Identity Within the Mainstream Grade 8 Writing Classroom: Ways in Which Honouring Identity

Enhances the Teaching and Learning of Writing

by

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Abstract

The following research project was born out of the author's personal struggle with writing proficiency and her multicultural identity experiences, both as a child and as an adult. In today's world, with increased movement and growing globalization, classrooms are alive with multiple languages and ethnicities. Many students live, perhaps unknowingly, with hybrid identities and many find written communication challenging. Writing, involving not only the mechanics but also the art (Graham and Perin, 2007), is a complex skill for every student to master, the first-language (L1) learner as well as the second- (L2). Likewise, identity, influenced by relationships, experiences, and context, is a complex phenomenon. Because of this complexity, identity is best understood through the sociocultural perspective (Gee, 2000-2001; Nelson, 2008; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Ethnographic research is able to bring to the forefront or make visible nuances that "through a wider analytic lens" often remain hidden (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 597). Thus, to further understand the interplay between identity and the teaching and learning of writing, an (auto) ethnographic approach is used in the research project.

Acknowledgements

This journey has been one I have often felt unqualified to attempt or continue. Thankfully, I have not travelled the road alone.

Though formally begun in January of 2013, truly this journey began as a young girl. As I began to face my own hybrid identity, it was my mom who became a sure shelter from the storm and my dad who showed me by example that every language and culture is one of value and worth. So I say, "Thank you."

Then, at the beginning of 2013, when I, with trembling heart, delved into the articles and sat down to write many a paper, the guidance received from professors challenged me on. Again I say, "Thank you." Thank you to Dr. Yi Li who introduced to me the world of narrative and encouragingly beckoned me to follow a path of challenge, possibility, and creativity. Thank you to Dr. Clea Schmidt who spurred me on to clearer and more concise writing. Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Sandra Kouritzin, who so graciously opened her heart, classroom, and home to my teacher schedule and whose encouragement and guidance made this journey possible and enjoyable. Finally, to my committee, Dr. Kouritzin, Dr. Mani, and Dr. Honeyford, "Thank you." Your comments were challenging and encouraging. Your words were inspiring. I left our first meeting with a renewed energy to continue the journey. A humble thanks for accepting me as a fellow colleague!

To my sisters, who have listened and prayed and cheered, I say, "Thank you." Thanks for not letting me give up!

And, finally, to my students, all of you, I say, "Thank you." You are my inspiration.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I am living out my hybrid identity and watching my students live out theirs.

I was born to parents of Mennonite background. When I was five, we moved to Venezuela. The rest of my formative years, save for Grades 4 and 9, were spent in this beautiful South American country. Green year round, bugs in the flour, national guards on street corners...these were my norm. I was quite used to carrying my *cedula* (identification card) with me everywhere I roamed. Though I learned to ignore it, I rather liked the attention I received as a blue-eyed, blonde-headed teen. Whistles, stares, and comments like "*Mi Reina*" (my queen) were simply daily life.

As a child, though I did not know what a hybrid identity was, I surely felt its effects. I remember returning to Canada for my Grade 4 school year. The seasons changed, the school was big, the teachers new, the friendships a work in progress. What do ten-year-old girls talk about? I do not remember our conversations, except for one, which stands out as a faint, sad memory. Obviously, my little girlfriend had heard about Venezuela one too many times. "There she goes...talking about Venezuela again." I had not meant to come across prideful or boastful. It was just that Venezuela was all that I knew; it was home. I now realize this is not an experience unique to me. Pavlenko (2001) notes:

> New arrivals may face the fact that their own identity categories are meaningless to the
> members of their new community and that they have to reposition themselves (or to
> allow others to reposition them) in order to be "meaningful" in the new environment.
> (p. 331)

Though she meant no harm, my identity was "meaningless" to my little friend.

