

**The Meeting of the Rivers:
A Teacher's Search for the Confluence of Beliefs and Practice**

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Dian Marie Henderson 2006

This project by Dian Marie Henderson is accepted in its present form

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Abstract

In an effort to identify and define what beliefs and values exist in her classroom, Dian Henderson weaves together stories, from her childhood and her current day practices both inside and outside the classroom, along with journal entries of more recent musings, and poetry that has inspired and sustained her. The resulting tapestry reveals the inner workings and life of a teacher seeking to bring soul into the classroom and searching for an authentic path where the process of learning is fully honoured. The reader is invited to witness the process of an educator trying to find the words to name the core of her teaching practice and personal identity – to solidify the connections between the systems of beliefs and values and the actions that result.

ERIC DESCRIPTORS:

Authenticity in the classroom

Listening

Beliefs in the classroom

Storytelling

Whole person Learning

Soul and Spirit in the Classroom

CONTENTS

Chapter

1. TWO COURSING STREAMS OF VALUES	1
The Personal Experience of Disconnection	7
The Classroom Experience of Disconnection	11
Seeking to Define Authenticity	14
Journal Entry #1.....	15
Stories Teach About Authenticity.....	18
Stories Connect to the Soul as the Inner Authority	20
Summary.....	24
2. THE TRIBUTARY OF LISTENING	25
The Story of Self as a Cultural Being	27
The Story of Self as a Teacher	35
The Necessity of Time	38
Journal Entry #2	39
A Story About Time	40
A Story of Saving Time.....	41
Journal Entry #3.....	43
Listening is Enhanced through Ritual or Routines	45
Listening is Enhanced through Focused Attention and Response	46
A Story of Listening and Responding.....	48
Listening and Responding or NOT.....	49

Journal Entry #4.....	50
A Story of Holding Back and Being Silenced	52
Listening to One’s Own Authority	54
Journal Entry #5	54
A Story of the Search for Dignity as Opposed to Assimilation and Invisibility.....	56
Listening is Enhanced by Focusing as Much on Process as on Product	59
Journal Entry #6	60
A Story About Process.....	60
Journal Entry #7.....	62
Summary.....	63
3. THE TRIBUTARY OF QUESTING	65
Questing as Inquiry	66
A Story About Tension	67
Journal Entry #8.....	68
A Story About Questing and Control	70
Questing as Noticing.....	72
A Story of Noticing and the Search for Words	73
Questing is the Search for Precise Words.....	75
A Story of Finding Voice	78
Questing as the Search for Connection	79
A Story About the Search for Connection	79
Summary	81

4. THE TRIBUTARY OF COMMUNING	84
Journal Entry #9.....	85
Journal Entry #10	87
A Story of Connection	89
A Story of Pride and Ego	90
A Story of Knowing our Place in a Community.....	94
A Story Where Role Defines Purpose	95
A Story of Leadership	96
A Story of Being Part of Something	99
Summary.....	100
5. BRIDGING THE WATERS	101
Journal Entry #11.....	104
Journal Entry #12.....	108
A Story About Life	112
BIBLIOGRAPHY	114

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

1. The Meeting of the Rivers – A representation of the metaphor..... 5

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Two Coursing Streams

I've known Rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

Langston Hughes describes the rivers of his life with a closeness, an intimacy that only his inner-most self could know, the kind of intimacy I yearn for. Through this poem, I am reminded of the flow of experiences that have formed my life, the flow of two very different aspects, the flow of what is seen and what remains unseen, the flow between what I believe and how I live my life. It is the lack of connection between these two flows that causes me to yearn. The Langston Hughes poem speaks to me of knowing one's self, knowing one's history, and knowing the place where identity is formed, and it is these knowings that guide me toward the discovery of my own, personal storyline. For

this is a collection of those stories that have shaped me as I experience them through two flows of consciousness.

My journey as an educator is inextricably intertwined with who I am as a person. Both personas live in me and flow through me like two identities forming the embankments along the rivers of what I believe and how I live my life - two rivers each with two embankments, one the personal, the other the professional persona. One river is the flow of inner values and beliefs while the other is the flow of the outer more concrete world. The embankments in both rivers consist of the identity of self and the identity of self as educator.

Wherever I have lived, rivers were nearby. From Edmonton, Alberta with the swift turbulent flowing North Saskatchewan River of my stormy childhood identity where the basis of my system of values was formed, to Portage la Prairie where the meandering, usually calm Assiniboine flowed toward the mighty Red as I struggled to define who I was and what I valued while my external world and my career took shape, and now in Kamloops where the two rivers meet. Figuratively, I feel I am at the meeting of the rivers and in actual fact, Kamloops literally means the meeting of the rivers where the North and South Thompson flow into one. The outer world around me reflects my inner truth, for I am at the confluence of two systems that seem to be searching for connection, for something more integrated. I am at the confluence between what is believed and what is done, between what is practiced and what is preached. It is here that I feel the tension.

Sometimes these two rivers in me flow parallel, and I can live without noticing or being aware of the divide and separation between them; whereas, other times they flow in

direct juxtaposition, and I become overly conscious of the distance between them. Yet, they are always flowing, always moving. Although there are times where the flow in each river is controlled and constrained, alluding to the perception of peacefulness, most often the flow feels unsettling and chaotic. The turbulence may be fed by some unseen, underground springs that connect the two rivers, or perhaps the waters feel more turbulent at times when the embankments fall away and the flood plain carries the seepage from one river into the other. In either case, the turbulence creates tension as if there are two opposing sides: two sides that sometimes feel like camps setup for war to see who will win, and other times feel like the balancing of two essential parts of a whole like the yin-yang of eastern philosophy. Sometimes, I think I have to choose, that only one side, only one river, only one system can exist in me. At other times, I think I have to learn how to bridge the chasm of difference like the fulcrum on a teeter-tauter shifting back and forth trying to find the mid-point or like I am looking for a more permanent structure to bridge the difference. These two rivers of thought, these two systems of values or competing streams of consciousness exist in me wherever I go. They battle it out in my role as a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, a friend and a teacher. Wherever I am, so too are these two flows of thought in me.

The one side believes in the quiet, the unseen, the mysterious, even the soulful in life. It is the place of inner values, dignity, spirit, affirmation, and a purpose-filled life. It is the place of my inner teacher, my intuition. This side of me believes that this is really all that matters; this is really what all the lessons of life are about. This is the less popular and more murky of the two rivers – what I believe is not in clear view for others to see.

The other values only what can be seen, measured and proven. It is the place of outer appearances, ideals, standards, curriculum demands, test scores and the visible accumulations of wealth. It is the stream of outer actions, showing how I live my life. It is easy for me to get caught in this river of consciousness as it seems to be a dominant voice in the public forum of education, academia and the consumerism of the society in which I live. This is the more popular and more transparent of the two rivers – how I live is more clearly visible to both myself and others.

These two flows form the self that exists both in and outside the classroom where both the personal and the professional identities struggle between the banks of what is believed and what is produced. And therefore, I cannot separate who I am from who I am as a teacher. I had tried to separate them along the way. I thought that was what was required or expected. I thought anything that was personal, anything that had to do with values and the presence of soul had to be left outside the classroom – that inner, personal beliefs and values had to stay out of the practice of education. But I cannot nor do I want to try to separate these beliefs and values anymore. I have journeyed to this place, and so I must live at this place where the rivers meet.

This part of my journey although its workings have sat in the core of my very being for most of my conscious memory, this part, started with a question. I had just experienced an intense summer of studies at the School for International Training (S.I.T.) in Brattleboro, Vermont in the Summer Master of Arts in Teaching program where self discovery and group processing are as integral to the program as the theories and approaches we studied, and so I left feeling that something huge and expansive had opened up in me. At the time, I described this metaphor that took shape in my life as

noticing a window where I hadn't even noticed that a wall existed previously, as being at a place of widening and opening.

Fig. 1 A representation of the metaphor

Words really didn't feel adequate to describe the reality, the newness in me. Even though I had experienced this unnamed part of my potential before, even though I had felt it stirring in me for decades, what stirred in me now was a newness in being heard and being affirmed at a deep, personal level in a system that I had for so long tried to be a part of, the world of academics. Now, I felt completely, soulfully acknowledged in the stream of academic thought. It was as if I were finally given license to speak up and let my personal, soulful voice be heard in a public, academic setting. These stirrings, these longings now seemed to have a place, an identity, an existence, a purpose in my life as an educator. I felt alive with an energy I hadn't felt for some time in my chosen career. I

felt an insurgence of potential and possibility, but with it, lay one question that continues to guide me both in the classroom and in my life.

The question arose out of one of the final circles using *The Way of Council* (Zimmerman 1996) with my supervisor, Bonnie Mennell. At the close of the circle, I asked her how we as teachers could invite our students to speak and listen from this place of profound authenticity. I wondered how I could create an atmosphere conducive to such open and curious streams of thought in an academic setting where learning is seen as something outside of the individuals who come into our classes. As is typical at S.I.T., Bonnie reflected the question back to me by asking how much teachers exist at that level of authenticity in their classes, and if teachers don't exist at that level in the classroom then how can they ask their students to exist there. Bonnie's question was really an invitation to probe my own question to search for my own answer. The answer was to be found by searching in me not by looking outside of myself. The answer always is found there at the same place where the question comes from if it is to be found at all.

And so, I left that summer with one burning question. How can I express more of my authentic self in the classroom and as a result invite my students to be present to their own individual expressions of authenticity?

This was such a burning question because for years, it had sat in me without being fully acknowledged. For years, I have felt the need to bring more of life into my classes. I have felt an intense desire and inner longing to create spaces where learning involved much more than the prescribed curriculum, but the yearning for a deeper sense of connection and purpose had sat unattended to for years. I left it because I thought it didn't belong in the secular arena of education. This yearning was something spiritual,

pertaining to matters of the heart which were matters better left outside the classroom and peripheral to one's life, or so I thought. I left it because I thought it was just me, that somehow I just wasn't getting it right. I left it because I had no name for it, no words to articulate this yearning in a way that didn't leaving me feeling vulnerable. I left it because I was afraid that this yearning was more a sign of my own inadequacy than a symptom of a potential, a possibility, an opening. I felt that I lacked authority, knowledge and wisdom. I thought that all that was needed to make "deeper" connections was some new technique that I hadn't yet discovered. I thought if I expressed my yearning, I would expose a sentimental wound of my own identity and ego, and that, in effect I would expose a flawed, weak-minded person that would be vulnerable to attack. I was afraid I would be left without dignity. These thoughts arose from the stories of my identity. These thoughts were formed in the rivers of my beliefs for one's present experience does arise out of the stories that form past realities.

But no matter how much I evaded the question of how to live authentically in the classroom of my life where private beliefs mingle with the more public display of practice, the question wouldn't leave me. The yearning only grew stronger. The more I feigned lack of awareness of it, the more disconnected I felt. So, the following is a rumination of the experiences that reflected the divide, the disconnect between what I believed and what I produced.

The Personal Experience of Disconnection

In the past few years, I have felt that I am becoming more conscious of the lack of alignment between what I believe and how I live my life, increasingly more aware of

these two opposing systems living in me. It is here where the world feels like a dichotomy between right and wrong, good and bad, success and failure. It is a dichotomy of values. The presence of these seemingly opposing values triggers a feeling of teetering between defensiveness and vulnerability where one side needs allies (the river of ideals and standards) and the other to be affirmed (the river of values and beliefs). Perhaps, this is part of my story line as Pema Chodron calls it (Kullander 2005). Perhaps I am stuck in what I feel defines me. I feel that I am not merely working with right and wrong, but rather I am “working with a change at the very core of [my] being” (Kullander 2005, 11). Part of my storyline here also suggests that there is no way to balance or integrate these two systems, these two rivers. It’s either one or the other. It’s the belief in the concrete or the belief in the abstract. It’s the world of materialism and its sensorial attachments or the world of spirituality and its intrigue in mystery. I feel these two rivers of belief coursing their way through defensiveness and vulnerability.

The defensiveness is my ideals, the picture of the consummate teacher, the place where all answers need justification and proof impeaches all mysteries. This side searches for allies. It searches for protection by projecting confidence and self righteousness, not only that I have an answer but more importantly that the answer I have is the right one.

In contrast, the vulnerability is my sensitivity. It is open and curious, a doorway to my potential. It is here that I can attend to matters of the heart, of passion and principles worth fighting for. It is a strength, but it scares me and others. It opens me up to criticism and a sense of failure.

This struggle between these two often feels like an incredible weight ... a weight that I associate to the “system”. On one side, there is a system based on fear, accountability, power, authority, competition, regulations, and standards. From a broader perspective, I feel it as the world of consumerism, big business, and politics. I am repulsed by this side of the system; it feels like the enemy. And yet, I operate on this side of the system. I am part of this lifestyle. At some level, I “buy into” its values.

On the other side is a system that is often unseen and unacknowledged. It feels like the place of true value, integrity, principles, intuition, listening and compassion. In the broader stream of things, it is about social awareness, community, ritual and inner knowing. This side resides in me, and it aches. It is this side that draws my attention to feeling the presence of the dichotomy, to feeling the turbulence in me. And it is this side that I now lean toward to listen.

I am part of both systems, but the scales feel imbalanced and at times outright one-sided, leaning far more toward the concrete, the competitiveness, the power over another.

Both rivers of values and consciousness do flow through me, and I am often at odds with how to compromise their differences. And so, it is here that the tension and lack of connection exists in me as does this painfully, lingering feeling of living an unreal life.

I have often felt like I am a fraud both personally and professionally. I feel like I can't belong in either the world of principles and values or the world of knowers and the esteemed because I don't practice the lifestyles that either would ultimately demand. It's like I don't fit and at times like I don't even know if I want to because I don't know what

fitting in might mean I would surrender to or for. I feel like I don't fit into the world of those who have and know, that of the world of business and academics, nor do I fit in the world of those who have less and know differently, that of the world of the natural, the untamed and of spirit. I don't fit into the grand world of case studies, PhD's and intellectuals but at times I want to, and I often feel that if I am to have true worth or dignity or even simple affirmation, then I should fit. I have to try to fit there. At other times, I desire the rugged, rural life where lessons are taught by the land and by living simply. I long to know by having some "enlightened" truths revealed, by living with less, by being an activist in something that matters, by having the wisdom and the knowledge that comes from listening, noticing, and tending to my own environment.

I have come to live in both these systems, but I cannot find my sense of connection between them nor a sense of solidity in one or the other. I am constantly at odds in both places. I feel disjointed, disconnected, and I long for something more.

Indeed, I do feel these two systems flowing like two parallel rivers and I don't know how to balance their co-existence. I don't know how to bridge these two parallels that compete within me. I long to find a perspective where these are not opposites, not as something that is attacking my very being where it isn't all black and white. This paradigm seems to exist in so many parts of my life which helps me to realize these aspects of self are not separable from the self that exists in the classroom. I cannot separate these values any longer, nor can I pretend they don't exist in the classroom. These parts of my life and my existence are inextricably intertwined. So, I am compelled to find the place where soul and whole heartedness can exist within the confines of measurable outcomes and intellect in the academic classroom. If I am to feel a sense of

connection, then it is here that I feel I need to adjust the balances, but I don't know how and I'm afraid – perhaps of being wrong, but more importantly perhaps that I will be minimized or even disqualified.

The saying that we teach who we are refers to this deep yearning for connection between knowing self and living self both personally and publicly. But, it also suggests a responsibility to become aware of who I am so that I know what I am teaching. This sounds somewhat Freirian in nature, and indeed I am advocating that teachers become “cognizant of the political nature” of our work (Shor 1987, 221). The idea of waking-up to my underlying values and impulses to become fully conscious of my principles and agendas within the classroom is the foundational work of knowing who I am and what I teach. To wake-up to these values in a way that seeks to align them with how I behave is to become, as Thomas Kuhn suggests, increasingly more refined (MFP 2005).

I cannot separate the parts of who I am and what I do because I am beginning to see the values and beliefs that are underlying it all and that thread my life together. I want to know who I am in order to know what I teach, for teaching is based in one's values. Teaching is based on what one believes.

The Classroom Experience of Disconnection

I have been in the field of education for almost twenty years, and throughout this time, I have felt a quiet stirring of discontentment (yet sometimes it was not so quiet). At first, I had no name for this feeling of the heart, and although the understandings changed and morphed as time went by, the new perspectives or concepts never quite seemed to capture what this longing was all about. I couldn't name my discontentment. At first, I

was even doubtful that it was real. The process of uncovering, claiming and naming this longing enabled me to hear what had yet been voiced. Indeed, the process itself has been part of the lesson. And it is this lesson that has had the most profound impact on my teaching so far.

My classes lacked spirit. There was no place for that which provides individual meaning, depth and purpose. There was no place for the yen of individual curiosity. There was no place where soul, spirit or deeply connected values could exist in my classes. Instead, I felt a compulsion to deliver a set of goods and a final product. Anything beyond this was not required. At first, I was barely aware of the void that existed between what I did and what I believed. I was fresh out of university, alive with ideas and potential. So, when I went to try it all out, and it just wasn't working as I had read and imagined it would, I thought I was just in the wrong place, with the wrong students, in the wrong venue, working in the wrong system, and perhaps I was for my work has taken me to many levels of education, but something else was stirring.

