classroom, while still a student teacher. I am honoured to have played a small part in the beginnings of what will undoubtedly be a successful career.¹⁴

April

I feel that April is the month when I finally accept my

¹⁴ Three years later, Alexandra becomes my most reliable and trusted TOC. We develop a great friendship and I am there on her big wedding day. Not only does she call me by my many nicknames, she also calls me “Jeh Jeh,” which is Taishan for older sister. I like being on the other side now, and am proud to be a part of this Chinese tradition.

A Letter to my Principal - admitting defeat⁵

Dear Shirley,

I would like the opportunity to meet with you to discuss going on an educational and personal leave from my current 1.0 to 0.8. Grade 1 is really difficult this year, even with my full time EA. And with all of my very needy families I have noticed that I have not been able to finish my albatross of a thesis that is hanging around my neck.

As well, you know that this is my year of evaluation, and because I am on the Pro-Growth Plan instead of the standard evaluation, I have noticed that the time I would usually use towards my thesis is going towards leading the Technology piece for our school and the Inquiry/Engagement with Technology with the Grade 1s.

The resources and the demographics of this school are very different from my last two years and, like you said at our last staff meeting, "it is hard to go back when you've come from

little community of kids and just try to have fun for the rest of the year. It may be because of the flowers blooming, the idea of waking up to the sun and driving home in daylight, or because the 'home stretch' is finally within reach, but this is also the time of year when there's less school drama to talk about. Parents take down any leftover defenses and any students who had 'control/power/oppositional' issues typically 'surrender' by April.

My class has been participating in the Salmon Program. We were given 200 Coho salmon eggs in February and it is our job to take care of them. I integrate every subject I know into this project and the children are excited

Finally the time has come and we are to release the salmon fry into the Colquitz River, about a five minute drive away from our school. The purpose of the exercise is so the children remember to take care of our world and see the importance of the sustainability of our environment.

This is another field trip that I love, taking them out into

⁵ The following is an excerpt from an email I sent to my current Principal, three years after this original data.

ahead.” I am just spending too much time at the board office, with the district Technology team, and with the families of my students, and not enough time with my own family and my own goals (one of which is to finish this thesis so that it is something valuable and not just jumping through another hoop).

So, with heavy heart, I am asking for an educational leave, one day a week, to remove myself from work and to re-focus on my thesis.

Thanks for giving it some thought,

Taryn

their community and releasing the salmon next to a local swimming hole. They each get a bag full of water with some fry in it and before they release them, they name them.

There is nothing better than being present in this situation, watching these seven and eight year olds taking such care to make sure they find a good, shady spot in the water to say good-bye. I notice how they help the student with the physical disability walk to the creek side. I notice how not one of them complains or whines about their fishes. I notice how they work together to make sure that each of their fry have a good send-off.

Again, this is why I teach: for these moments that are not in the classroom, that cannot be taught. I feel a sense of pride and let the kids know how proud of them I am. This would not have happened with my Grade 8's. Yes, they would enjoy getting out of the classroom, and I have no doubt that they would be polite, but there wouldn't be this same sense of pure wonderment and pride. I don't think they would appreciate the intrinsic value as much, or maybe it would be me not valuing it as much. Maybe it

Mah Mah,

Not a problem at all. Let's get together on Monday lunch to talk about it. I understand that life happens. I can help you in this way. I would like you to take Fridays off because your class needs the routine you have organized for them. We'll have to let Human Resources know, but it shouldn't be a problem.

On a side note, I have empathy. I have been in your position before, teaching Grade 1 is very difficult, and I had to teach part-time too when I was finishing off my thesis.

We'll discuss it more on Monday,

Shirley

would be me who would have such defenses up, worried about the bully manipulating the situation, or that the Grade 8's just wouldn't buy into it.

Whatever the case, this is when I realize that I think I've narrowed down my place for the next couple of years. It is not with middle school anymore. I believe I've found a home, at least temporarily, in this elementary life.