During the two years spent in the Canadian school system, a teacher and an assignment brighten my memories. My Grade 4 teacher will forever hold a special place in my heart. She was a teacher who cared. I do not remember what I learned that year, but I do remember a tall, pretty lady who was sensitive and loving to a quiet little girl going through some new experiences. Hers was a classroom where "assumed needs" (institutional requirements) did not override my perhaps unspoken but very real "expressed needs" (Noddings, 2012, p. 774). Later, I remember a writing assignment I completed in Grade 9. In it, I described the beauty of the Venezuelan outdoors...my home. I remember the teacher asking me if she could keep a copy. In doing so, she honoured who I was, what I knew, and what I had experienced. She valued my hybrid identity. She legitimized my "self," my "world," and my "own life story narrative" (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 325).

Like my students, my past has shaped my present. And for all of us, our present will shape our future. These cannot be separated one from the other. Our lives are stories, some chapters already told, some yet to be written. Each chapter builds on the last. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that "life – as we come to it and as it comes to others – is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities" (p. 17). It is in reflecting on those "storied moments" and "narrative fragments" that we grow. Farrell (2006) speaks to the importance of reflection and the past when he says, "The old cliché 'Experience is the greatest teacher' may not be as true as we think, for we do not learn as much from experience as we learn from reflecting on that experience" (p. 77).

Tensions

As I reflect on my past, I see tensions begin to surface. They affected me but they also involved others. Sometimes these had to do with my hybrid identity, at other times with my schoolwork. I specifically remember the issue of writing coming to my mind in Grade 9. The small private school where I was coming from in Venezuela used an American curriculum. This curriculum focused heavily on grammar and punctuation. Through the years I learned how to dissect and diagram every word in a sentence. I understood each part of speech and had no trouble with quotation marks and apostrophes and semicolons. Yet, I came to a realization that year spent in the Canadian school system. Though I felt confident with the mechanics of writing, I felt much less so with the art of expression. While in the area of mechanics I felt I surpassed my Canadian classmates, I sensed they surpassed me in their ability to communicate.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that narratives are lived within a three-dimensional space, where "personal and social" emotions, relationships and experiences are lived out along the "past, present and future" timeline of one's life, on the landscape of a specific "place" (pp. 50-51). As I look back on my own history, I see how, although unknown to me at the time, my experiences have shaped who I am today, both as a person and as a teacher. Likewise, my experiences in the present are shaping who I am becoming as I move into the future.

"Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20), and so I continue my narrative in the following pages, understanding that each chapter of my life has influenced the present and my present is influencing the future.

First teaching job.

"Can I broom the floor?" asked my Grade 4 student. Broom the floor? Yes, broom the floor. At the time, I was working in a small Texas border town about twenty minutes from

Mexico. The school district in which I had the privilege of working was composed of a 99%

Hispanic population. This was the sort of environment I had dreamed of during my college days.

Having grown up in South America, the Spanish language and Hispanic culture make my heart

feel right at home. As a candidate teacher, I greatly desired to work with ESL (English as a

Second Language) students, specifically those from Hispanic background.

My dream came true. I was offered three jobs at three different elementary schools in the

same district. I accepted a Grade 4 position. Here, in this south Texas Grades 1-4 school with a

population of about 500 students, I was introduced to bilingual programs and students labeled

LEP (Limited English Proficiency). I was placed in a bilingual classroom, with no bilingual

certification. The first year of teaching is stressful as is; being called on to teach in two

languages, when unprepared, was so much more than that. This assignment, however, lasted

only a couple of weeks. When the district office heard I was in a bilingual classroom with no

certification, things quickly changed. I was moved across the hall, to an all-English class. I

went to work, getting this second room up and running – books organized, desks rearranged, new

bulletin boards hung. These were also the days when being called away from my students and

classroom for random meetings, any time of day, with no warning, in the middle of a lesson, was

the norm. Then, my new classroom kept growing. Soon, another teacher was hired.

Responsibilities were divided. But his classroom management style was so different from mine.