Although in the past few years I have taught mostly advanced writing at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, British Columbia, I have taught in all four skill areas in the past. Prior to that I taught in a junior high school as a counsellor, and as a health and modified math teacher in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. Three years earlier, I was teaching a grade three/four split class at a north end inner city school, and even earlier in my career I had taught in a multi-grade classroom on a Hutterite Colony. In between times, I taught in various adult education environments both in English as a Second Language and in a literacy program. But no matter where I went, I carried this lingering feeling of disconnect, an emptiness and lack of potential energy. Indeed, as I'll

describe later, this disconnect had as much to do with my own consciousness and sense of connection to self as it did to my students or the systems I taught in.

I began to put a name to this experience during my time teaching writing at Thompson Rivers University in an advanced writing class. It was here that I was able to name this disconnect to give it some concrete sense of substance and reality.

I noticed that my student's writing was mundane, formulaic and stiff. It was as if the students were expressing themselves by trying to fit into something rather than designing something to fit what they wanted to say. They were trying to complete the standards that were external to themselves. They knew all the right tricks in developing their writing. They knew about topic and concluding sentences. They knew about transitions and coherence. They knew these things and could apply them in most cases quite skilfully, yet their writing remained lifeless. It lacked purpose and meaning or significance. Their writing seemed to be filled in but not filled out. Pages had been written but nothing was being said. Students were more concerned about how many words they had to write than what words would fit what they wanted to say. There was no power, no significance, no authentic sense of communicating something of value. This is not to say that I never came across writing that exhibited the true voice of the writer, but those were rarities and in most cases students had no sense of what constituted a well written paper from the perspective of having a voice by communicating something of value. For most, a good essay was simply a skill that could and must be acquired from outside of themselves, and that the combination of clear instructions and endless study was all that was necessary to produce a good essay, indeed all that was necessary to complete their education. I had seen it also in my speaking classes where students

seemed more interested in what the teacher wanted than in what the student him/her self actually wanted to say or do. In contrast, but nonetheless with the same sense of lifelessness, were the voices of my students in the public school system where education seemed to be focused on the pouring in of information rather than the drawing out. Here the students were more rebellious, more resistant to the system, but the system seemed to want to continue to focus on standards that existed outside of the student. And so, there was this disconnect.

Both my students and I were disconnected from a vital energy necessary for learning to be lived as part of our lives. Both my students and I were trying to exist outside of ourselves according to the standards and expectations of other authorities. We were disconnected from our own sense of purpose. We were disconnected from our inner world, our authenticity as humans being in a class.

Seeking to Define Authenticity

Authenticity is about being real, being open and honest with ourselves. Being authentic is about meaning making by connecting to ourselves, to the place of what we believe in and what we value. Being authentic is about listening and speaking from the heart. It's about trusting both inner wisdom and in the authenticity of those around us. Authenticity is about connection, emotion, and soul which are found in the reclamation of our "trueself" (Palmer 2000, 12). It is the place of motion where motivation, desire and energy propel one forward.

I am struggling trying to define this because I am answering it from my head, trying to be succinct, organized and as exacting as possible. Perhaps that's what a

definition of anything requires, but if that's all that is necessary then why should I bother defining it at all? Where can I authentically exist in exploring this definition? Why not just look it up in the dictionary or in one of the many books I've read about being real in the classroom like *Radical Presence*, *The Courage to Teach* or *The Soul of Education*. I could quote definitions from any of those sources or a swarm of any other number of books and articles written about bringing meaningfulness, voice, creativity, and soul into the classroom. But if I am to be authentic as I speak of authenticity, then I have to go to a more passionate and connected place in me and in the classroom. That is, if I am to be authentic in answering this, then I must speak from my heart. So, let me share what is stirring in my heart.

Journal Entry #1

There is so much to say. It's just sitting on the edge ready to jump. But I'm scared to death, scared because I feel that I have nothing original to say and once I jump where will I land? Who am I to speak in a crowd of academics on any of these topics? I feel like a fraud swimming upstream in a place that is not my own.

Who am I to speak of the power of putting thoughts into words or the power of writing or of the power of personal voice and of soul in the classroom? Who am I to speak of times of silence and reflection or of

living authentically? Who am I to speak of being real?

I am a fraud because I don't know ... I don't have the answers, the facts, the proof. I am a fraud because I don't even know where I fit.

I feel like everything there is to say has already been said and that I have nothing unique to offer. I look back through notes from articles and books I've read, but I have no idea which ones to include because they are all exactly what I feel and think. They are all parts of what is in me that longs to be said, and yet they have already been written. Where do I begin and how can I trust in this process that tears at me? I am hungry to be finally freed up of these thoughts that have lingered and tussled in me for years, yet I am terrified that they will have no value, no place... no existence in the world of academics. They won't really count in this modern, scientific world.

As I write this, I can feel my voice quiver with fear. It is the fear of judgement, fear of being disqualified, and fear of never having been heard or

believed. These fears have chased me throughout my life and have had a profound effect on who I am both as an individual and as a teacher, as if those could ever exist separately. So much of my identity feels bound to this project, this product.

Fear. Fear seems to always be in that place where values and beliefs lie. Fear is part of the process of putting something of self onto paper, into music, into the voice of expression. If it matters, if it has intimacy with our sense of self, then there is fear. One of my favourite authors who speaks about the process of writing, Brenda Ueland, says in her book *If You Want to Write* that “all people who try to write (and all people long to which is natural and right) become anxious, timid, contracted, become perfectionists” (Ueland 1938, 7). And in a word, perhaps that is a definition of authenticity.

Authenticity is the opposite of contracting.

Thomas Kuhn says that sometimes the only way to understand what something is is to understand what it is not. So, what are the moments when I have contracted and felt a lack of authenticity, times where I felt insignificant, like my stories, my thoughts, my experiences, my feelings were of little consequence to the situation or audience at hand? This happens to me in situations where I feel I MUST behave in a certain way, where I must put-on a certain persona or complete a certain task in order to attain something. I believe I move away from my authenticity at times where I either don't trust that what I have to say will be heard or at times when I feel someone has power over me (either emotionally or monetarily). These two notions of trust and power then have a huge

influence on the potential for authenticity in the classroom. Both can cause one to contract.

This contracting, this fear holds me back from being authentic. Fear causes me to contract, to belittle the self, to feel that I lack uniqueness, to believe I have no authority or credence, to think I can not meet the standards that someone else has set. Fear is based in judgement and criticism and can come from past experiences of not being heard or from the current reality of an existing power structure. Fear exists where product matters more than process. And therefore, fear can prevent learning from occurring. Fear can cause the heart and mind to close up, to contract. How then can I invite authenticity when fear based in judgement and power exists in my classroom?

Much has been said and researched in the field of lowering the affective filter and meaningful communicative activities, and I believe this is the necessary groundwork for the call to authenticity in the classroom (Curran 1972, Krashen 1981). Being authentic can be scary, but it is necessary if I am to change and to exist “divided no more” (Palmer 2003).

Authenticity can create openings and can be expansive by showing, both to the self and to others, the place where the stories of identity are found. Authenticity is an invitation to tell the stories that form the values and beliefs around one’s identity. Authenticity is the window (like the one I felt at the end of my first summer at SIT) between the inner and outer world, the soulful self and the material self, the personas of the personal and the professional self. To authentically speak one’s truth is to speak with spirit and energy that is alive with purpose and action. Authenticity is about being real and that takes practice in this culture where it seems that authenticity is a tide that one

must seek. Authenticity tells the stories of who we are, where we have come from, and what we believe. Authenticity is about being real and awake to the truth of our own stories.

Stories Teach about Authenticity

I will tell you something about stories; they are not just entertainment. Don't be fooled. They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off illness and death. You don't have anything if you don't have stories.

Leslie Marmon Silko, "Stories"

Stories matter because they form the words of the personal, authentic experience which combine to form a sense of voice and identity. Stories matter because they are what memory is made of and where emotion and meaning are found. Robert Sylwester asserts that "emotion is very important to the educative process because it drives attention, which drives learning and memory" (Sylwester 1995, 72). If the story remains, then the emotional memory remains also. The way the world is conceptualized can be found in the stories we tell, the songs we sing, the dances we dance or the creations we create. Our stories are what we carry with us. Stories define us. Shakti Gattegno acknowledges that "the medium of storytelling allows one to narrate to others what one sees, as one sees it, without trying to convince anyone of anything. The medium allows listeners to pay attention to and pursue only those aspects which they find questionable, interesting, inspiring or worth further investigation" (Gattegno 2000, 1). Uncovering the stories can be a route to traverse the rivers, can be a path toward curiously inquisitive learning.

Authority comes as one's lived experience intermingles with the present situation. These stories of experience inform the way of knowing. These stories define the state of attentiveness – to what we pay attention. By listening and speaking to the stories that weave the fabric of meaning in life, we may see or become aware of the real authorities in life. The authorities come through in the stories that lie dormant waiting to be heard.

Rouff Mama emphasizes that stories are the bond of our humanity as “a way to talk to each other about each other” (Mama 2001). The stories of our own existence are the foundation of what it means to be authentic, and listening to these stories is central to expanding the territory of our awareness. Brenda Ueland says, “when we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand” (Ueland 1992, 104). Listening is central to the unfolding of authenticity. Listening “is the key to learning and to understanding” says Rouff Mama (2001), and listening to the stories of our existence is the very act of unfolding our true selves before each other in the soul's presence.

Stories are who I am and they are what I bring and my students bring to the class everyday. Without stories, how would I find my purpose, my place, my soul's longing in life and in the life of the classroom? How can my students do the same? How can they connect to the content of the class? How can they feel connected if not through their own stories?

Stories Connect to the Soul as the Inner Authority

My journey as an educator is inextricably intertwined with my life. That sounds ordinary, and yet its depth is profound. So I wonder then, why does so much of modern

education seem to separate these two: to separate that which is truly educable, that which seems most essential, most ordinary to the human soul from those parts that demonstrate what one believes. I think it is Stephen Covey who says that we are not human beings on a spiritual journey, but rather we are spiritual beings on a human journey. If this is true, then why have I felt such a lack of the existence of the soul or spirit in the systems of education in which I have taught. I often struggle in this system of curriculum demands, test scores, standards and fear based accountability because I feel more like a dispenser than a real educator. Actually, I feel ashamed because so much of modern education in the systems where I have worked espouses to the *facilitation* of learning, and yet my role has been anything but one who makes learning “facile”, easy, free or less laborious.

The journey of finding soul in my profession is deeply connected to my life. I come from a rather uneducated family, and so in the system of higher learning, I have felt ignorant, unsure and unsteady. I feel my voice is easily dismissed because I have no book knowledge, no authority to speak of things that stir in me. I have no proof, no documentation, no letters behind my name, no declaration attesting to my sincerity or honesty and nothing that may be considered scientific. As a teacher, I struggle with my role in the classroom and with what really is essential to teach to my students. I have been discredited with labels such as idealistic, sentimental and overly sensitive. It is these same labels that I now draw upon to find strength to resist a system that feels closed, cold and insensitive in allowing that which is most essential to life itself, that which is essential to the soul. Tyron Edwards once said that, the great end of education is to discipline rather than to furnish the mind; to train it to the use of its own powers rather than fill it with the accumulation of others. Indeed, our school systems can no longer

even attempt to just fill the minds of our students for now there is too much to pour in. The amount of information and knowledge that comes into our classrooms and into our homes is expanding exponentially even as I write this. Perhaps the human race needed this impetus of change for us to begin to see the folly of this kind of school system. We have turned, “wisdom into information [and] community into consumerism” (Palmer qtd. in Kessler 2000). We have turned learning into a commodity. And so it is that I now feel compelled to begin to look at my real role as an educator and put my soul into teaching in an attempt to open the hearts of my students and to invite life itself to unfold within and without the walls of my classroom.

The separation and disconnection I am referring to in this paper is ultimately the disconnection between the head and the heart, but this dichotomy has gone by many other names. Antoine De Saint-Exupery refers to it when the fox tells the little Prince that “what is essential is invisible to the eye”(2000, 75) suggesting the distinction between the seen and the unseen or the proven and the mysterious. Lucy McCormick Calkins refers to this quality also when she says that “to teach well, we do not need more techniques and strategies, as much as we need a vision of what is essential” (1994, 33). When we turn education into purely a system of trade then product is all that is essential. I wonder where the humanity of what is essential fits in such a picture.

So, what is found here is not a proclamation of the best approach. It’s not a recipe. It’s not even the basic instructions. What can be found here is a statement of the principles and beliefs found in my stories, the stories that guide who I am in the classroom and in my life. This paper is a starting point in learning to listen to the stories that have shaped the values that stir in me so that I might influence the same growth in

my students. This paper is my own invitation to learning about the self that I bring to the classroom each day.

A colleague mentioned that when she writes, she always begins from the standpoint of defence, believing that all writing is in some form, argumentative. I believe this defensive position is the position of academic writing where the audience is always thought to be sceptical and where the writer can't just come out and say something without proving it either from their own official studies or from credible sources of other studies. I believe this scientific view of reality indeed has a place, but I think that place has become the dominant position. In other words, that modernism continues to dominate our school systems and institutions by demanding certifiable evidence making education a system of delivery of the dominant voices rather than a system of discovery of individuals, a system where knowings of the heart, intuition or the soul have become secondary to those of the head. It seems that the scientific thought of the modern era has made the heart subservient to the head, has made the concrete have more significance than matters of the abstract, has made outer knowing more important than inner knowing. When only one way of knowing and thinking is valued or seen as relevant and significant, all other forms of knowing are discounted or minimized and as such, voices are lost.

In my experience, my teaching and learning, my education has focused heavily on what is concrete, and now is the time for me to change my focus so that I can engage my heart and the hearts of my students, so that we can learn how to connect to what is meaningful and authentic in each of us.

Numerous educators, theologians and great thinkers of time have reiterated the notions that education should indeed serve the spiritual unfoldment of the individual (John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Yoshiharu Nakagawa, Ron Miller), and so we as educators must begin to educate the heart, but how is that done? I don't believe it is found in any one technique or approach but instead it comes from the identity and integrity of those who come to teach in our lives and who have both the courage and the awareness to act as mirrors of our own potential.

Summary

I began this chapter with a poem about rivers which serves me both as a metaphor of consciousness and as a reminder of the history that has formed my sense of knowing and understanding of the world for I have always lived near rivers. The flow of two rivers symbolizes the disconnect found in my life both personally and professionally. I have defined and described the role of authenticity in trying to reconnect to what is essential and meaningful so that my life can be lived with inner knowing and purpose in an effort to connect to the humanity of education. And now I am turning toward the place where the stories of my identity lie so that I can affirm what is integral to my own authentic presence in my classes, so that I may hear what lessons these past experiences have to teach me, and so that I may become conscious of the place where my beliefs come from. This is the documentation of my journey to find the place where authentic voices can live and grow in my classroom. This writing exists as a culmination of learning at a specific point in time. It is not an end point but just a point. For now, this is where I am in the flow of the river.

The focus of this paper has emerged through the telling of these stories; for therein, lies the pivotal truths to unite the two rivers of my identity. It is these truths that have enabled me to begin the journey toward authenticity and humanizing my classroom. To find these truths, it is necessary for me to traverse three tributaries that continuously and repeatedly feed the rivers of my consciousness. My identity and integrity is informed by traversing the tributary of listening, the tributary of questing, and the tributary of communing, and it is these three practices that will assist me to place the process of learning at the centre of my teaching – to authenticate the practice of learning.

CHAPTER TWO

The Tributary of Listening

Can we really ever know self? And in that moment of trying to define and claim hold of the self, don't the waters of change flow past in the never ending tide of re-forming?

Knowing self is a process then. It is a process that begins by listening to the stories that form the understanding of the self that exists today. It is a process of listening to the stories that form one's set of values and aspirations. Knowing self is a process of gathering the stories that burn to be told.

Ancient people in cultures of long ago would gather round the fire to tell their stories, to share their insights and to solve their problems. These people of the distant past knew that learning and wisdom was revealed through the process of living, listening, and sharing. They knew that life is the great sage, the consummate teacher. These indigenous people from around the globe would gather round the fire to tell the stories and to listen to the voices who told them. Sitting in circle around a fire, searching for the

words, to find the voice of authority, to be taught by life, they listened to the truths that burned in each of them and in their collective selves.

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.

So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.

When we are able to build
open spaces in the same way
we have learned
to pile on the logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel
together, that make fire possible.

We only need to lay a log
lightly time to time.
A fire
grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings
in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way.

Judy Brown, "Fire"

The opening is here, now. I make a space by creating an opening, an invitation to come sit by this fire and to listen. I am invited to listen to the stories that have shaped my beliefs and values and created the storyline of my identity. To know one's identity, one

must know their history and have a sense of connection to place. These three parts; knowing identity, knowing history and knowing place form what Leslie Turpin referred to in a presentation she gave during the summer of 2004 as the three legged stool of culture and selfhood. So, I will sit on that stool by the fire and listen to the stories that rise to teach me about how I can live ever more authentically.