Figure 13: Releasing Fry

For it to come alive in the classroom, the curriculum itself

has to contain, said or unsaid, an invitation to teachers and students to enter into it. Not only that, there needs to be a reciprocal invitation. The curriculum-as-plan must wait at the classroom door for an invitation from teachers and students. And when the curriculum, teachers, and students click, we are likely to find a live tension that will allow the teacher and the students to say, “We live curriculum” (Aoki, 2005, p. 362)

The NOIL Process

Today, Brian hand delivered the ‘Notice of Intent to Lay-off’ letters to everybody that should have received one, except to me. Mine went to the school I taught at last year. The Principal faxed it to my school, and Brian let me know that the real thing would be arriving inter-mail soon. I mean, come on, if you’re going to lay me off, at least know what school you’re going to lay me off from. This year, for elementary, the cut off is 14 years.

A LINGERING QUOTE

We need to “look within” ourselves to look beyond what we have already seen. Looking within is part of preparing ourselves for engaging in reflective and mindful practice (Hwu Wen-song, 1998, p. 29)

They also cut the district Music program and reduced the Learning Resources, Reading Recovery, Teacher Librarians, and Low Incidence Resource time. This means that many people will be looking for more teaching point time. What a joke.

Turning Thirty-One¹⁵

The families of my class this year have been extremely understanding and caring. Not only do I get the occasional leftovers, baked goodies, and lots of little hugs, they have understood and recommended home remedies and professionals when I was sick with pneumonia, had vertigo, strep throat, a viral infection, and pinched a nerve! This year has been a year of

¹⁵ This is an excerpt from my personal journal. Since this thesis is about identity, I think it's valuable to include. I'm nervous about expressing myself this way, i.e., Too much information? Not professional enough?

Recursion

Recursion: “The Capacity of having thoughts loop back on themselves. Such looping thoughts on thoughts, distinguishes human consciousness; it is the way we make meaning” (Doll, 2004, p.255). “Conditions, situations, relations (in our world) are always changing, the present does not recreate the past nor does the present determine future” (Doll, 2004, p. 255). This looping back makes thinking about time transformative.

“In a curriculum that honours, values, uses recursion, there is not fixed beginning or ending” (Doll, 2004, p. 256). Just because my school year begins in September and ends in June, doesn’t mean that my teaching and learning begin and end at

change, some good, some bad, and a lot of sick.¹⁶

Today I turn thirty-one. If you had asked me when I was twenty-one what I thought my life would be like when I turned thirty-one, this would not be it.

I would have told you that I hoped I would be teaching an intermediate grade level that I had been teaching for about five years. I would have said that because I was growing confident in my teaching, I would have more time to build and work on my family because at thirty-one, of course I would be married and probably with a kid on the way, if I didn’t have one already. I would have told you that I was married to someone (most likely Chinese) successful in his career and, therefore, we would be able to afford a nice little house with a big backyard, probably in

¹⁶ Later, someone will make a connection about the classroom. How the four teachers previous to me had fallen quite ill, all with cancer, and the teacher after me had a rough year of weird illnesses too. My classroom air vents would turn on at 8:00 am and turn off at 3:00 pm, like clockwork every day. Luckily for my FM system I didn’t lose my voice either! My desk, for the first six months, was right next to the register. And, I never drank the water from my classroom tap. The school, with all of the original asbestos and piping, went through a recent renovation to remove and change all of the windows, heating, duct work, etc. I’m just glad that in May, I could start opening my windows. There’s a small part of me that wonders about my classroom air quality that year.

those points. Every year I engage myself in new opportunities and those new opportunities are not isolated, they engage me to continue to make meaning of my curriculum and identity. For example, while writing this thesis and reading my journal entries, I continually came up with different subtopics that I wanted to research and interpret. Every couple of months I would change my mind, thinking that this was not how I wanted to segment or portray these narratives,

Curriculum segments, parts, sequences are arbitrary chunks that, instead of being seen as isolated units, are seen as opportunities for reflection. In such a frame, every test, paper, journal entry can be seen not merely as the completion of ones project but also the beginning of another – to explore, discuss, inquire into both ourselves as meaning makers and into the test in question (Doll, 2004, p. 256).

It wasn't until I took a one year leave of absence from teaching, completely moved away to Kentucky, that I felt I was able to

Vancouver or Richmond, where I grew up. I would have told you that I would be happy and successful and that the rest of my girlfriends would have similar stories!