The upheavals, the changes, the randomness of those days left me frazzled and floundering.

Surely things could not get worse, only better, and they did! I survived the chaos of that

first year and began to love my workplace – my students, my coworkers, the culture, the

language. After five years, I even obtained that bilingual certification. I was the odd-one-out –

the tall, blonde lady – but I loved my students and they loved me. Colourful and creative – that is how I would describe the people, the place, the interactions, the life at our school.

Those good things are what made the tensions so hard. I wanted to teach, to have the freedom to make lessons the students would enjoy, to really foster curiosity and learning. Constantly, however, I found my philosophy of teaching beaten down, its voice drowned out by the thundering and pounding waves of *The Test*! The mandate was to ensure my Grade 4 students passed those state writing and reading tests. The pressure was great – from district building, to principal's office, to teacher's classroom, to student's desk! Practice test booklets abounded; the joy of learning did not. Recess, so needed by little 10-year-old bodies, was frowned upon; after all, students needed to sit and learn. After-school tutoring was pushed. Where was the delight of learning? Where was the joy of teaching?

I remember every bulletin board covered, the room left bare and stark, on the day of *The Test.* I remember a 10-year-old boy trying and erasing, trying and erasing, wanting to get it just perfect. Some students laboured for hours, while others finished up and were asked to put heads on desks or read quietly. For all, time dragged on. By the time the day was done, I had students bored silly, on the floor under desks or shelves, willing the minutes to march on and get them away from *The Test*.

The Test, mandated by the state, seemed to be the driving force behind decisions made by school administrators. Schedules were reworked; students and teachers pulled from classrooms and out of routines to be placed into tutoring groups. Though I loved my students and appreciated and learned so much from my coworkers, I continually felt the struggle between teaching to the test and teaching to learn.

The Test began to rob the teacher, the student, and the classroom of the joy and spontaneity of learning. Perhaps it was not even the test, but the way in which *The Test* was handled. Taken to the extreme, *The Test* and its accompanying pressures tended to turn teaching into a machine. Students were funneled in, books and worksheets added next, and, it was hoped, *successful* students manufactured, all looking the same. If they did not look alike, the machine – the teacher and her teaching – had failed.

I was teaching in a context where numbers "tend to imply that the test scores of one's students are evidence of one's teaching quality" (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2011, p. 7). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) view this educational experience as one that rejects the importance of students as individuals, each with unique stories shaping their individual responses and learning (pp. 30-31). I agree. For me, such teaching caused inner turmoil; it clashed and crashed with my own philosophy of teaching. I was experiencing "tension at the boundaries" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 32). It is as Clandinin and Connelly suggest, "Student achievement on a test does not in and of itself tell the tester or the teacher much of anything until the narrative of the student's learning history is brought to bear on the performance" (p. 31).

From south to north.

With an unexpected move to northern Winnipeg, the context changed. Now I was in an independent school, in Canada, teaching Grades 7 and 8 students. *The Test* was no longer the monster lurking in the shadows. However, it was clear I had entered a new landscape, with new unique obstacles to climb. Like the landscape in south Texas, this new place had also been shaped by "institutional narratives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 67).

I had just left a school district with a 99% Hispanic population. I had had to leave abruptly when paperwork out of my control was left undone. I was sad. At the time, I did not know if I would ever again be given another opportunity like the one I was leaving.

Now, here I was in the north, with a new multicultural opportunity offered me. It had been nine long months in coming. With anticipation I entered the building. Then came the culture shock – lack of resources, decades old books, missing textbooks, little technology, no internet access. How *was* one to prepare these kids for a 21st century, multicultural, technological world?

On this new landscape, students still needed to learn how to read and write. English skills still varied. Hybrid identities were still a constant reality. Here on this northern landscape, I still faced times of frustration as I looked at the needs in my classroom. The richness and diversity of this northern landscape was again a paradoxical place of both blessing and perplexity.

Memory one.