Each day my students and I enter a classroom together to consider the values and beliefs found in the books and teachings of others and each day those stories coincide or clash with the stories that lie in us. We don't come to the table of learning empty. We arrive with a threshold of meaning and we intend to construct more of that meaning together. That's why we gather. Communication is a process of meaning making.

To know myself is to be in communion with both my inner self (or soul self) and with those around me. To know myself is to give voice to my deepest values and beliefs and to find a way to live those in alignment or at least in consciousness toward alignment. To know myself is to be fully aware that I teach from this self both as a parent and as an educator. Therefore, to teach is to know myself. A fellow S.I.T. classmate, Brent Arndt, once said that he wanted to become a better person, so that he could become a better teacher, and I now carry that mantra to encourage the stories of my existence to be told, so that the personas of self and teacher can merge together like the meeting of the rivers. How is it then that I have come to know myself and how has that influenced what I do in the classroom? What has influenced the development of my self, my voice and my own inner authority as a person and as an academic?

This story arose from the question of who am I as a cultural being in response to the exploration of where my values and beliefs come from. This took me into my childhood, into my history.

The Story of Self as a Cultural Being

My parents are fourth and fifth generation Canadians. We are as mongrel as they come. A little French, some Irish, more English and of course Scottish, a bit of German (although Dad would adamantly deny that) and even some Aboriginal, but no one knows what tribe. Perhaps I could say I am for the most part of European ancestry, so why isn't that enough to direct me to know who I am as a cultural being? Is culture just a label that identifies ancestral connections? How can it be when I feel no connection, and when I know so little about any of them? What evidence of culture did I have as I grew up?

We practiced no religion. My father was angry at all religions. They are a hoax and for the weak minded according to him. (According to him, his mother abandoned him at the age of six and, he angrily adds, she was a Christian. That's all I ever heard of her.) My mother was a practicing pagan. She loved the excitement of Santa Clause and the Easter Bunny. I remember the day when I learned that Santa Clause didn't actually exist. His story had been the only story I knew of. His story was my truth and then I discovered it was a lie. I have no memory even of going to a church or saying a prayer until I was well into my teen years when I began to ask others about spiritual rituals, but even then I was more

attracted to the ritual than the belief or perhaps I was attracted to the sense of connection that ritual seemingly brings to true believers. So, there was no religion associated to the culture that formed me.

My sense of cultural connection is one that feels more nomadic. By the time I was twenty, I had lived in more than twenty houses and five different cities. I didn't know about differences in religion and ethnicity, and yet I felt totally different than anyone else. We remained at a distance and on the move. I remember Sonya's family. Twelve people whose parents spoke something I thought was pretend living in this small pink house where they tended a huge garden and were continuously cooking. They went to a church, and they had plaques on the walls of their home attesting to their religion. That's all I knew of defining culture. I didn't know what kind of religion, what language they spoke or what foods they cooked, but I did notice the sounds, the smells, the fullness. Their house was overflowing with fullness. We, however, lived in a bigger but not a grander house. Then there was Jodi's house or Bonnie's house. Both seemed organized, clean, pristine and even 'smart'. Everything had a place and they too seemed to know their place in this world and in their families. Their parents were educated; I never heard them swear or saw them drink. That would be how I might have described it if I had the conceptualization of education as part of culture. It would be years before I could even recognize the substance of what I compared myself to. It would be years.

One predominant feeling I had while growing-up was a feeling of insufficiency of not measuring up. I felt insufficient when compared to any and all material wealth (and it's associated 'cleanliness'). I felt 'out of place' in any atmosphere of 'learning'. Perhaps I absorbed these attitudes from my parents or perhaps they are indicative of the interface that happens when a person moves from one socio-linguistic reality into the next.

My mother, who completed grade eleven education, grew up in poverty in a family of twelve kids. I don't even know the 'truth' about why they were so poor. The pieces I've heard reveal a family that was inept because of ignorance and the lack of desire that coincides with that. From this void, grew all kinds of tempestuous behaviors many of which Mom still only half hints at when she reveals her craving for unity in a family that's splintered. Mom has been a binding force to keep her family and ours together despite the fights, divorces and deaths. She can endure and still keep her head above the mire (although her language often reflects the filth she was surrounded by). I have learned from her to hold my head up despite feeling such deep shame and despair at times. Mom is a fighter, a survivor, but she's also an angry woman! I remember one day coming home from school. I may have been eight or nine years old, and I wanted a snack and began to complain there was nothing to eat. She exploded with a rage I have since learned to fear. It was a rage that comes from old wounds and lurking fears. I know this because I have adopted this rage, and so it resides in me now also.

She began to throw food and slam the cupboards and she yelled from some place deep, shadowed place from within. She said I was never again to say there was no food in the house. That she had worked hard to ensure there was food on the table and that I knew nothing of hunger, so I had no right to complain. I never did again.

Dad on the other hand, just barely completed a grade three education. I remember reading to him and never knowing it was because he couldn't. He has since learned to read and write although at a very elementary level. He feels both shame and pride around his illiteracy which is evident in the fact that he would never even use such an articulate but harsh word to identify it. His pride is attached more to my mother than him though as it was her influence that perhaps seeded the courage for him to learn. I remember her sitting with Dad late into the night to teach him how to write a cheque and to understand what a fraction was. He wanted this information to pursue his interest in gun-smithing. I jokingly tell him that it's because of his education that the spelling of my name is so unique (D-I-A-N is phonetically misspelled and by the 'rules' should be pronounced as a single syllable word). He laughs, but I know he doesn't understand what I mean. And in our laughter I feel some sense of connection.

My father was mostly absent even when he was home. He is a quiet man who is actually frozen in unmet needs which makes him self-centered. I'm sure that's one of the biggest reasons Mom and Dad divorced.

I remember the day the divorce became public knowledge. In those days, there were no other families in our school who had actually divorced, so this was big news I guess for the staff of the school I attended. A well intending teacher and two other 'interested parties' called me out of class just to check how I was handling the divorce. They asked me these questions while we stood outside the classroom door. I don't remember many details other than a feeling of being different and just wanting to be normal.

Dad never wanted the divorce. It just affirmed many of his beliefs that nothing is ever certain in life, that you can never trust anyone's word on anything and especially if their word is stated at a time that they think they're in love! I carried these placards of insecurity and doubt into my own marriage for years.

So, between Mom's stand-up and fight, hold your head up high and work hard and harder attitude and Dad's not trusting anyone, I guess I was destined to spend some time alone searching for both community and connection. I became a nomad. I tried on many different lifestyles searching for something that fit. I did the conservative religious group searching for stability maybe, depth probably. I tried Mormonism, Lutheranism, Native cleansing, self-discovery, Christian Science, Buddhism, crystals and chanting. I meandered over to the 'back to basics' and the 'hippy group' searching for a sense of connection to the earth. I tried on the regalia of fringe groups, of upright individuals, of the laid back and

relaxed and the structured and goal centered. I moved into the soft and the timid and then the loud and the boisterous. From the party-like to the homebody, I wandered, but all along I felt alone, isolated, disconnected even LOST.

The sense of being lost seems strongly associated also with having no memory, for memory comes from being connected to one's sense of place and from a feeling of belonging. Being lost and having no memory are two beliefs and two reoccurring nightmares I have about myself.

Between both sides of the family, there are only three of forty-seven cousins who have completed anything beyond grade twelve, most dropped-out of high school. I used to joke that my memory was so poor because I did too many drugs in high school, but I know it's because I'm afraid. I'm afraid I won't remember and that somehow I'll be exposed and people will see that I really don't know. I'm afraid that I am at a socio-economic disadvantage. It is a sense that I have stepped into a world that my family has no understanding of or connection to. It is a world unfamiliar to them and yet one that is now a part of me. I have no background to it. I have immigrated. It is the sense of having a lack of knowledge that has made me feel separate from others and actually to separate myself from others.

As a migrant, I have learned how to be like a chameleon; I have learned how to be eclectic. There is beauty in being eclectic, a beauty that comes from being open and having the ability to suspend judgment, but with it comes the pain of

never feeling full. Fullness comes in part at least by knowing your place, but mostly by knowing your stories, knowing what it is that brings meaning to life and simply just knowing.

In 2004, I attended a presentation by one of my S.I.T instructors, Leslie Turpin, where she rhetorically asked the audience, “What blocks memory”. But I wonder, what creates it? Where do our stories come from? What makes them “worthy” of being told, worthy of being remembered? Why does my story feel so “storyless”? I believe it is the part of me that continues to search for a sense of community and connection. I believe memory is connection. That by feeling connected, one remembers - one can remember. Our stories define our role, but without a voice, they have no space to exist in. Stories need someone to hear them. The stories that feed and fill us need both the space within silence and a place in community before they can form into something that identifies us. The story of the culture of my family is a shaken mixture of memories, fears, heartbreaks and challenges that often leaves me feeling unsure and unsteady. The stories that have formed my family are only now beginning to be acknowledged as part of who we are rather than stories we’d rather forget. I am only now beginning to see them as the waters that flow through my beliefs to shape every move, every thought.

My family still cannot listen perhaps because we are so preoccupied with containing the stories, with holding in and holding back. We are all too tied up in

ourselves; we are trying so desperately to be heard that no one knows how to listen. We are all searching for a voice, to be seen, to make connections.

So, when I think of who I am and what my sense of culture is, I start with these memories, these stories, and I realize it is here that I must give space and voice to listen to the authority of my lived experiences that have formed my sense of values and beliefs for from my sense of emptiness and lack of connection, I now revel in times of abundance and inter-relatedness. Without these stories, I may never have known the depth of joy found in times of authentic listening and communing. I may never have known that life is not purely incidental actions but rather that learning arises by seeing the significance, the power, the connection between and amongst all the events of life. Without these stories, I may never have experienced the vulnerability of a migrant, the fear of not remembering because of having no connection to the people or ideas around me. Without these stories, I may never have understood how so much of the self could be surrendered for the sake of fitting-in, meeting a standard or being normal. The stories that arose in answer to who I am as a cultural being came as teachers, and they will teach if I have ears to listen and a heart to hear, if I can give them enough “breathing space” as Judy Brown says in her poem at the start of this chapter. My acculturation, however gritty at times, has empowered me in as many ways as it has disempowered me. I can claim these stories as part of me with no shame because it is from their tattered remains that I have begun to weave the fabric of self as I see it today. I have a story however fragmented it may be. I have a personal story to offer.

And too, I have the stories that form the public persona of self.

The Story of Self as a Teacher

My public voice, the esteemed persona of the educated, lives through my work as a teacher. I wonder what might have been, had I not gone to university, had I not become a practitioner who works with words. I have lived a lifetime infatuated with the life and voices of the inspired, the revered, the dignified, and the well educated, and I have constantly felt that I don't fit-in, that I have nothing worthy of being said. I have feared that the world of academics would laugh at the simplicity of my thoughts for surely these thoughts, these ideas have all been written before. I have nothing new to add. I do not measure up. And when a colleague questions my pronunciation, my grammar or the purpose of an activity, I feel the potential for entrapment like my guise will soon be exposed to show the fraud that I am, like the roots of my upbringing, holding the potential to scandalize my credence. My public voice has often been lived through the veils of expectations. I thought it was the expectations of others. Only now am I beginning to know it as the expectation that comes from my own ideals about dignity, worth, and respect.

The merging of these two voices of the private and public voice began with me directing a play entitled A Voice of My Own by Elinor Jones (1979). The play is a woven tapestry of the voices of women authors punctuated by verses of poetry and song. It was written and produced as a collective of voices. The melding of all these voices struck a chord of such deep reverence and meaning to me that I knew

upon first reading it that I had to direct it. I had to be part of the resurrection of the voices that formed the play. This was my first recognizable or conscious step toward “saying” something intelligent and meaningful to a public audience. This play represented something in me. Some part of me could live through this play. As odd as it may sound, this play was part of me. It was a means to expressing some truth that existed in me, some truth about me as a person. To me, this was not just a play, and I was not just the director. I was stepping into the words of another like slipping into the shoes of an old friend. Some part of me came to life through these words as if I were seeing some deep part of my true self, my intimate self and I was doing this before a public audience that would be smarter, more well-read, more analytical, more perceptive and more critical – more knowing than I was. I was excitedly speaking out, stepping out but I was scared to death. Who was I to present such a piece? Who was I to risk speaking through the words of such famous authors as Sappho, George Sand, Emily and Anne Bronte, and Lillian Hellman. The play was woven with verse and song, and even now seven years since I directed the play, I can recite the words of the chorus. Each stanza remains as an echo of realities that I have lived. The experiences of my life exist in the stanzas of this song.

*When I was very young I made up stories
I hypnotized my friends with magic lies
Of course the words all got away
I couldn't make them stay
And I didn't think it mattered if they died.*

*When I got older I wrote down my stories
And signed them with a hundred other names*

*Of course the words were really mine
But I hid behind the lines
And said I wasn't ready for the fame*

*But when I think of all that's gone before me
And how the years just seem to slip away
Then I have to make the choice
To speak with my own voice
So when I'm gone a part of me will stay*

*Yes, I like to think of all that's gone before me
How all I've done is part of what has passed
For a while this song is mine
Then it's handed down the line
And singing makes it certain it will last*

*I've got so many things to say
Took me so long to find a way
So many years spent all alone
Seeking a voice of my own
Elinor Jones, "A Voice of My Own"*

The Necessity of Time

I wonder then what is needed to create the container for stories to be shared and for my students to find the stories that have shaped them. In reading *About the Natural Cycle* by Bernice McCarthy (2000), I remember being struck by the idea that learning is a cycle that begins with experience, moves through a process of reflecting, to a place of conceptualizing and on to the phase of acting or achieving until the learner returns in a spiralling way to the point of the next experience. McCarthy says, "learning is not whole or complete until we get back ...to being" (2000, 13-14). She goes on to say that, "learning is a from-to experience...we go from ourselves to the newness" (2000, 18). What stands out for me is that all learning must start with my experience of self, and then I must have time to reflect on what that experience means to the self – going from self to the experience through reflection. Learning itself is a process of interpretation. Meaning

is formed as a response to the world of experiences. This has had a profound impact on me because what I felt I needed as a learner and what I have experienced in my own classrooms, is that there is very little time to reflect, to notice the interpretation. Instead, the cycle of learning in much of the field of education seems to skip a cog and jump right into asking why something is important (to the place of conceptualizing), but time isn't being given to actually listening for the importance to "speak". We have yet to listen to how the experience resonates within each of us.

If the goal of all teaching is to lead students toward further knowing, if it is to promote the process of drawing out rather than pouring in, if the expectation is to have students become leaders, then they must be encouraged to listen to the truths of their own interpretations. But how can they do that if there is no time for reflection? I believe much more time must be given to the power of listening through inner reflection, to listen to the yearnings of our own hearts, to listen for the questions that intrigue our passions (which is to quest), and to listen to the whispers of the world around us in the quiet of nature in the places that we live.

Journal Entry #2

As I sit in this chaos of my writing process feeling overwhelmed by it all, I notice how my anxiety seems to be attached to the notions of time and product. Time is really all that anyone has in life, and so perhaps that's why wasting it can feel like the greatest sin of all. Yet, I sit here stumbling and spinning in the chaos, trying to control the flow and

the outcome, trying to scheme the final product. Am I wasting time? Somewhere amongst the placards of values that rule my life, I carry one that reads, 'Thou shall not waste time' and another that says, 'Thou must produce something if time and life are to be seen as worthwhile or valuable". I have heard these maxims in the echoes of my personal past and in the hallowed halls of education. It seems that waste is linked to the quality of a final product that is assessed and measured by a standard beyond the self. If the job isn't finished, if there is nothing to show to others, if the outcome is not clearly measurable, then time has been wasted and there is no value in the final outcome.

Time - I seem to always be running against it as if it we're some obstacle to be overcome. I am continuously feeling that there isn't enough and no matter how hard I work, I haven't done it all, done it right, done it enough. I have not succeeded. As if time were an enemy that needed to be outrun and out done- similar perhaps to the enemy camps along the river.

So, how can time be used wisely in a classroom? Is there some secret to time management, some lesson plan format that is yet to be revealed to the masters of technique? I realize this is slipping back into an old mode of thinking.

A Story About Time

I am reminded of the two principles that Shakti Gattegno suggested to our group of grad students in the summer of 2004 at SIT. Shakti began her Silent Way lesson by asking us what these two principles suggested:

“Do not teach them what they already know”

and “Do not do for them what they can do for themselves”.

She didn’t stand and deliver any specific product but instead took us through a process of self reflection by having us describe and probe our own thoughts and experiences. In the end, I walked away not only with the knowledge of these two principles but with concrete experiences that spoke to these in me. I had constructed the meaning of these principles by connecting to the experiences and stories of my life. Only after carrying this construction for months did I begin to see and know how to apply them or act upon them.