Instead, on my thirty-first birthday, I have this to report, and in no particular order:¹⁷

1. I am not married. I am in the midst of ending a 5-year relationship. My 'One' was not, after all, 'The One.'
2. I do not have children.
3. Yes, I do own my little condo, but I co-own it with my parents, and it is not a house, and there isn't a yard, and it is not, thankfully, where I grew up!
4. I still have no idea where and what I'm teaching year to year. This makes eight years of teaching, not one classroom (nor grade level, nor subject level) twice in a row.
5. And as for the rest of my girlfriends, we are all in our

¹⁷ My, does 10 years change one's perspective on life, similarly re-writing and editing this with my 34th birthday fast approaching it's changing once again!!

indulge in an open interpretation and make meaning of curriculum, knowing that once I finish this thesis, and move back to teaching, my interpretations and self inquiry will continue. Having this moment to pause in my “spiral curriculum” (Bruner, 1960) has allowed me to recognize the power of recursion.

Recursion is not repetition:

The functional difference between repetition and recursion lies in the role reflection plays in each. In repetition, reflection plays a negative role; it breaks the process. There is a certain automaticity to repetition that keeps the same process going – over and over and over (...). In recursion, reflection plays a positive role; for primary experience, or in Piaget’s reflexive intelligence reflecting back on practical intelligence, it is necessary, as Bruner has said, to step back from one’s doings, to “distance oneself in some way” from one’s own thoughts (Doll, 2004, p. 256).

I had never thought that I would need to distance myself as far away as Kentucky, but being in this place, where I do not teach, in a place where I know no one, has allowed me to step back,

thirties, single, on the property ladder with co-signatures from our parents, and all have employed a counselor or two at one point or another in our lives!

6. But I am confident in the direction my life has taken.

I wonder what the next ten years will bring. Will I finally have a steady job and not get laid off? Will I ‘concede’ and finally settle down with someone? Will I adopt, even though every inkling in my body really doesn’t care if I have children or not, and is that horrible for a teacher to say? Will I ever want the real responsibilities of owning a house and doing all that home maintenance? And will the rest of my girlfriends do the same?

Or am I destined to be this single, childless woman who leads the gypsy school life, staying at school past six, coming home to her Pugs? Happy Birthday, Taryn Mah!

The (joke of a) NOIL Process Continues

“Point 4? Seriously? Point 4? I’m going from 1.0 to 0.4?”

three years later, and look at myself in a different light after reading these Grade 2 narratives. Even re-reading my university articles, in preparation for the thesis, I feel like I understand more, am able to catch some of the notions that I thought went over my head. I know that I will never be the same teacher, that my thoughts about teaching and my identity, while they may loop back on themselves, will never be the same, and I am very good with that idea!

And in Sidney?”

This is what I yell when Brian tells me what I’ve received at the, ‘DRC Staffing Draft.’

I picture it like a bad auction. All of the staff who have been laid off are picked back up according to seniority. The higher the seniority, the more likely you are to receive your old job back. I picture our Superintendent/CEO in front of the podium, with each of us represented by a piece of paper, piled in order of seniority, being handed to him by the assistant Superintendents. The president of our district union is sitting along the side, the principals from each school in the audience with their BlackBerrys positioned to motion their requests. This year was sure to be different, though, what with so many new teachers out of a job due to budget cuts.

My number is 6.9425. Ahead of me is number 6.9633 and behind me is number 6.9300. If you totaled up all the time (point hours) I have taught in our district, it would equal six years, nine months, and one four-hundred-twenty-fifth of a day. When I

A LINGERING QUOTE

Curriculum understood as currerre is a form of social psychoanalysis, a complicated conversation with myself and others, the point of which movement: autobiographic, political and cultural (Pinar, 2001, p.2)

TOC-ed, a half day was truly a half day. And a 0.2 temporary contract was truly a 0.2 contract. There is no getting ahead here!

Being a seasoned NOIL-er, I should know better than to be taken aback by the first round. After all, there are sure to be at least 3 more rounds to go. But still... teaching with the district since 2001 and I'm still only receiving a 0.4? That's not even half time.

I'm not sure why they even ask us to fill in the survey of our job preferences. I didn't even apply for Sidney.

"How am I going to pay my mortgage on 0.4? In fact, how am I going to pay for the gas to get out to Sidney every day, to work for 2 hours and 40 minutes and then drive home again?"

June

The last month of school, and yup, we did it. All my students know how to read for comprehension, fill in a graphic organizer, they can tell you all about the needs of living things, and they can subtract a single digit number from a double digit

number with re-grouping. They can skip, they can run without falling, they can follow more than five instructions in a row. They can sing the entire 'Ging Gong the Cat' play and print starting at the red margin and on the lines. They know how to make change with dollars and cents and can use a map and tell you where they are. Yup, we did it! Not only that, but I survived Grade 2. I have officially taught lower primary.