"Next week is going to be painful." That was my silent thought as I stood at the kitchen sink pondering the issue of writing with my homeroom Grade 8 class. The next thought that followed was, "That must be how they feel when they are asked to write." A third of the class is one to three grade levels below in their writing skills. Some struggle due to EAL (English as an Additional Language) issues; others struggle because they have never received a solid foundation of basic writing skills. (May/June, 2013)

Memory two.

My ESL learners are getting it. They are making connections, personal connections. As they show me their entries for advice and approval, I see the sense of accomplishment and

delight on their faces. I notice that in making a personal connection, one student is also learning to use an introductory phrase. This student is mimicking the author. (May/June, 2013)

Memory three.

My own identity as a "good teacher" was once again shaken on Thursday. I see four students in my 8A class who desperately need help in writing. How do I help them sufficiently without neglecting the others who also need my input, but in a less desperate way? I want to help EVERYONE. How do I do it? Thursday I was overwhelmed with the need...and frustrated. (Journal entry, October 25-26, 2014)

Memory four.

Because we are discussing population issues in Grade 7 social studies these days, I asked students two questions regarding their own experiences with language and immigration. When I asked what languages were spoken at home with families, there was a variety of answers: Punjabi, Tagalog, Cree, Spanish, and German. (Journal entry, November 3, 2014)

These tiny glimpses into the landscape of the mainstream classroom reveal the complexities of the learning environment. The landscape is not just about perfect lessons, or an understanding teacher, or the presence of a variety of languages, or the dynamics of student behaviour and personality. No one factor can be isolated and attributed to successful teaching. The landscape is complex.

The complexity of the learning landscape shaped my life as a child; it continues to touch my life as an adult. I have experienced the complexity as a student; I continue to experience it as a teacher. The complexity of the learning environment influenced my identity as a child and continues to affect my identity as a teacher. The effects of this complexity are seen in how I teach and the choices I make. It is a complexity whose rhythm reverberates within the classroom

walls, in some way shaping the identities of each of my students and continually impacting my own.

I share the complex learning landscape with my middle school students. Students at this age find themselves engaged in a vulnerable chapter of life; personal identity is developing. Several students come to mind as I think about this tender age. Each has struggled academically. One was extremely quiet in my Grade 7 social studies class. In Grade 8, he was louder in a unique sort of way. He found out that he could scare me by coming up behind me and yelling. Though first reaction was to get him to stop, I noticed he received great joy out of this little prank. The attention he received seemed to make him feel valued and a part of the learning community. So I let him continue, on the one condition that he was only allowed to scare me once a day. Sigh and smile. Then my mind wanders to two students who had often, in the past, been pulled from the mainstream classroom to receive help from the resource department. However, once on the landscape of my Grade 8 English language arts classroom, I encouraged more consistent time in the classroom. I saw positive results. The embarrassment of being different and singled out seemed to slip away, replaced by a feeling of worth and belonging. With a refreshed identity, hope appeared to brighten and growth then followed.

Owing to the complexity of the learning landscape and its influence, not only in my own classroom but also within the classrooms of so many teachers who live in an ever increasing global world, I look at the complexity of the learning and teaching environment in more depth in the following pages, discussing how this complex landscape affects learning and the student, as well as teaching and the classroom environment.

A Complex Landscape

As educators, we cannot escape the fact that context matters to learning. Morita (2004) states that "the local classroom context—the social, cultural, historical, curricular, pedagogical, interactional, and interpersonal context—is inseparable from learners' participation" (p. 596). Understanding this complexity of language acquisition through the lens of the complex classroom landscape is what Davis (1995) refers to as "a holistic perspective" (p. 432). Davis explains that "from this point of view, mental processes are not unimportant, but they are situated in a larger sociocultural context that is equally important" (p. 432). Morita (2004) also speaks to the power and dynamics of both context and teacher on the learning landscape:

> Instead of assuming that individual students simply behave according to their abilities or cultural/personal preferences, instructors should question what kinds of roles and statuses a given classroom community comprises and how those roles are shaping or being shaped by classroom interactions. Second, the classroom community should treat L2 learners (as well as native-speaking domestic students) as valuable intellectual and cultural resources and give their unique contributions adequate legitimacy. (p. 598)

The practices on the landscape of the classroom are crucial to a student's learning. Teacher attitude, classroom atmosphere, and student experience are all pieces of the learning and teaching puzzle.