I carried these two principles into my IYTP year, but it wasn’t until the practicum that I really saw what these meant in relation to time and product at the application level in the moments of a day.

In my journal entries to my supervisor during the IYTP, I had continually mentioned the restrictions of time that I felt in the context I work. However much I tried

resisting the power of time in my life (I even refused to wear a watch as my own silent protest to time), I continued to feel that I never had enough time in my classes.

Bonnie had been working with me on reducing the amount of time spent explaining to my students. She noted that I often wrote the word explain in my lesson plans. She questioned why I felt I needed to put my words in where the students' words might be instead. Each time she asked this I realized, I was talking because I thought I needed to give something to my students. As if I was the giver. As if that ensured I was accountable in delivering the "goods". I felt I had to explain, decipher and decode everything, yet the students could do it themselves. Much of my teaching time was based on these lectures of information-giving where I spoke and they listened, where I did the conceptualizing and meaning making for them.

A Story of Saving Time

On this one particular day as students discussed questions related to a story we had read and I walked around to listen in and be available if they had a question, I began to notice how dependent I was on fulfilling that role of the explainer. As we came together as a class, I asked the students what questions or answers they weren't sure of, and I asked other members of the class to help clarify or add to the ideas already presented. I began to see my role as guiding them to find the answers, and that I didn't have to reiterate or explain anything. I simply opened the floor to help them do what they could do for themselves. I gave them time. In the end, I must have been somewhat dubious as I began to ask repeatedly if there was anything they needed me to explain or clarify!

We ended early that day, a first in my twenty year career of teaching. We finished because I didn't fill in the time explaining. Instead, the students explained to me and to each other what the story meant to themselves. They didn't need me to put my words to it all because they had put their own words to it. I didn't need to tell them what they had found out for themselves. I had saved time by giving them time -- time to reflect.

Malidoma Patrice Some', a teacher of Dagara culture, observes the fast pace of life and the speed that permeates the industrialized "machine-dominated" culture of the west (Some' 1993, 16). One of the Dagara elders points out to Some' that "to move is to keep oneself distracted" and in the western world where so many people are always running we "are hard put to listen" (1993, 16). Time out of the cycle of the machine-like culture is needed if we are to focus and not be distracted. And I believe it is this focused reflection and listening that is most necessary for meaningful learning to occur.

Journal Entry #3

Immediately, I hear the analytical part of me, the idealist, the side based in the concrete ask the question of how this can be done. This side quickly asks why something is important at all. This causes me to doubt these ideas, to doubt myself, feeling like these principles are folly. They are whimsical and

unrealistic. The other side of me quivers longing for affirmation by beginning to believe. This culture that I live and teach in has little time for curiosity and stirrings of the heart. This culture wants to know immediately how to apply this, how to make it move, how to make it become part of the machine to keep it all going. Perhaps principles and beliefs have no place in the machine-like, scientific, academic world that seeks action plans and outcomes. Perhaps the only models that are accepted are those that keep the motions going, but I believe practical solutions do begin with principles and sometimes these principles may seem impractical. I believe change begins by listening to the hope that aspires toward something greater, something more authentic, something more realistic, something that brings alignment. I believe action does begin with a thought. I do believe this but I long for acceptance from the culture of the machine.

With this belief in the necessity of having time for reflection, I headed into my interim teaching year from S.I.T. taking the practice of Way of Council as part of a daily Go Around in my advanced writing classes. I continue to use this practice as a way of giving time to what is personal and meaningful for each person in the class, and I use it as

the fertilizer for the ideas as writers as well as nourishment and affirmation as individuals. As students enter the classroom, they are asked to lay-out their writing materials such as their journal, pencil and dictionary or their computer before the class begins. Some students will begin setting up the chairs into a circle while I turn on the music, open the curtains and set-out the flowers and centre piece (a cloth where the flowers are placed as well as a variety of other treasures and talking pieces). I write the plan for the day and the Go Around question on the board. Students are aware of the basic norms for Go Around and are frequently reminded that they have a choice in how to respond in Go Around. They can respond either to the question, greet the class and let us know how they're doing, or they can pass. Sometimes, I will start the Go Around, but most times, a student starts. The first person to go selects which talking piece they'd like today for the group. This has added an interesting flare on quite a number of occasions! When the talking piece has gone all the way around and those who passed are given the choice if they'd like to speak now, the talking piece is returned to the centre and I may comment by making connections, synthesizing or directing questions. Time and time again, student's feedback tells me how important, relevant and powerful this time is to them as people and as writers. It has become a way to give time for reflection, time out of the machine like culture in which we find ourselves. This practice has created time in my classes. It is time to create a space, to gather, to listen, and to reflect on the stories of who we are as individuals and as a group.

Listening is Enhanced through Ritual or Routines

Rituals, structures and routines can create an atmosphere that invites authenticity into the classroom and enhances the capacity to listen to the opinions and thoughts of others. Rituals and routines can focus the attention while creating an opening for those currents that run deep in our lives and bring meaning to our daily work.

Unconsciously, my first step toward inviting authenticity into the classroom was itself a move away from the fast paced machine-like culture that existed in the buildings and halls of the university where I work. In order to focus our attention and shift our energy so that we could pay attention in a different way, I began to attend to the atmosphere or container of the classroom.

Despite the effort, I knew I needed reminders of things from outside the world of academics. I needed to create a haven of time and space to remind myself to be more conscious. So, I would bring in fresh flowers each week, and I would lay them out on a tie-dyed blue cloth along with various treasures such as a rock, a seashell, a finger puppet or a medicine bag from my journeys in life (later the students began to add to this center piece as well). Then I would press play on the CD player and open the curtains as a reminder to let in these qualities of life and light. It all seemed so small, but it represented something much bigger, and I noticed that students would often comment and compliment upon these things. I noticed students look at the flowers when they spoke during our Go Around, and I have heard students say that the flowers feel like gifts (and indeed they are). This daily ritual of preparing the class takes time, but it creates an opening to slow down and to focus for all of us. It has become our breathing space as Judy Brown suggests in her poem at the start of this chapter. Over and over again students would compliment on the sense of ease that existed in our class, and this space

created a way of talking that students said was different from other classes. We spoke differently here. We began to talk about what mattered to each of us individually and collectively.

Rituals can be evocative like the time one of my instructors at S.I.T. setup a bowl and a pitcher of water and invited us to come forward to dedicate our lesson, to focus our listening, to invite our attention. What a powerful, authentic listening lesson that was!

Rituals can be routines such as ensuring that each day the first ten minutes are set aside to check-in with the group or to spend time journaling to check-in on ourselves.

Rituals free up time and space by focusing attention even though they are “not compatible with the rapid rhythm that industrialization has injected into life” (Some’ 1993, 19). Ritual is simply a way of slowing down, to stop running away from anything, to stop seeking distraction. When we know what to expect, when we know we will be given time, we learn to relax and to focus.

Listening is Enhanced through Focused Attention and Response

The man whispered, “God, speak to me”
And a meadowlark sang
But, the man did not hear.
So the man yelled, “Creator, speak to me”
And the thunder rolled across the sky.
But, the man did not listen.
The man looked around and said,
“Allah, let me see you.”
And a star shone brightly.
But, the man did not see.
And, the man shouted,
“Buddha, show me a miracle.”
And a life was born.
But the man did not notice.
So, the man cried out in despair,
“Touch me Kukpi, and let me know you are here.”

Whereupon, Kukpi reached down and touched the man.
But, the man brushed the butterfly away.
And walked on.

The world of authenticity speaks in whispers. It doesn't shout. It doesn't come in grandness and glory. It is humble. To find authenticity is to attend to the whispers of all that is yet unspoken.

Ram Dass says the greatest challenge, the simplest act, the most healing response is simply to listen (2003). We must re-learn how to listen to the heart of another and listen to the impulses of our own yearnings and in so doing, we must not minimize ourselves. Because in that moment of making ourself small, we take away the divine and lessen the potential for change for hearing our inner voice which can make a difference in this world. Listening is the first act toward activism toward making a difference. If we are to make a difference, if we are to leave this world a better place, we need to listen deeply.

In classrooms, we must create openings where this kind of listening can occur if education is about making a difference, if education is about actions based on beliefs.

What is missing in our schools of today is a time for reflection, a time to focus the attention. Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 5-6) states that to find a period of potential growth, people need a time and space to be able to concentrate and focus on an achievable task. People need time to identify their potentialities and to listen to what stirs in them in response to the material or the voices and expressions of others. This kind of self-listening is found in children as they play and in adults when they "experiment". Brenda Ueland (1992) says that listening to self is found through explorative expression. She goes on to say:

... it is only by expressing all that is inside you that purer and purer streams come. You are taught in school to put down on paper only the bright things. Wrong. If you hold back the dull things, you are certain to hold back what is clear and beautiful and true and lively (106).

In order to be real in education, we as educators must attend much more to the art of listening rather than our form of speaking. We must learn how to attend to our students' whole self and help them learn also how to listen to that self. Learning how to listen must become part of our educational system. We as educators and as human beings must learn how to attend to the words and the movements of self and of others around us. We must learn how to attend to matters of the heart. So, I am compelled to learn how to authentically listen so that those, in my classes at least, may be freer to express who they really are.

A Story of Listening and Responding

I remember when my son, Jacob, would cry and well intending people would say that I shouldn't spoil him by going to him right away. They said he would control me if I listened to his cries. And I wondered about the truth found in this old belief. Are human beings inherently manipulative? Does responding to someone's needs cause people to become manipulative? And, isn't denying the need just as manipulative? Does denying the voice of someone in need (whether "real" or not) change the need or just the expression?

I am reminded of Maslow's hierarchy of needs where the higher needs toward self actualization can only "come into focus once all the needs that are lower down in the

pyramid are mainly or entirely satisfied” (Wikipedia 2005, 1). Brenda Ueland (1992) tells the story of the man whom she listened to for hours before he was finally able to say what was central and only then could he turn to her to inquire of her stories. Only after he felt heard could he learn how to listen. If we hold back the stories that need telling, if we hold back the songs of our life, then we can not listen either to ourselves or to others around us. When something inside us is denied, it doesn’t quieten the voice.

Parents respond differently now. Beliefs seem to have changed, maybe. Perhaps we are more responsive to the cries of an infant. So how are we with the cries of others in need? How about our own soul’s cry for what it needs? How about the voice of what is most intimate in each of us? And how can that form of liberation, the liberation of the individual voice, be present in my class? Is there space for authentic expression of the soul’s longing in my class? Is there a space for the stories of students and what they believe defines them? Is there space to listen and to feel? Is there a space for affirmation? Is there space for humanity in my classroom? These are the questions I hear when I listen to the stirrings of the self as teacher as a human BEing.

Listening and Responding or NOT

I am surrounded by a crowd,
But from all directions, silence is calling out.
People are like figures carved in stone,
I look towards them
But stones cannot see where I am looking.

I rang so many bells
But still
From all directions, silence is calling out.
My voice echoes in the air,

This single being of mine makes so much noise!
The heart screams and goes “thump, thump”,
The crackling of my breathing loudly complains,
In my veins blood flows swiftly
Like a river in flood.
This noise from deep inside me
Mixes with the sounds of the wind.
This noise of silence May it not work on me,
And the deep stillness of everything
May it not turn me into stone.
Attiya Dawood, “The Voice of Silence”

I wonder what holds back the voice of truth. What causes authenticity to retract or freeze up or turn to stone? What limits the ability to really listen?

Journal Entry #4

I have sat with these questions for days now and have written very little as a result. I am stumbling with how to answer this. I stumble because although I have an opinion, a perspective, an idea, I feel I can't just say it. I can't just give my opinion in this forum. I'm afraid that it wouldn't be acceptable. I feel that I must find the words and ideas of someone else who can justify it for me. I am led to believe that I must find someone else that can prove the accuracy of my ideas, my experiences and my interpretations. I must seek credence through an outside authority. My experience alone feels inadequate like I have no authority. My life itself

and my interpretations of it have no authority in the world of academics. I cannot author anything without an external authority. I can not authorize my own ideas. I do not feel like an authority, and so I turn to stone outside even though the inside of me "makes so much noise".

Currently, it seems that authority exists outside of self in education. To me, this seems odd in a culture where the ideals of independence, creativity, individuality and critical thinking are espoused. Intriguing that our youth are asked to not follow the crowd, yet answers found within the realm of the individual experience are disallowed or discredited, and so what else can they follow? I wonder how much our systems are still entrapped in the scientific model of beliefs where ideas alone cannot exist without proof and at least one other corroborator. And if our belief systems are trapped in a model where only the values of the masses are valid, then how can individual thought occur in an atmosphere where nothing can be spoken and especially not written until it is proven from an outside source? How can we build and support trust in individual (or un-divided) knowing, our own inner voice of wisdom? Scientific models of power and oppression are outdated in a classroom if the intention is to be inclusive and inviting of all voices and opinions. Perhaps the current paradigm is too set in seeking answers that are right or wrong, looking for the perfect answer, the exact response, the best technique. I am once again intrigued by Thomas Kuhn's thoughts that "this is not a process of evolution toward anything"(MFP 2005, 2). Instead, ideas are simply evolving, changing, in the

flow of searching for questions and answers or interpretations that are increasingly more refined.

I am also struck by the forms of silence and invisibility as it relates to confidence in speaking and writing. It could be the kind of silence caused by ignorance and not noticing – where something is just not on our radar screen, so how could I address it. It could also be the kind of silence that results in not having the ‘right’ words to express it. This kind of silence is where we feel very alone – not yet knowing that others have experienced that part of life also. Then there is the more insidious but no less prevalent form of silence that results by not entitling someone to speak because they have no authorized authority. As Donna Topping (2002) says in *Slipping Writing into the Content Area*, how can students claim their inner voice of authority if they have never been given the time and the means to find it? This kind of silencing happens because only those individuals who have the favour of the masses are given audience to express ideas freely and unabashedly. I recently heard someone say that we feel authority when we are heard and when we don’t stand-alone. So, how can I in a classroom and in my day to day life hear and support ideas that are not common or perhaps not even favourable? I wonder how many great ideas are lost because the speaker or writer stood alone - where the ideas did not conform to the norms. I wonder how standing alone influences one’s sense of dignity and uprightness.

A Story of Holding Back and Being Silenced

This is the memory of the parties and my struggle to show whomever might be looking in (or perhaps it was just me) that our family did have dignity.

Mom and Dad were going through a divorce. Mom was freed and wanting fun. The parties went late into the night. I remember waking on many occasions to call out for Mom as I was too shy and embarrassed to go out to the living room myself, or perhaps I was too scared of what I might see. Sometimes Mom would come to stand in the doorway as a shadow against the hall light. Other times, one of her guests would come. Maybe they came to see what this kid really looked like or to see if they might quieten me. Other times no one would come to acknowledge my cries, so I would pound my feet against the wall. This was always sure to get someone to come, but usually they came in anger and protest of their own. So, I felt I had no voice. No way to tell them to be quiet that I needed to sleep and wanted to live a quiet normal life like the Kreigers next door.

Sometimes when I felt I had no choice, when I felt that no one wanted to hear me, I would squeeze and tighten my body together as if to scream inside. I felt as if I would implode if I could just do it hard enough. And then when I felt completely desperate, I would take my pillow that I used to cover my ears, and I would flip my body halfway out the window, pull the window down to touch my back, and I would press my face into my pillow to scream as loud as I could, just to release the energy.

I needed just to give voice to what was screaming to be let out, so that I wouldn't freeze-up and become a stone as Attiya Dawood refers to in her poem. The inner self knows what it needs if we can just learn how to listen.

Listening to One's Own Authority

The world would be a Silent place
if the only birds who sang
were those that sang the best
Author unknown

With this, I begin to question then, what voices are silenced in a class and which ones are given the most air time and how the amount of time given can amplify and refine certain voices while diminishing and coarsening others. Indeed, this sensoring of voices reflects that which is given authority and that which is valued. However, the silenced voices are not silenced indefinitely, but rather silenced only to select audiences.

Journal Entry #5

I am having such a hard time writing this because so much of my writing in the past has been done just for me as a means of self-expression to explore the dynamics of my own thinking and emotions. I have rarely had to and even more rarely chosen to share my writing with a public audience. This difference in perspective of audience changes the flow of my own

thoughts and the freedom I feel in expressing those thoughts. In order to place these thoughts before a public audience, I have to edit them. I don't mean the kind of editing for sentence structure, mechanics, clarity or coherence that is necessary just to be understood. The kind of editing that I feel I have to utilize in writing this is more of a sensoring of ideas. Now, perhaps sensoring ideas is both respectful and necessary in order to preserve dignity and decorum, but the kind of editing that I feel in writing this has more to do with the limiting of ideas because there may not be sufficient evidence or because no one with authority may have said it before. The one with authority is the one who can publish. As if only those who have the credentials can have the voice that will be heard in academic circles. If a voice has no scientific evidence, no proven research, no published materials then those voices are discredited. The perspective of the individual experience or even the co-constructed experience holds little water in these revered halls of power in the field of education. Yet, the kind of voice I long for is the voice where one's truth can be expressed as one potential interpretation of the world around us.