Round Three

It's NOIL postings Round Three, and Brian is finally able to post the Grade 5 temporary contract position at Seaview. It's a continuing maternity leave, and he'll post it with the contract ending on May 1st. The inside scoop, though, is that Kendra, the teacher on maternity leave, will want to take the rest of the year off to be with her new baby girl. The posting looks ugly to an outside eye: temporary contract, ending in May, and at 0.8 with the chance of increase. To me, an inside eye, it looks good.

Brian comes into my classroom one hour after the posting closes and lets me know that I received the posting! My class and I cheer! Yes, I'll be changing classrooms again, yes, I'll be changing grade levels again, but finally, I'll be in the same school two years in a row. Things are looking up. I am ecstatic not to have to learn a new round of staff colleagues, a new community, a new bunch of families and faces, but most of all, I'm ecstatic to be staying right where I feel most comfortable: in elementary school.

Attempting Closure

It's the last day of class with our students and the classroom is bare. Desks and cloakrooms have been cleaned out and swept. We push and stack all the desks into the hallways for the custodians and set up all the chairs for my annual end of the year movie.

This is something I both dread and love to do. Every year, I take hundreds of pictures and movie clips of the kids, some of

them playing, some of their presentations, some of them interacting with guest speakers or other teachers. My favorite part is when I take a picture of the kids at the beginning of the year, and another one at the end of the year, and we get to see how much they have physically changed in just ten months! Kathy Brown once said that she can remember every child she has taught in the last thirty five years just by looking at their eyes.

This year I've done things a little differently. I've invited families and parents to join us to see the little iMovie that has taken me over twenty hours to create, plus another day just to copy DVDs for each of them. The movie is an hour long and I wonder if it's too long for the families to handle.

We turn off the lights, get ourselves comfortable in the June heat, and turn on the big screen.

Pictures flash through of all the highs in our classroom and I am warmed at seeing how many pictures there are of all the kids playing and smiling together. One mother starts to cry and that sets off the rest of the adults.

Postscript

I have written this 'conclusion' many times. It has taken the form of a letter, a conversation, a story, a poem, and even a picture, but each attempt to conclude felt inauthentic. In this, my final attempt, I resist the impulse to sum up this thesis in a neat and tidy package, all too aware of what is seen as both the poignancy and the difficulty of autoethnography: conclusions are virtually impossible and when attempted are, at best, merely 'good enough'.

In not concluding, I have led the reader to a point of discomfort. Throughout the writing of this autoethnography I would often ask myself, "What does this all mean?" And, "What is my point?" A conclusion in the traditional sense would not allow for the unlimited ramifications and open spaces of what this 'all' might mean. My story is dynamic, layered, shifting, and on-going, as I continue to negotiate the hyphenated spaces of my journey to (re)invent (my)self as Teacher. The novelette that makes up this thesis details moments in my own life narrative that lead to my present teaching situation. To explore the question of whether

The movie ends, we gather our tissues, and we say our goodbyes! I tell each of my students how proud I am of them and how much I am going to miss them over the summer.

This last day of class has made me extremely emotional. I'm not sure if it's from the lack of sleep from movie-making, or just the anti-climactic feeling I always feel at the end of the school year. I look around. My stuff has been packed back in its boxes, ready to be moved into the classroom down the hall. My ticket has been booked for a spontaneous trip to Mexico. And, for some reason, I'm not the least bit nervous about my blind date tonight.

Always in motion is the future.

-Yoda

I am writing the plots of my teaching journey, or if, in fact, they are writing me is beyond the scope of my current project.

However, this thesis describes many journeys in defining my Teacher identity; journeys of remembering and reliving, of interpreting and discovering, of writing and reading, and of coming to know (my) self through the transformative experience of autoethnography.

My hope is that at the end of my autoethnographic exploration, it is evident that stories, narratives, reflections, and interpretative inquiries have the ability to expand the boundaries of classroom lived experiences to include those not otherwise understood or recognized. More teaching stories of lived classroom experiences and the search for Teacher identity must be brought forward, not only to continue to acknowledge the uniqueness of everyday teaching situations, but also to enrich our understanding of our own pedagogy.

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