Ideally for me as a teacher, being authentic means that all voices have a place in my classroom and where voices are sensed only by the degree of consciousness towards one's intentions. Each day as we check-in through the Go Around, we speak to what stirs in us while we hold the talking piece. This is a time to speak from the heart and to listen from the heart. It is a time when one's words are offered to the group to share individual perspectives. It is a time where individuals are not interrupted, or questioned. It is a time for reflection not conversation. Students here can share their ideas and values that might not otherwise be given space in a classroom. To censor what can and can not be said according to what can or can not be proven, according to what has or has not already been said by experts in the field is to censor out the real authentic voices of education.

This reminds me of the experience of our group the first summer at SIT. At one point in our culture class, one student stood-up and began to speak against the actions of the American government and the history of oppression of the English language. It was obvious that he felt passionately about this and even that he was angry. Another student, an American, then stood up and asked the first student to stop speaking because she was offended by what he was saying. He didn't stop. She walked out. And the class went on a break, but the impact of this event stayed with our group throughout the remainder of the summer. In fact, the man who spoke up was told to monitor his speech to hold back that display of thought and emotion. The woman was not told to monitor her speech however. So, what voices are heard? Which ones are entitled? What determines entitlement? What happens when voices are suppressed? Why are we offended by anger

but not by a lack of forgiveness that can infuse the anger? I am not condoning offensive speech, but I wonder where the line in the sand is drawn. What is the difference in the degree of acceptance between an expression of anger and one of sadness? What is the difference between civil disobedience and the silence of oppression? What permits one thing to be heard and others to be forced back and what happens when thoughts are held back for too long? Is the evil in the initial thought or in the oppression of it? What causes the pressure toward assimilation, toward seeking to be the same as everyone, or worse yet to become so similar that we are invisible?

A Story of the Search for Dignity as Opposed to Assimilation and Invisibility

Mom says I was cleaning from the time I was born. Now, obviously that's an exaggeration, but I do have many early memories of cleaning. Perhaps some of the memories exist more from the memory of the photo or from the repetition of Mom's testimonies, but then, there are other memories too.

Like the memory of pulling the weeds from the haphazard flower bed in our front yard.

I was only about eight or nine years old perhaps, but I remember having often looked over into Mr.Kreiger's yard which was defined by an immaculately painted yellow and green fence and a terraced slope of landscaping blocks that were perfectly straight. Everything matched in the Kreiger's yard and home. Everything seemed to be specifically chosen to exist in the exacting positions that they occupied. Their yard seemed to demand respect. They had dignity.

Our yard however, stood in complete contrast. Everything here was placed haphazardly, just exactly where they had been dropped or abandoned. Our backyard had a number of dilapidated vehicles sitting in a spot that ought to have been reserved for a garden. There were no boundaries in our yard; nothing seemed to act as a divider or separator. Everything grew into the other. Everything was tangled together. And everything was visible, totally open both from the front street and the back alley which opened up into a public park. Everything was exposed for public viewing.

On this particular day, I remember the heat from the sun and the dust rising up from the dry earth as I pulled the weeds away from the base of the three evergreen trees. Each of the trees had been planted in different years shortly after the day in kindergarten when kids get their free Arbour Day tree. There were three kids in our family, and so there were three trees planted there in that semi-circle bed that I suppose was intended to be stepped but really it just looked like the ground was collapsing away from the bit of slope that defined our yard. I was trying to clean it up, to make it presentable, to, in some strange way be seen as equal or as “worthy” as the Kreiger’s yard and home. Really, there was way too much there for a child to attend to or care for, but I didn’t know that as a child of nine or ten. I felt I could and more importantly that I should clean up the appearance of our yard. But as I tried to pull those weeds, the ground would fall away making the boarder or edge even more unsightly. I began to feel the weight of the burden and to feel frustrated with the limitations of my body, but I had no

one to talk to, nor anyone to share my anger and frustration with. I had no words to express nor explain what I was feeling, and I definitely felt I had no one who would listen to it all, so I reached out to a large mound of thistles and deliberately squeezed them as I tried to pull them from the ground telling myself to just take it... to bear the pain. It was as if, at that age, I already knew that if I were to form myself into this appearance in order to be similar and to be seen as having dignity, then I must suffer the pain of assimilation.

Stories stay with us for a reason. Their memories form our sense of self and place in the world. This one stays with me because I continue to live that struggle of trying to maintain a place of dignity, a place worthy of the respect of others while balancing and honouring my own individuality. However, I continue to feel that I must conform and that the appearance of dignity is of more importance than the experience of it. As the waters of life continue to ebb and flow from the past to the future, I feel the discontentment in me for living a life that is not in truth with who I am, and I feel the call to find, to name, and to claim the authentic dignity found in this confluence.

Sensing one's own authority and finding individual voice is found in that place of authenticity and truth. By learning to listen from this place, one may find the pain of joy. It is the kind of joy that makes one's voice quiver with excitement in being released and revealed. It is a painful joy because it has been denied or held back for so long. Invisibility hurts. It is the invisibility that comes from holding back – holding back by never feeling qualified, intelligent, capable or sufficient. By being invisible, we dullen our own 'still small voice' and in so doing we limit our joy. Nelson Mandela says our

“playing small doesn’t serve the world”. So, how can we as educators play it big? How can my students play it bigger yet? How may I live from this place of dignity in my class?

I believe part of the answer lies in learning to live authentically, to put words to the experience found simply in being human, but what happens is that truth holds back because so much emphasis is placed on the end result and on the final product. It seems that education has become more interested in the outcome than the process, in the destination rather than the journey. Or is this just my storyline?

Listening is Enhanced by Focusing as Much on Process as on Product

So much of what I do as an adult and especially as a teacher seems to exist because I’ve planned it. I never seem to have time to live in the present because I am always planning. As a parent, I am planning the next meal, the next day’s schedule of who goes where and when, planning of when the trees need pruning or the garden planted or the canning done. As a human trying to BE, I am always planning when I will meditate, exercise, read or write. As a teacher, I’m planning when we will learn a specific concept, when I will test to see that it has been learned and when the mid-term reports will go out to students. My life seems to be lived in a realm of planning and control. I have often struggled with how to be open, creative and living in the moment when I am so stuck in planning. How can I balance these two essentials in teaching and in my life outside of teaching?

Journal Entry #6

I have hit a wall, but it took me three days before I would admit it and let it go. It has taken me that long to realize that I was forcing something into an existence of perfection. I have been so focused on the final product that I have not allowed myself to see the process. I have been pushing and forcing, thinking I must and could control it all. These beliefs are deep in me like the thistles in that flower bed.

A Story about Process

On this day, I was canning which is an art of precise timing and a process of controlled variables. My son, Jacob, who was almost three years old at the time, was playing with Duplo in the living room. So, here I was with the plums in their light syrup bubbling away almost ready to be canned. The jars were in the oven, and I had just set the rubbers for the lids to soften. Jacob had been calling for me and was now at wits end. His voice began to get that higher monotonous, droning pitch that beckons a parent to come right now or at least to respond. But I was torn between the success of the plums and the call of my son. The deciding factor was the weight of my guilt as a working mom who doesn't spend nearly enough time with her one and only child, so I surrendered to the guilt perhaps a little too begrudgingly. I turned the plums down to low and hoped they wouldn't become too thick and I hurriedly went into the living room. I sat down, a bit distracted but present nonetheless. For me the next objective was to make the plan of what to

build, get it done and go back to canning. I guess my tone must have indicated my distraction and sense of urgency because when I asked Jacob what he wanted to build, he paused, tilted his head in a quizzical sort of way and then with a slight shake of his head he said, “Just Build, Mom”.

I think too often in teaching I forget how, to just build and to play. I have ended up believing that a “good teacher” is one who has total control and knows exactly where things are going to go. The objectives are laid out, the plan is drawn with precision and the outcomes are all measurable. I have turned my teaching into a science of exactness where the product matters more than the process. I have forgotten how to be curious and how to experiment. I have forgotten how to build just for the sake of building because I feel pressured by the demands of curriculum, outcomes and product.

Even as I sit here typing out the stories that reveal themselves, I hear my analytical side ask what the point of all this is anyway. And as I search for the most structured and articulate way of saying it all, I realize that quite often the point is not revealed until the experience is lived and the story is told. Sometimes the lack of interpretation actually gives the story its poignancy. Why do I need to relate my interpretation or my explanation? Why can't I let the story define itself to the listener? Why can't the meaning come from inside the listener rather than be imposed from the outside? What matters more – the story or the interpretation, the inside or the outside, the head or the heart? Again, I am reminded of these two sides that battle in me. On one side is the world of big business and consumerism while the other side is of inner knowing and compassion.

Journal Entry #7

Leaving S.I.T. at the end of the second summer in a posh hotel in Boston, twenty floors up, feeling ugly like I don't measure up to the outside world around me, I am feeling small in a belittling way not in a revering way. I see that my sense of self and place can guide me or distract me. I'm not a city dweller but the avante-garde, the diversity, the energy all seem to attract me while the choices, the sizes, the hurried productive busyness seems to minimize me.

It's easy to get caught into believing that everything outside of me is really what's important. I just need to keep up, to pull up, to step up. But what I want is to step out because I can get lost in here. I can easily get caught in this current of beliefs where everything that matters is outside of myself. I fear I could get lost in the glitter and the glitz, and then the dark ugly alleys would consume me. Or would I have to become the consumer? Would I become the frontage that causes the existence of the darkened, nauseating alleys? Either way, I fear I'd get lost. Consume or be consumed. The battle between the two rivers continues. The flow is definitely not calm.

Sometimes when I try to exist in the world of academia, I feel I have nothing to offer – I feel that I am easily lost here. What is essential has all been said and done. These thoughts can be comforting because then I know that I am not alone, but there is also a sense of apathy, that I cannot exist here as a unique voice. It's the attitude of ownership. Who owns the words, the ideas? Whose voice is being used? Is it a voice worthy of esteem and reverence? What is my place in this stream of thought, in this movement of life? Do I own the words or do the words own me? How can I hear the roar on the other side of silence (as Virginia Wolfe is famous for penning) when all around me are voices of the authority of others? Listen to this Dian. Listen, or be consumed.

Summary

Listening then must be an essential part of the process of education, but not the passive listening suggested when authorities tell us to, “listen up”. The kind of listening I am referring to here is the kind found in times of silence, reflection and integration of experience. To hear what life has taught so far, is to put words and expression to the stories that are carried within each and every one of us, and this can only happen when time is given, not taken away, when ritual is created to call our deeper selves to attention, when the stories to be told are given credence and authorization to speak, and when process matters at least as much as the product of education. I continue to search for how I can be real and authentic in my classes, and I know that I must begin by listening to the stories of my own life and to create an atmosphere of reflection and listening in my

classes. I have begun, by establishing some of the principles and practices of *The Way of Council*, but I continue to search, to experiment, and to listen. Florida Scott Maxwell says, “You need only claim the events of your life to make yourself yours. When you truly possess all you have been and done you are fierce with reality”(Palmer 2000, 70). And as I journey toward that kind of authentic ferocity, may that be guidance to give others permission to do the same in my classes and in my life outside those classes.

CHAPTER THREE

The Tributary of Questing

Some time when the river is ice ask me
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether
what I have done is my life. Others
have come in their slow way into

my thought, and some have tried to help or to hurt: ask me
what difference
their strongest love or hate has made

I will listen to what you say.
You and I can turn and look
at the silent river and wait. We know
the current is there, hidden; and there
are comings and goings from miles away
that hold the stillness exactly before us.
What the river says, that is what I say.

William Stafford, "Ask Me"

Asking questions or questing is the foundation of authentic learning. Quite often questions arise out of the 'mistakes', the point where things don't turn out as they were expected. But, who is doing the asking in the system in which I find myself? What questions are receiving the attention? Which are being ignored? Are they really questions or "tests" to check what the students have learned or if the teacher knows? More specifically, where are the answers found to the questions being imposed?

I ask myself if the answers have anything to do with my life, my experience? I wonder if I have been true in keeping the channels of my life open to receiving life's lessons, if I have given credence to the current that moves in my own life or just to the one that moves around my life. I ask myself if I have listened enough that I can hear the questions that arise.

Questing as Inquiry

To ask is to inquire, which really is to quest, and to quest is to search or go in pursuit of something. It is a journey. The journey begins at a juncture, a place of departure or tension. Without the tension, without the problem, without the dis-easement,

the quest may never begin for where would the questions arise from? Questions arise when something is not going as planned or when something out of the ordinary happens. There must be a certain idea or experience that causes a degree of movement or stirring otherwise the questing does not begin. And in the quest, the sojourner finds his potential, the tools necessary to resolve the problem, to reduce the tension, to return home victorious. That is the authentic path of learning.

Inquiry then is an awakening of one's potential (tools found for the journey) and as Carl Rogers is known to have said, each of us has a natural tendency to work towards the fulfillment of that potential. Inquiry is a forward moving energy not a backward glancing motion done in preparation for tests and displays of what has been "covered". Inquiry is an innate way of checking out and experimenting. It is inductive rather than deductive. It is discovery rather than recovery. It is explorative rather than corrective. By creating space for reflection and internalization, by turning the ear inward as a response to the outer world, by listening to the inner stirrings of struggle and discontentment, learners begin to uncover where the questions lie. Only by listening to the where the tension lies can students begin the process of inquiry, the kind of inquiry that initiates personalized, authentic learning and awakens the inherent potential and curiosity in each of us.

Pablo Casals rhetorically asked if we can dare to be ourselves. Do we dare to ask the questions that burn to be asked? Do we dare the journey? The quest? Do we dare? And it is daring. It requires taking a risk because it means facing the tide of most resistance, the one not commonly found in the systems that I find myself. Can the individuals in my class dare to be real in posing their honest questions, the questions that

acknowledge their inner struggle, the questions that might reveal something vulnerable, the questions that open the heart to what is personally meaningful? That kind of honest questioning does feel risky in the business of education where I work, but the quest requires this sense of risk taking and so it is there that the tension lies.

A Story about Tension

I was teaching in a grade two class at Norwood Community School in Edmonton, Alberta when I first witnessed the tension that can give rise to honest, forward moving questions. Around Easter time, our class began studying about animal classifications. Specifically, we were learning the defining characteristics between birds and mammals. We had zoology students from the University of Alberta bring in all kinds of hands-on samples to help us define the attributes for each category. Throughout the entire unit, Russell sat quietly and somewhat sceptically at the back of the class. On the last day with this unit of study as we were reviewing what we had all learned, Russell stood up abruptly, and he starred at me as if I were the devil himself. “Are you trying to tell me that the Easter bunny doesn’t lay eggs”, Russell asked. This question of great consternation was a brilliant display of the tension that exists when the newness rubs up against the experience of one’s beliefs. Russell had finally dared to ask.

Indeed, to pose the question is a significant step in all learning for it is the question that prompts the experiment. Questioning involves stepping into the unknown. I remember Shakti Gattegno saying that we as teachers cannot walk into a class knowing

exactly what will happen. We don't know. Just as the experimenter doesn't know, and that is part of the risk if we too intend to continue learning. Learning is rarely an orderly, static process.

Journal Entry #8

I am learning to trust in the process of creativity where everything goes through a period of chaos and messiness, but I am uncomfortable. I am reminded that all growth goes through a stage of pain or struggle that nothing occurs without struggle and the feeling of discomfort, but that doesn't help me to like it any better.

I am feeling like this is all too messy and I should have an exact idea of where I'm going. I compare myself to others; thinking that others would have their writing well under way by now, so why can't I. If I let myself think like this for too long, I begin to set myself into a state of panic and self condemnation which causes me to get stuck even further.

It is amazing how fleeting, moments of inspiration are, and yet when I can and do really attend and

listen how they can guide me. I have to always keep in mind that I don't have to be great, that I just have to be. Similarly, I have to realize that there is greatness and inspiration in the flow of the moment and that to minimize this is to dissolve all creativity. Herein lies the tension in the balances of chaos and control, expectations and creativity, process and product, greatness and ordinary. I see these two opposing forces as necessary points of tension but I have often felt them as points of conflict like only one can win. Like there is only one side that is right - similar to the rivers of my consciousness - the values of my life.

Taking one step back as soon as she entered my office a dear friend and colleague, Alex, commented on the amount of paper taped to my walls and spread out on the chairs and floor as I worked on my writing. She asked in astonishment if all this stuff really helps me because it felt overwhelming to her. As I pondered her inquiry, I realized that the journey of probing and questing can feel overwhelming and chaotic. And as I travel, as I write, I feel the sway between feeling okay with it all and then feeling hindered and

frustrated. At times, I see it all as a necessary process and other times I feel panicked that the product is not yet clear. I feel panicked from the lack of control, the lack of knowing ultimately where this is all going and the fear that I may be wasting time. These opposing streams continue to clash.

The process of writing, like the processes of living, learning and reclaiming my true self is not an orderly, pre-planned, conceptualized, categorized process, but in the chaos and complexity of it all there is truth that I can become aware of if I can be open and curious to listen and to hear it speak, if I can understand that the tension is necessary, that without tension nothing new arises. If I stay in a position of comfort and ease, I will always do what I have always done. Learning arises only from some point of tension between what is thought to be true and what is now presented however messy it may all seem. Peter Elbow says, "People learn from the truth even though the truth is a mess"(1973, 133).

A Story About Questing and Control

From the moment we married, we had talked about having a family, but it wasn't until we'd been married for about four years that we began to seriously try (an actual word used as people begin having sex with the intention of having children). So now we were ready and we expected that within a year things would go as planned. But they didn't. It would take three ectopic pregnancies, one

miscarriage and eight invetro transfers before we realized that we were not going to become parents through this route.

It was just days after my seventh invetro transfer had failed that I was out in the garden between the tight even rows of corn, peas, and carrots. I was weeding, taking out everything between the even rows that was growing out of place, pulling out everything that didn't belong and leaving behind everything that was suppose to be there by my own determination and will. My neighbour's garden was right next to mine separated by a thin wire fence and she too was out in her garden but she was transplanting and thinning to make space so as to ensure things could all grow well. As we chatted, she commented about the need and uses of many of the weeds. Like plantain that can be used in salads or pigsweed which can be used as a poultice to reduce swelling or as a tea to reduce cramps. So, I jokingly commented about why we differentiate between weeds and plants and tried to offer some trite definition of the two. And without much thought, I commented about how it's really all about control anyway.

After she left, I bent down to continue my picking, but I couldn't. I ran into the house weeping.

All of my life I had believed I could control anything if I set my mind to it. I believed that was all that was necessary to achieve something. If I just worked hard enough, there was nothing I couldn't do or get by my own volition. I

believed I was in control and ultimately that control was a necessary sign of success in the world of those with authority and dignity. I had planned where we were going to live, when I would go to university, when we would get married and now I was planning when we would have a child. But this one wasn't working. This one I couldn't control. This one I had to surrender to, but I didn't know how. It was out of this tension that I began a quest.

Parker Palmer describes this place of tension that is beyond one's control as the place that "can strip the ego of the illusion that it is in charge" (2000, 18). Could I dare to let go of the self that defined me and trust in the process of discovery – the discovery of my own truth? Perhaps it was at this juncture that I began to allow the waters of the two rivers that flowed through me to come together, the part of the serendipitous, soulful and unseen with the objective, controlling outer self. Perhaps it was here that I began to allow them to mix. Actually, it was more about surrendering to the chaos and complexity because I could not control it any longer. I couldn't pretend any longer. This was the threshold of awareness that who I am, what I believe and how I live can not be separate. I could not pretend any longer. Holding back and controlling the journey was preventing me from listening to the real questions in my life. I was blocking my own authentic discovery.

The presence of truth heightens our awareness and calls forth a focused attention. When truth exists, something quakes within us as human beings, and I could feel this quivering in me.

Questing as Noticing

My voice quakes when I feel called upon to speak authentically or when I feel the kind of listening that is present is attentive and heartfelt. When truth is invited to exist before both self and others there is a kind of heightened awareness, a keen alive energy that comes from some unknown place or space within me. By someone else existing authentically, I too am called upon to be focused and attentive to what exists not by being coerced or prodded but out of my own free will. Without free will there is no authenticity. I believe that is the true role of the educator, to be fully alive, attentive, focused and present so that I can invite and witness that presence in my students as well. I believe this heightened awareness is the core of all learning. It is heightened because of the clash, the tension between what is believed and what is now presented. It's like those first few years as a parent where the world now seems alive with new energy and new wonders because we are looking through these fresh new eyes of an infant who has yet to experience it all. This RE-viewing the world, heightens one's awareness to it. I remember when Jacob was a baby how he marvelled at the feel of grass on his toes or how he would explore the feel of snow on his eye lashes. And as he did, it caused me to stop and notice with him and to try to put words to it all for him.

A Story of Noticing and the Search for Words

I remember how Jacob, my son, would often ask, "dat" meaning, "What's that" over and over again, and how I misunderstood his questions as wanting to know the labels that identified these wonders, so I would keep repeating the names over and over. Until one day, I really attended to his quest. I saw him repeating the

name of the thing he held but his fingers, his eyes, his mouth were busy attending to the qualities beyond the label. He was exploring the properties that formed this thing before him. So I began to offer the words that might help name these qualities, and as I did, he would pause. It seemed that he would stop his quest momentarily to take in this new word that further described what he was questing after. I believe his questioning guided his exploration in order to continue probing the thing. It wasn't that he hadn't heard me and wanted the same word repeated indefinitely. He seemed to want to explore beyond the words that labelled his experience. He seemed to simply want to put words to the experience.

I have experienced this same quality in my class where students come into my advanced grammar class knowing the names, the grammatical labels but where they can't describe its properties. They have essentially stopped noticing, stopped experiencing, stopped questioning. It often seems that my students have stopped asking questions because they already have the labels, and so they think they have the answer like having it all under control. They have stopped being attentive because there is no curiosity once they have the label. The label has stopped the process of inquiry. It has "dullened" their attentiveness and subdued or quelled the questions. So, when I use a more inductive process with my advanced students especially, they seem to wake up, to notice. When I present the anomaly, a problem, a puzzle, it creates an alertness where the mind seems to wake up and to question. So for example, I might present four groups of sentences using gerunds in four different ways. Then, without telling my students that we are now studying gerunds, I ask them to look at a specific group of sentences and see what they

notice about the forms found in each sentence. I ask them to see if they can identify similarities or differences, if they can see the rule that binds each set of examples. I ask them to focus on the order of the words, and to use their own words to describe what they notice. In this way students are no longer just using a label but instead are calling their attention to noticing the qualities, the properties or the inner makings of a form. They begin to question and to put their own words to what they have noticed. They begin to play or experiment, to quest beyond the knowing of the label.

Rather than describing something, labels can end up reducing it to its smallest denominator. In this way, education must not seek only to label. Self exploration and expression doesn't just begin with a topic. In order to invite inquiry toward one's potential, we need to begin with noticing. Let the questions arise from the words used to describe what is noticed and let that heightened awareness determine which words are essential because, after all, the words we choose can enhance or diminish the questing.

Keep a watch on your words my darling
For words are wonderful things
They are sweet like the bees fresh honey
Like the bees they have terrible stings
They can bless like the warm glad sunshine
And brighten a lonely life
They can cut in the strife of anger
like an open two edged knife

E.R. Miller, "Words are Wonderful Things"

Questing is the Search for Precise words

Words have such power. They can define our entire existence. Words frame the perceptions of self both for ourselves and before others. In *Hunger of Memory*, Richard Rodriguez says that "by finding public words to describe one's feelings, one can describe

oneself to oneself” (1982, 16). Words become the way others look at us or feel about us while at the same time, words shape our own identity and perceptions of truth. Words can expand our understanding of self and the universe by giving form to thoughts that once existed as just wisps of energy. Words can be a liberating force by identifying needs, describing the history of our lives and expressing our deepest aspirations and visions of the future. Words can infuse the potential use of one’s free will. They express what is and what might be. They can free truths that have been locked away and can cause liberating revolutions. Words exert power.

Words can also limit our view of the world and our place in it us. They can shackle us, restrict us and limit our understanding. Words can trap the mind, so it can’t see or hear beyond what is really being said. Words can cause identity to be misunderstood, to be judged or defined incorrectly. Words can discredit the experience, the idea, the argument and disallow the potential for change. Words can deceive or be harmful and even deadly. Their suppression can cause unbearable suffering and generations of sickness while their expression can initiate life itself. Words contain power.

Words contain the stories that we each carry, the stories that cry out to be told, the stories that justify the basic values and beliefs that are held to be true. So much begins with words ... or with the silence that results from holding back the words.

Silence can come from repression or from being unsure, from not knowing or from being in awe, honour or disbelief, from being in total agreement or from feeling complete resentment. Words encompass power. Words and the silences between them are power.

And so it is that mastering the use of words is central in the field of education because words do have power. The conscious ability to use these icons of power can liberate or strangle individuals. Language embodies power.

As I read Peter Elbow's book *Writing without Teachers* (1973), I find the words that help define my experience as a writer, and this discovery seems to validate and authenticate my experience. Elbow's words affirm my experience which therefore deepens its place in me. The experience, the journey is made credible because someone else has experienced it. Hearing the words of another, does help to solidify my interpretation of the experience and even to empower its significance.

Words are never wasted. They are like stepping stones, leading us, one toward the other. They are never wasted because they can linger and come forth at a time of their own calling. Like the memory of the words found in a book, these words have not just passed over unnoticed. They linger along with some subtle memory, waiting to be called forth, waiting until the tides shift so the current may wash them ashore.

Words have become my chosen form of expression partly because of my attraction to the power they seem to contain and partly because I needed them to help define my reality. I needed them. I began to need these words to help identify and give some kind of credence to my experiences that define me. Words have become my tool to carve out what I believe and to transform how I am to live my life. Words are my current means of transportation toward a self that has lain dormant somewhere in the shadows of my being. Words have enabled me to define and find who I am or at least to begin to listen to the stories that form a sense of who I believe I am. Words are simply a response that reflects how the world is being interpreted. And so hearing the words of another

with a similar interpretation affirms my response and the power of the words attached to that experience. Words have enabled me to begin to decode the interpretation of my identity, unearthing the seeds of what I believe, so I can recognize my own voice like the day I recognized my son's voice.

A Story of Finding Voice

Our son, Jacob, came to our family through adoption at the age of five months. Part of my first journal entry on that day reads: I have heard you laugh and squeal and cry, but I've yet to identify your unique voice just as you have yet to identify mine. At the time, I didn't know exactly what I was searching for. I think I was searching for one specific quality, but as time passed I realized voice consists of much more than just knowing the arrangement of pitch, tone and duration. That in effect voice is composed through relationship both as an individual and in relationship to another individual; it is between the experience and the witnesses to that experience. The first few entries in the journal are filled with descriptions of the sounds and qualities of his voice as he expresses numerous desires and dissatisfactions. There is the purr of contentment, the nose breathing of frustration, the grunt of determination and the high pitched call of curiosity. It wasn't until sometime afterward that I wrote: Today, I am completely sure that I know your voice and I can distinguish it in a crowd. On this day, I felt confident that the dawn had broken. I knew him. The intimacy of relationship and connection was formed. I had learned to listen, to attend, to notice so that I

could detect the subtleties that separate the voice of my son from the voice of another.

Words create distinctions. Certain words can become associated to specific people in certain contexts or even indicate particular relationships. Words form one's identity and connect individuals to groups.

Questing as the Search for Connection

To quest is to search for connections, connections between the person and the experience, connections between self and the newness. The quest is a search for self, identity and uniqueness, and the connections are found in the spaces between in the interpretation and the response. Connections are formed between the experience and the words that describe the experience. This is how meaning is formed and language is acquired.

A Story About the Search for Connection

In my second year of teaching, in a grade three-four class, at an inner city school in Manitoba, I was struck by the distance between what I had to teach and the everyday realities of my students. These kids were dealing with life issues around hunger, neglect, violence, or family addictions, yet here I was trying to define the difference between a neighbourhood and a city, or teaching about fractions and measures, or expecting them to understand the distinguishing features of a liquid and a solid. I came across an idea found in Lucy McCormick Calkins' book

Living Between the Lines where a teacher took a class on a sailing trip and the students had to plan everything. I knew that's what I needed for my students. I couldn't go sailing living out on the prairies, so we began instead to plan a two day sleepover at the school.

The activities were to be centered around stories – telling, writing and reading the stories that formed us. In the evening, we sat draped in blankets and carrying stuffed animals around a fake 1950's fireplace in the classroom that now looked more like a huge rumpus room. We shared stories, pictures, and drawings of places we had lived and people we had lived with. Using the school mic system like a karaoke machine, we told stories of experiences from social gatherings. In the morning, we cooked pancakes and told stories about favourite food, food gone bad and strange foods. We had a scavenger hunt and ate chilli while we listened to stories told by adults from the community. Some told jokes, some showed us how to clean a fish and some shared a song or a prayer. At the end, as kids were leaving the school dragging sleeping bags and clothing, Tiffany turned to me with her big bright eyes and with tell-tale signs of chilli still on her chin. She gave me a big hug and said that school feels just like being at a friend's house. I began then to learn what it means to “bring the work of their lives to school”, for then the students could “invest themselves heart and soul” (McCormick Calkins 1991 304).

If inquiry and questing are free-will investments in discovery not recovery then in this way, errors are no longer seen as problems but rather are viewed as points of new energy and new beginnings to continue the process of discovery. Tom Miller, a teacher, a writer and a proponent of Counseling-Learning, says that when we begin to see and label mistakes as problems, the doorway to listening and the momentum of energy is diminished. Identifying mistakes as problems has a negative connotation that does not invite openness. Instead Tom Miller states we must learn to move to a place of asking why a mistake was made. In this way, the process of inquiry begins. Dan Millman expands on this when he says that, “errors are not the problem; ignoring or misunderstanding them is. In order to correct an error, you must first be fully aware of it; then it’s inevitably going to be corrected “(1979, 18). But I would add to this that the inevitability comes only if you are pursuing the inquiry as a result of having opened up to a new awareness yourself not because someone else points to it. In this way, inquiry is not where the teacher poses a question and the students search to find the right answers. Instead this kind of inquiry is where the students inform the teacher of the questions they would like to find answers to and the teacher helps find the materials and tools to explore it. This means also that there exists a delicate balance of teacher control and student initiative (Stevick 1998, 30-46). It becomes the teacher’s role to open a window of vision, but it is the student who decides where to set their sights.

Summary

This pathway of teaching and learning means that my role in the class is to provide both a space for listening and an environment of honest open inquiry, not one

where judgment exists, for students must feel safe to make mistakes or to ask questions that may indicate a mistake. It is only from the mistakes that one's awareness is heightened, opened toward authentic inquiry and learning. This kind of classroom must be a place where mistakes are seen as grounds for further exploration, where students have choice and where the teacher really is in service to the learner. The quest is to find how to open the windows of curiosity where wonder and intrigue exist. The quest is a search for invitations toward real and authentic learning by listening to where the real questions lie.

As a teacher, the tension here lies in my own sense of vulnerability in a system that demands evaluation rather than simply meaningful actions. Once again the rivers seem wide apart and the values between them seem to be poised for conflict. I am vulnerable here because this is what I care about. My caring heightens the point of tension. I care about authentic questing in a class. I care about honest intrigue not just passing an exam. And because I care in this way, because I hope to open my students up to exploring their own potential, I struggle with how to balance that in a system which demands answers that are right and wrong. And I struggle, not because I doubt what I feel but because I too am afraid of being judged. I am afraid of the expectations of my colleagues, the system, the parents, and the students themselves, and I believe it is this fear that ultimately blocks my own quest and inquiry. It is not the fear between the self and the newness. It is fear between the private self and the public self.

This is the crossroad that Parker Palmer refers to as the place where the personal and the public meet (1998, 17). I have placed myself in the forum of public scrutiny because I have found something that I believe deeply in, and I am choosing to bring these

two systems of belief and practice together because I now question my own authenticity. It is the place of confluence that now causes this tension in me as a call to exist in my own authenticity. Palmer goes on to say that it is at this juncture that we can “build a wall between inner truth and outer performance, and we play-act the teacher’s part” (1998, 17). I did build that wall out of my own fears and longing to be seen in a system that I believed had dignity and worth, a system that I longed to be part of. I built a wall out of my uneasiness with being vulnerable, but now I realize that I cannot live divided any longer. I am beginning to realize that not knowing and being scared are part of the process ... the process of learning, of creating, and of living life.

So, how can I encourage honest, open questing in a framework of learning that insists the quest has already been done by others and that the answers have been found, where the role of the teacher is to judge the accuracy of the answer rather than to steer the refinement of the question and interpretation? How can I exist in an atmosphere that suggests knowing self is not necessary in the quest? How can I advocate a journey from self to newness when it seems that self has little role in the equation of education today? This is my tension. This is my quest. I continue to journey.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Tributary of Communing

Among the tribes of northern Natal in South Africa, the most common greeting, equivalent to 'hello' in English, is the expression: *Sawu bona*. It literally means, 'I see you'. If you are a member of the tribe, you might reply by saying *Sikhona*, 'I am here'. The order of the exchange is important: until you see me, I do not exist. It's as if, when you see me, you bring me into existence.

This meaning, implicit in the language, is part of the spirit of *ubuntu*, a frame of mind prevalent among native people in Africa below the Sahara. The *ubuntu* stems from the folk saying '*Umntu ngumuntu nagabantu*' which, from Zulu, literally translates as: 'A person is a person because of other people'. If you grow up with this perspective, your identity is based upon the fact that you are seen – that the people around you respect and acknowledge you as a person.

Peter Senge et al., "*I See You*".

A basic human compulsion is to communicate, to share, to exist before others. Brenda Ueland (1938, 4) advocates that this compulsion is so intense that, if we don't communicate, we'll burst. To communicate means to commune with another. It means to share and to be heard or as the Natal greeting states, it means that I can only exist when I am seen and respected by others. Again, I am reminded of Maslow's hierarchy of needs where the need to be seen is equated with the need for love and affirmation which is indeed a basic human compulsion. To be recognized by self and before others, validates one's existence and worthiness. Affirmation is the water that encourages the growth of human potential. In this context then, learning is a process of reflecting upon the stories

that form our identity, but these stories need to be both heard and affirmed if the experience is to have full impact. Communion means we need to listen to and tell our stories, to be heard, to be affirmed and to be with like minded people for optimum growth to occur. Without affirmation, something essential remains hidden and life feels purposeless, but that still small voice continues to cry out. The fire is never completely extinguished.

Journal Entry #9

I have said all this over and over again in my essays and at staff meetings, in interviews and amongst colleagues. I have journaled it and spoken it. I have repeated it innumerable times. So, why can't I let go of it and move on? Why do I feel like it still needs to be said? Am I searching for allies, someone to vindicate these ideas? Like none of this can exist until someone of 'authority' puts their stamp of approval on it. So, what authority do I seek? Who can vindicate it for me? What is required for this to be validated?

It's terribly frightening to think I am alone, and yet I know I am not. Surely, I'm not. So, I search for like minded people sometimes to justify and other times to nourish and infuse that which screams for full existence. I need others to help clarify and authenticate my experience, my emotions, my beliefs, but isn't that what we all long for? Aren't we all afraid of being alone in our ideas? Aren't we all afraid of leaving our ideas alone?

Intimacy is defined by a degree of closeness. So, what is it we are close to in this intimacy? Is it being close to the lived experience, close to the memory, close to self? What is it we can be intimate with? What parts of the self experience this intimacy? I believe intimacy lies at the point of connection between that which has been heard or affirmed and that which has not. The smaller the distance between these two, the greater the intimacy. And the more I sit still to hear, the more intimate I become with the inner workings of who I am.

I seek intimacy with others but mostly I seek to be intimate with myself. In fact, only by being intimate with self can one learn intimacy with another. I seek to be deeply connected so that my words and my actions reflect this intimacy, that the distance between what I say and how I live is minimized. I intend also for my students to find some kind of intimacy with their own ideas so that learning holds personal, intimate meaning and relevance. Shakti says that the only thing that is educable is awareness and as such awareness holds individual meaning. I believe awareness is the path toward intimacy. Awareness awakens the mind to notice, to inquire and to find meaning and meaningfulness. Only when someone is aware do the truly inquisitive questions arise. To be deeply and meaningfully aware of one's interpretation of an experience and the beliefs founded on those experiences is to be intimate. And for this kind of intimacy to be vindicated, there must be an opening where it can be expressed and received. Affirmation is a basic need. At that point, one can begin to live from the place of one's potential.

To open this door of potential and possibility is to be humbled, to feel small, but one can also be made to feel small in a belittling way. Indeed in the world of academics

and politics, in the world of knowers, believers and doers, I have felt small. I have felt intimidated not affirmed. This kind of small limits the potential for growth. This kind of small is where the power of oppression exists. It is here where I have felt the need for allies, as if alone, I am insufficient. This feeling small can come from self denial or from the lack of affirmation. And yet, if it is true that no one can make you feel anything that doesn't already exist in you then perhaps all feeling small comes from the shadows of our own beliefs. These are the perceptions of self that can limit our own potential. And so perhaps, these are the shadows from the experience of life that have remained with me as my own oppressor because I have felt small and insufficient.

I have felt the kind of small that suggests only the schooled voices have wisdom or clout. I have felt the kind of discrimination that denies authority based on the words chosen, the job held or the material possessions displayed. I have been intimidated by people with money and education. Education itself is about this power over - it's about dominion of ideas and answers. For what we choose to teach and focus on already reflects what is valued and what has power in our lives. Values are found in the places where time and attention is spent. What ideas or voices are affirmed reflects where one's values lie. What ideas are recognized, what voices are stifled, what studies deserve funding? These are the places that reflect what is valued in education and discrimination of ideas does exist there and therefore so does the limiting of individual potential.

Journal Entry #10

The provincial government has decided to have a referendum to 'settle' the outstanding aboriginal issues in British Columbia. In order to form the

referendum question, they decide to have a committee travel the province to gather ideas from the public. I had to step forward.

The idea that an articulate Caucasian majority would be asked to vote on an issue that would have an effect on a minority population who had been neglected and abused by the government for generations was ludicrous and outright immoral. In my presentation, I adamantly protested by saying that "this entire process appears to be another strategy of intimidation when you consider that only those who feel somewhat articulate, confident and educated would be brave and bold enough to step forward to give their opinions and suggestions... in effect, you [the provincial government] have already omitted the opinions and suggestions of a countless number of people including many of whom would be affected by this referendum". As I gave my presentation, I shook. I shook from nervousness yes, but more importantly, I shook because I was daring, risking to stand in my truth and to stand against a system that can often make me feel small.

But there are two kinds of feeling small. The other kind of feeling small is the one that really does support the development of individual potential, the human spirit. Indeed in all learning and growth there is an appropriate kind of feeling small where I stand in awe and reverence of all that has come before me with a recognition that there is nothing I do today that comes solely of its own volition and action. There is nothing that happens in complete isolation. Every thought and action is built upon previous thoughts and acts. Nothing exists in a vacuum; no one is ever really alone. We are all influenced and we are all connected. The idea that anything could really exist on its own accord and in isolation must be a myth. No thought exists in isolation. No words exist without experience. It is all connected.

A Story of Connection

I had a dream where I felt myself as part of the wind, part of the earth. I was flying over the land as part of the wind, and ever so slowly I came down closer to the earth until I was in the earth and all around me I could see how the roots of the grass were all intertwined. One blade, one root was no longer separable from the others. They became one even though on the surface they looked like individual blades. A blade of grass could never survive alone. It needs the nourishment and support of a system, a community.

Parker Palmer speaks to this connection in community when he says, “there is no selfhood outside of relationship”(2000, 17). Self is defined by being in group as is reflected in the Natal greeting. That self grows out of group. Like the co-constructivists

theories proposed by Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, all my thoughts, my ideas, my beliefs exist in me to some extent because the system, the group has created an environment where my part of the system can grow. We are all connected and our thoughts and the developments of mankind are equally connected and dependent, one idea bouncing off the next, one event creating an opening for the next event.

The challenge is to not get so stuck in our ego that we think we've done it all of our own accord.

I remember one teacher I met who was always quick to claim glory in the success of her students but at the same time took no "blame" for the struggles of those who couldn't find their way through the mess of education. And as a teacher, I too have felt the presence of my ego asserting that whatever happens in my class is somehow part of my doing.

A Story of Pride and Ego

I have very few memories of times where I felt my mother's pride in me (and even fewer times if any of my father who really was absent for most of my childhood) but when she would share those moments, it seemed more like the success was of her own doing and not from anything solely of my own ability. She would tell others about my achievements but the accolades were rarely said to me directly and never privately. As a child and even now as an adult, there are times where I feel that my successes are diminished before the glory that is somehow owed to my mother. As a child, I felt robbed and began to not want to share those times of accomplishment. In contrast, I was led to believe that any failure that came to me

was of my own accord. It was my own fault and my mother would take absolutely no ownership of those falls in life or at least she never let on that she did.

Now as both a teacher and as a parent, I too have these moments of ego transfer where the quality of a student's writing or the abilities of my son seem to somehow add to my cloak of honor, to my sense of esteem and pride. And too, there are times where the struggles and misgivings are things beyond my control, as if I project the image of forsaking any true responsibility. I'm reminded of when Shakti referred to the subordination of teaching to learning which to me suggests that learning is what directs teaching not the other way around. This really is about putting aside the ego of the teacher and instead listening and attending to the needs of the students.

So what are the boundaries of influence? When does influence mean ownership? Or can it ever? For, I too have been influenced by the thoughts, ideas, and words of thousands of writers, speakers, singers and artists, but can they or do they claim ownership of the outcome of what I produce or do they feign responsibility if I fail to produce?

Knowing that nothings exists in isolation and the everything really is co-constructed, that ideas and feelings can be inherited, built as a family, a community or a culture, then is it any wonder that many of my students are confused by this notion of plagiarism? Donna Topping says that "students plagiarize perhaps because they haven't found their own voice" and therefore they find the writings of others "so much more compelling" (2002, 108). I remember in one of my advanced writing classes where this very notion of ownership of ideas came into question. We were trying to co-construct a

definition of plagiarism with examples of what it means to plagiarise and to identify the difference between commonly agreed upon facts and opinions that would need justification and proof. We had come up with the notion that facts may be defined as such when a critical mass of people accept an idea as a reality. It was at this point that one of my students asked how opinions could be expressed then if everything had to be proven by the masses or accepted by authorities. Then another student probed further by asking how ownership of ideas could be attributed if every idea is actually built in co-dependency upon the last one presented. This student went on to suggest that the first idea should be the only one that needs to be cited, that in effect none of the other ideas could have been formed without that first idea. And so came the question of how authority is decided. What gives someone authority and credibility, what enables someone to freely express their opinion in print?

The challenge is also to not minimize our “selfhood” by thinking we have nothing else to add. I heard a documentary recently on CBC radio about the influence of such legends as Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry on the succeeding generations. And the commentator remarked that the problem with legends and heroes is that we mystify them and in so doing we deny the other voices who feel they can’t keep up. Yet, in truth, nothing is ever totally new. It’s all continuations of borrowed material. We are echoing voices from the past as we continue the human caravan of thoughts and energy into the future. Developing a sense of one’s voice is a balance of noticing what has come before us, and yet still adding our own voice to the chorus knowing that we have authority.

Yes, I like to think of all that’s gone before me
How all I’ve done is part of what has passed

For a while this song is mine
Then it's handed down the line
And singing makes it certain it will last
Elinor Jones, "A Voice of My Own"

The kind of classroom I esteem toward is one that is centered around community because I believe the Beings within us thrive best in community. We are interdependent and constantly being influenced by each other. Indeed, quite often it is as a result of being in community that gateways to inquiry present themselves; there is more opportunity for discovery in community. Learning is a process of accumulation where one discovery or understanding or even one question gives rise to the next momentum of discovery. Curran theorized, "that inept learning and consequent negative feelings and behaviors may be brought about by depersonalized way[s] of teaching which split head from heart and individual from community" (1976, 13). We are a connected energetic system not separate members in a classroom or anywhere for that matter. That is where much of our school system has broken down because we have set it up so that the individual matters more than the group as if one could survive without the other. We have set up schools so that individuals compete against each other and success is an external notion. In order to begin putting the soul back in my classroom, I must build on the truth of our interconnectedness in a much less competitive way. I must seek out ways to build inner criteria for success and motivation while at the same time creating an appreciation for our interdependence in posing the questions. According to Stevick, "success in a language classroom depends less on the materials, techniques, or linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom"

(1998, 24). Stevick goes on to say that, “the most important aspect of what goes on is the presence or absence of harmony” (1998, 24).

Harmony exists partially when we know our place. To know one’s place in a group not only liberates the attention of the mind but also provides a sense of security. Knowing one’s place in a family, a community, a classroom or in society can open the doors of potential. Perhaps this is even more true if the “roles” are not held to be permanent and that there is some allowance for change, some room to expand but to always belong. Like the two sides to everything in my existence so to are there two sides to knowing one’s role or place in a group, one side can limit, the other can expand.

A Story of Knowing our Place in a Community

Sean Conley, the assistant dean at the School for International Training, had asked us all to observe our roles in the groups that we form throughout the summer at SIT. He asked us to notice where we seem to instinctively go in our role as we work together. He suggested that if our inclination was to lead then we should try to step back and just observe what happens. In the same way, if our inclination was to step back and let others lead then we should try to step forward and be the leader. As he said, we should lean into discomfort to extend our boundaries in an attempt to feel the process of change and growth.

So, here we were. A group of five total strangers and our task was to design and create a bulletin board that represented the faces of the SMAT community. I knew that I usually took on leadership roles, so I purposely stepped back. As a

new group of people, it seemed that we were all tip-toeing , unsure and respectfully reluctant. I felt the group begin to dissipate its energy. Individual distractions began to occupy the attentions of the group. I felt that nothing was getting done and time was ticking away. Hours had gone by. Other groups were nearing completion but our group seemed to be going off in separate directions. We had no leader, and so our energies were scattered. I felt I had to take control, and I did.

Later as we debriefed the process of the project, I realized that the entire project really was intended to call attention to process. Its objective wasn't really aimed at the completion of the product (the bulletin board). I began to reprimand myself for having been so blind and for being so self absorbed and product driven that I became a dictator to the group. I felt both regret and remorse. I felt ashamed but I said nothing. I couldn't. The emotion was too raw, too present to share it before strangers. But then one after another, the members of the group came to me to thank me for having taken control. One classmate said he felt purposeful and relaxed once he knew who the leader was and that by taking control, the group became purposeful and had a sense of direction. Another member of the group said that every community needs a leader and once that position is designated, the other members of the group can more easily fall in to the roles they are comfortable with. I was beginning to understand this dynamic of control versus initiative and the significance of having a place, a role in a community of learners.

A Story Where Role Defines Purpose

I had come home from work exhausted and was met by a total look of exhaustion from my husband also. As we began sharing the triumphs and discouragements of the day, our son, Jacob, skulked away with his head down and shoulders slouched. I called him back over to us and asked what he was thinking about. He began to sob while he told me that everyone in our family has a job but him. He said, "Dad has a job and you have a job, but what's my job in this family".

I believe we all need to know our job, our role, our purpose and that without it, we do slouch away. We all need to know our place and how we can serve others not just ourselves.

But knowing our place or our role is not something we simply decide on and enforce it on others.

A Story of Leadership

My title was that of facilitator in an adult literacy program through Laubach Canada. It was a tough group to find my place in. I was reminded of the years earlier in a junior high remedial math program for a group of boys who were all facing school suspension. Both of these situations had the same feel to them. I was an outsider, definitely not part of the group. I felt vulnerable and unsure but the difference was, in this group of adult learners, I loved my work and the content that I was assigned to instruct. I felt that one of the strengths of the

program was that we had what was called a check-in. Unknowingly, this was my attempt to incorporate the practice of speaking in circle that I would later come to know as The Way of Council (Zimmerman 1996). I always took part in the check-in but only in a superficial, professional manner. I thought that was my job to remain stoic and emotionally removed. I thought that the two personas must never meet.

One day, during check-in, one of the students asked me straight out what I was feeling. He said it in such a way that it was more of a demand than a question. I had no choice. I had to be real, and I knew it, or I'd face losing them. So, I told them that I was scared and that I wasn't sure how to lead them. I shared as much as I could without losing the face of professionalism. The group just sat quietly and when I was done no one said anything. Over the course of the next few weeks together, this group taught me more, about how to share and to be real and present. On the last day together, that same student who had called on my authenticity asked for a special check-in and he began the circle by describing what he thought a true leader was made of. And as he passed this beautifully hand carved talking stick to me, he said the position of leader is not something that is taken up but something that is given up, offered up from the group. He said that I was their leader because I had walked the journey with the group. I was part of the group and my place in the group was as the leader.

My next question then is, in my classroom, how can I create a community that enables individuals to define their role and their purpose? I believe I must begin by affirming and inspiring (which literally means to breathe life into) the hopes and ideals in my life and by listening and attending to the stories that define my own sense of self, truth and authenticity. I must open the door to the divine and the intimate within myself so that I teach by being, by existing right there with my students. Mandela's inspires us all to let our own light shine and in so doing we will unconsciously give other people permission to do the same, so that we in effect become a caravan of humans being while at the same time knowing that we do indeed stand on the shoulders of giants in the processional march of life.

Jo Nelson (2001) does this kind of inspiring through a daily affirmation done as a choral read with the students in her class. She asks: Who are you? To which they reply: I am the greatest. And then she asks: Where do you live? And they say: In the Universe. Then she asks: Where are you Going? And they shout out: To bend History. For to live fully, we must know ourself, our sense of place and our sense of history. That is the I, Thou, It (Hawkins 1967) that forms the we of a community as my friend, Emilie, so aptly said.

Our stories need to be told and they need to be heard. Essentially, they need a place to land. In this way, we find our sense of purpose – the telling and acknowledgement of the lived experience directs our sense of service and purpose in life. It is the telling of our stories, both the comedy and the tragedy that directs our sense of meaningfulness. So, through acknowledgement, stories have a place to exist and they have much more power and purpose in our lives. That is the role of community.

Listening is a way of knowing, of communing, of sharing, of journeying and exploring. Lev Vygotsky says that all learning occurs in discourse, and I have come to experience this as the discourse between and amongst others as well as the discourse of my own musings. Listening is the process of unfolding those understandings both as the receiver of knowledge and as the co-creator of it. To involve students in this process of unfolding knowledge by inviting all that they bring to the table of learning is to empower the students to be part of the circle of knowers and in this way to invite the whole self into the classroom. Students really only need invitations to join, to be included and to belong. These invitations stir the curiosity, stimulate inquiry and enhance the motivation to experience the process of learning. Drawing on the stories that the students bring is to involve the students in the Experiential Learning Cycle (McCarthy 2000), so the process of learning includes the experiences, and the interpretations of those experiences. The student is no longer just a receiver nor a spectator in the cycle of living and learning.

A Story of Being Part of Something

I remember when I first “discovered” books. Coming from a home where reading anything beyond the odd arrival of a newspaper or manuals for how to fix a car or a guarantee for the recent toaster purchase was considered extensive reading, I never knew that there was such a thing as reading for pleasure. I had never been to a public library until I was in university! And I definitely didn’t know that people actually talked about books or that books could inspire and stir the soul. I remember my grade five teacher, Mrs. Fraser, introducing me to “Charlie and

the Chocolate Factory” and later to “James and the Giant Peach”. Reading these books conjured feelings of wanting to be part of something, like the unnamed feelings I had years later in wanting to be part of a community (as I had moved so much as a kid). I never felt like I totally belonged to this group of knowers and this haunting feeling remains with me to this day. Now, as I watch my own son become entranced with books for hours every morning, and as I feel the comfort of our family lying on the bed together reading stories of truth and fantasy, I am delighted to see that we are journeying together into the land of knowing ... or perhaps at least believing that our small entourage is joining a much larger circle of knowers and that indeed we are interconnected as learners and lovers of life.

Summary

To be believed, to be respected and acknowledged is to say “I See You”, and, like the Natal greeting, I cannot exist without a community to affirm who I am and to provide a sense of place and a sense of purpose. We are all a part of something much bigger – that which I call community.

The kind of small that promotes growth is not one where I am made to be insignificant but where I am part of a something greater and I stand in awe of all that is. I do this in community in communion with self, others and with the world around me and in me, and when I do, I feel small in that awesome humbling way.

I feel small because I am.

I am barefoot in this circle, where every voice is heard

We pass a stone for speaking and we listen with our hearts
We're hungry for connection and understanding eyes
And I'm small before the shaking voices
Small before the honesty.

Lisa Pontappidan, "Barefoot"

CHAPTER FIVE

Bridging the Waters

The most difficult lesson: which bridge in life to use and which one to break.
Author Unknown

Long before I wrote anything for this conclusion, I titled it. Somehow, impulsively perhaps, poetically probably, I felt that bridging was the place I had to get to. I believed that I had to find a way to bridge these two rivers linking what I believe and how I live, connecting these two aspects of self that flow through and guide my life. I thought I had to bridge the chasm of differences between the world within me and the world around me.

It took me many weeks before I could sit down to write the conclusion. I sat for weeks mulling over the requirements, the standards, the stipulations of what necessitated a conclusion. I was drawn to believe that a conclusion had to sound firm, solid and

confident. I thought I couldn't write it until I had the answer or answers to all my questions so that I could clearly and succinctly summarize what all this meant and provide a simple answer or even a "proven" technique that would guide the rest of my days as a teacher and as a person. My aim was to provide something that was useful, to name the hidden treasure, to come out knowing something expansive and profound. I thought I had to go back and ensure all the stories were told in the past tense in order to show that I had grown past them, and that today I was something different or beyond the stories. I thought I had to find a way to let go of the storylines and find a way to traverse to another shoreline. I felt that to be good or bad was to be on one side or the other. I thought my goal was to show that I was strong enough and articulate enough that I could just let go of the stories once they were told to the right audience. I believed that I could just move forward as if to forget the stories of the past as if to surrender completely and to let the storylines that formed me dissipate. I thought that's what I was supposed to do if I were a complete product, if I had learned the lessons well enough.

But I couldn't. I can't.

I can't just let go. I can't just crossover. I can't find the answer all neatly packaged.

So, maybe it is not even a bridge that I need for the waters of these two systems have already begun to flow together. Perhaps the purpose is not about giving-up or letting-go for I really can't surrender one system to the other. Perhaps the purpose is as I suggested in the chapter on questing where the relevance, the meaning, the usefulness is found simply in the quest, in the journey.

Maybe there is no one simple answer for me right now. Indeed, I feel I am left with more questions now than when I first started. Maybe there is no finality, no neatly wrapped conclusion, no single method to which I can attest, no practice that seems to suit me and my context in all situations, but maybe that is the answer. Maybe I was looking too hard for the one answer rather than really seeing the potential for the multiplicity of answers. Maybe that's what real authentic learning is – the creation of an opening where what is discovered leaves one feeling like they have more questions, more curiosity. Maybe that's the heart of curiosity, the heart of inquiry, the heart of questing. Carlos Santana says that the head is the house of questions and the heart is the house of answers. Maybe this is part of the balance that I am learning that although I am swaying toward a place for the heart in the classroom, in the end, there must be a balance of both the head and the heart. Maybe the heart stirs the intrigue and curiosity and the head leads the search toward the multiplicity of answers. Maybe.

Words arise as a way for me to explain my answers, my interpretations of the world. Words form the system of beliefs and values that arise from the experience of the core self in contact with the world around me. Beliefs and values are expressed through the words used to interpret the world and the newness in it. These conscious or unconscious beliefs propel my actions, and for this reason, I feel I must learn to be aware of this energy of propulsion which seems to arise out of competing streams of consciousness. The one values aesthetics, the wealth of capitalism, the work ethic, standards and measures accepted by the masses. The other values the integrity of one's character, a sense of purpose, knowing one's connection, and individual inner criteria for success and contribution. And I have attended to the former much more than the latter.

By not attending, not listening, the propulsion has grown in discontentment. But I am learning to listen, to attend and to find the words that form my systems of belief. I am becoming increasingly more attentive, more connected, more intimate with what I believe and how I live my life.

I believe in the Buddhist maxim that the thought becomes the word, the word becomes the deed and the deed becomes the habit. This paper reflects the process of deciphering two primary streams of thought that have flowed through me and into my habits for many years. On one hand, I espoused the ideals of listening, questing and journeying and the other sought to fit-in to the norms and expectations of others. Where one side thirsted for authenticity, the other craved affirmation even if it meant assimilation. Where one side longed for the journey, the other wanted the result. I have spent so much of my life believing in the values of money, materialism, consumerism and the work cycle, believing that if I am to be anything at all, I must produce. I must have assets. I must BE on the outside first if I am to be anything on the inside at all. I have believed that the goal was to fit in. I believed that all that mattered was on the outside. I taught from this place of value. I lived from that place of value. But the season is changing...

Journal Entry #11

I went into the yard yesterday to begin the fall clean-up. Everything looked sickly and dead. There was so much mess to clean-up. A rage swelled in me. It began with complaint, changing to blame, shame and then fury. I tore at the boards that had fallen away

from the fence. It was a job beyond my physical power, but once again I thought I should just bear it and get it done. I pushed. I raged. I wept. Ah, these stories that have formed my beliefs of what should and should not be. I ran to my room and cried the kind of cry that pulsates between voiced and voicelessness, and then I listened to the words that shaped my sorrow.

It's all changing. It's all falling apart. Nothing lasts forever, and yet I wanted to get it all to the point where it was perfect, where it was all done, so that then I could enjoy the fruits of my labor. I wanted to just get the physical world right, somehow believing that if I could get it right in that place then I could attend to the world that is unseen, believing that if the outside world could reflect perfection, then I could find inner perfection, believing perfection was a standard, a pre-conceived notion, believing the standard was outside of me. I bought into the notions of the nice house, the great wardrobe, the upstanding education, the consummate teacher. I have become part of the stream that judges between right and wrong, dignified and not, perfect

and less than. And now I am angry that I can't let go and allow it all to change. I am angry because it feels like the world around me screams out the standards of inner integrity and dignity, yet what is measured is the worth of one's outer world. I am angry because no matter how much I do, just as soon as I reach the threshold of the standards, it changes and I can never seem to get beyond the point of seeking. I just want to get it all right. Everything is getting older. It's falling apart. Why do I think it won't? I desire that which will last forever, yet I only have time to attend to the physical world - a world which always changes. My sadness and my anger is that I have wasted time. Ah, to waste time is the greatest failing of all.

It's autumn and I wonder how to let it go. How can I let these old values and beliefs fall away? How can I make room for new growth? And I am reminded of the saying by Marilyn Grey found on a fridge magnet given to me by a wise friend. "No one ever has it all together. That's like trying to eat once and for all." And I wonder if I can really live according to that simple truth.

I have never lived nor worked anywhere long enough to see the work I've already done begin to fade and change. I've never stayed long enough to pay attention to how I've spent my life's energy, to see the fruits of my time spent here, but now the veneer on the once new floors is losing its shine, the paint I put there just eight years ago is starting to peel and the wood that once seemed solid is now rotting away. Things are changing.

I am at a significant crossroad in my life, and it is time to re-evaluate how and where I spend my life's energy, to ask to what can I apply myself that will serve more than just the passing fancies and the changing tides of time or fashion? What is it that I can serve that will have some longevity that will not rot and waste away? What is it in my life both in the classroom and in my day to day life that is real, authentic, universal and long lasting?

You see, much of my discontentment has come from a desire to get it all right. I thought that after twenty years of teaching, I would have it "easier". I would know the answers. I would have something done completely. I would have done something. I would be complete. I thought the lessons would be planned and the techniques well established. I thought then, I could attend to other matters – to matters that really mattered. Instead, I have more questions, questions that move me toward an ever more refined sense of consciousness, questions that hold the potential toward seeing beyond the walls that limit my own potential and my own real authority. Instead, what I have are stories that define what I do and why I do it, stories that I can listen to as my teachers, stories that reflect what I have done and what is my completeness.

Sitting in that final group circle at S.I.T. with Bonnie Mennell and six other classmates, I felt the tension that initiated this project. I felt the struggle between authenticity and just another technique. I sat there as the talking piece was passed from one person to the next, and I wondered if this was all just another gimmick or was it real. Was this some new idea that was being tried on us? Was it a new teaching tool that would be used to poke at what is essential and raw in people? Was it part of some study that was using us as guinea pigs? I wondered if I answered sincerely, would someone respond condescendingly. Would I be seen as gullible, overly trusting, too sensitive, or too deep if I answered honestly, completely? Would my response be analyzed without my knowing? Was all this just a costume, an outer apparel of sincerity intending to jeer from some place of superiority? Was it a test to see who had the right answer, the best answer, the one answer? I turned in anger toward Bonnie when the stone came my way, and I questioned her intentions not because of anything that she had or not done but instead because in me lay a fear born out of the experiences of my life's stories, born out of the fear that is integral to the process of living and learning, born out of a system that demanded product not process.

The stories found here are not just trivialities, but are the answers arising from the question of how I can live and express authenticity, so that I may invite my students to do the same. There could have been a thousand other stories and perhaps a thousand others will arise as time passes. But these are the initial seeds for the change in me to live authentically, for if I am to make myself available at that level for my students then I must do this kind of inner, personal work. The life within me and the life around me cannot be separated any longer.

Sometimes when stories are told the significance, the poignancy or even the main point may feel obscure to the listener, but if life is the consummate teacher then I must learn to trust in the process. If I hope to make a difference, if I hope that my life holds any purpose at all, then I must learn to breathe life into my own stories and to simply listen to what they have to teach me. In this way, I might learn what it means to really inspire, and that in so doing, I might inspire others to do the same. For me to know myself, to know what I teach and to know what I value in the classroom, I have to continue to listen to the stories that shape me, for stories are the heart of knowing.

As an educator, I believe I can make a difference by becoming a guidepost to direct the unfoldment of authenticity of the people who come into my classroom. Like the inukshuks of the Inuit of the north, I believe my role is to simply point in the direction of where home can be found and to mark the place where contributions have been made. In this way, I hope that I can open the windows of inquiry toward self or at least toward the kind of learning that is not entirely outside of the self, not the self that is self absorbed but instead the self that seeks to listen to the drumbeat of purpose and contribution to community.

If I am to be for real, if I am to be an authentic educator then I have to consider how to move away from a system that suggests that knowing is outside of ourselves to one that values the kind of knowing that is inside each and everyone of us. We are all story tellers. We all have a story to tell and a life that is purposeful.

Journal Entry #12

The dilemma battles on in me. Should I teach to deliver the product, the skills, the knowledge that

the system and even the students want? Do I deliver the goods just to enable my students to get a job? Is that my sole purpose? Is that my soul's purpose? Do I become part of the machine driven culture and in so doing encourage my students to do the same? Do I fulfill the outer demands or can I be attentive to inner demands?

It is our last week of class. I could try to get through an overview of all that we've done, but I choose instead to do the ball of wool activity where a ball of wool is tossed from one member of the class to the next accompanied by a statement of what we have learned from each other. It is a time to appreciate those who have contributed to the process of learning. Each time the ball comes our way, we must wrap the wool around our wrist once for each point of appreciation. When our words are spent, we then pass a pair of scissors from one person to the next to cut away from the web of our interconnectedness. As we cut, we say what things we will always carry with us in memory of this group. We walk away with a wristband of strings representing our words, our gratitude, our memories, and remaining on the floor

are the remnants of so much more, but we can't carry it all with us. We take only what remains real and alive for each of us personally.

Being real and authentic means that I must know myself, take risks and remain curious. Being authentic means staying alive to questioning and questing after what I believe and feel. I truly believe that education is not about having the answers. It is about having questions and curiosity. I believe if I am to stay alive to the spirit of a fellow human longing for their potential then I too must be alive to seeking my own potential. Being real and authentic means that process must matter at least as much as product if not more. It means that as an educator I must have a sense of direction, but I don't necessarily have to know the exact end point. My role is to provide direction, to open the window but not necessarily to have everyone notice the same things. I must continue to search for ways to invite the stories to be told because therein lies the system of beliefs and what is seen as meaningful. That's what we notice. That's the glasses we wear. That determines our perspective. That's the idea of creating our own reality.

Stories also guide the teacher to know where the attention is and what students notice. One can find inner authority by listening and by being heard. To create a space where authenticity is valued, I will need to create a class where ritual and routines exist. But most importantly, if I am to create an atmosphere where authenticity can exist, then I must focus on creating a space where communion and community can unfold where we work together in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning making.

My quest continues. I have only begun to explore how to live authentically in the flow of my life as a teacher, a mother, a wife, a friend ... a person. I will continue to

probe the questions and to search for a path and I believe that as I do so, others may take notice so that in this way they too may see the window where there was once a wall. To invite authenticity to live in my classes, I must begin to live authentically. It is I who must begin.

It is I who must begin.

Once I begin, once I try –
here and now,
right where I am,
not excusing myself
by saying that things
would be easier elsewhere,
without grand speeches and
ostentatious gestures,
but all the more persistently
- to live in harmony
with the “voice of Being”, as I
understand it within myself
- as soon as I begin that,
I suddenly discover,
to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
nor the first,
nor the most important one
to have set out
upon that road.

Whether all is already lost
or not depends entirely on
whether or not I am lost.

Vaclav Havel, “It Is I Who Must Begin”

Without authenticity, I would be lost. I am learning to listen to my own dreams and not just what others expect. I am learning to listen to the stories that shape what my students need and not just what the system needs. I am learning about my own sense of

connection by finding and claiming the words that have become part of my identity. I am learning. I am beginning.

Like the story of building Duplo with Jacob, the living, the learning is found in the process not in the product itself. For years, I have heard that life is a journey, and yet all too often I have felt that I had to get somewhere. I never completely understood that I didn't have to get anywhere at all. I just had to move, to risk the journey rather than to sit still.

A Story About Life

Although I don't remember the title of the play I saw years ago at Yellowquill School in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, I do remember the power of the key scene near the end of the play. The tension in play was between a mother and daughter and in this scene the daughter had just exploded in a fit of rage and had thrown a vase that she had given to her mother some years earlier. Without flinching, the mother bent down and began to pick up the shattered pieces of the gift from the past. There was a hushed stillness on the stage and in the audience, and then the daughter bent down and reluctantly began to help her mother. As she did, she asked her mother why she bothered with it at all and she reprimanded her mother for a life spent on worthless things. Again without hesitation the mother responded, "It's a life. No one told me how to live it. I just did. It's just a life that's meant to be lived".

To conclude seems to suggest a closure, a kind of finality, an assuredness, yet these words seem far way from the reality of what I am living for my awakening has really just begun. I am only now awakening to the divides in my life, the divide between the personal, inner identities of self and the public, outer identities of self as an educator, the divide between knowing what I believe and living my life accordingly, the divide between the changeable, whimsical outer self and the deeper, more solid soulful, authentic self. This is not a conclusion, but rather an invitation to myself and perhaps even to others to continue to seek, to be curious and to listen to the stories that form all those selves in an attempt to live connected and with integrity. For to teach is to be connected, and to live with integrity is to be authentic. Authenticity is a lived experience.

“It is said that the old and the very, very young and the ones we call whisperers hear most clearly of all. If you wish to hear as well as they do and discover the secrets waiting for you, you must learn to: open your ears from the inside out, travel all over without moving about and make friends with silence.”
(The Third Ear – Celebrations of Teaching Stories and Songs from the First People”)

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