The teacher.

It is on the complex learning landscape that a teacher either empowers or discourages. Morita (2004) suggests that teachers assert their power negatively when they assign roles to students "monolithically and deterministically in terms of their limitations" (p. 598). Identities such as these are not limited to those who struggle with language but may also be assigned to those who struggle with behavioural or academic issues. On the other hand, a teacher can see a

student's background, experiences, and language as having "currency" (Morita, 2004, p. 592). It is in such an environment where a sense of community is created. And it is in community where students learn best. To create a community where students adopt an attitude of responsibility, are willing to take risks in their learning, and are encouraged to persevere requires an atmosphere of safety. It is the teacher as leader who encourages this climate on the classroom landscape.

Park (2012) relates the experiences and growth of Xia, an L2 (second-language) speaker from China, as she came to understand the importance of a safe classroom climate to the teaching of language. In social circles, Xia's identity as an English speaker was strong. She was able to converse effectively with both L1 (first-language) and L2 speakers. As a teacher in the classroom, however, her identity faltered. Under the wise direction of a mentor teacher, Xia came to realize "that teaching ESOL has as much to do with the attitude that one exhibits toward one's students and the relationships that one establishes with them as it does with how well one speaks English" (Park, 2012, p. 140). On an inherently complex learning environment, it is the teacher who plays an integral role in the climate of that environment.

The classroom environment.

Classroom climate emerges from the attitude of the teacher and the practices chosen by the teacher. These choices are crucial to a student's learning. Morita (2004) explains "academic discourse socialization" (p. 576) as an intricate, multifaceted process involving more than the simple acquisition of a given set of data or skills. She highlights the need for students to feel valued, stating that "a certain level of legitimacy is essential for learning" (p. 576). Teacher attitudes, classroom atmosphere and management, teacher-planned learning activities, and teacher-student relationships work together to foster a learning environment where each student understands they are a valued member of the community.

The complexity of the learning and teaching landscape, brought to life by different characters and within unique contexts, together with its accompanying influence on teacher and student identity, is best captured by story.

The Power of Story

Stories speak. Bob Dotson (2013), in sharing about the importance of listening to and sharing stories, writes:

> We are better when we share them. We're better when we hear those stories and recognize ourselves....We are, in the end, each of us a collection of stories. We love each other by embracing those stories, honoring them and learning from them....Like my dad taught me, it's the story that holds life. Tell the stories, and the rest will take care of itself. (pp. 56-59)

In these pages, I have tried to capture the story of my classroom. The act of deliberately writing it down has challenged my own growth. It is my hope that, in some small or big way, it will also challenge the growth of others who, like myself, find themselves teaching in the multicultural, multilingual classroom, a complex landscape which is equally challenging and exciting, sometimes discouraging yet all the while filled with hopeful opportunities.

The Research Puzzle

Throughout my twelve years of teaching, I have wondered how best to teach writing and puzzled over the pieces students need in order to write well. How do the pieces fit together? Is there a way to teach the pieces so that students and teacher feel positive about the process? So that growth is sustainable long after the school year ends? So that the ugly weed of frustration does not overtake the joy of creativity? So that all students learn to write, especially those whose first language is not English? The wanderings and wonderings of my own life as a child

followed by the wanderings and wonderings of my life as a teacher have become the "particular wonder" from which my "research puzzle" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 42) has emerged.

The learning and teaching landscape is complex. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) help us visualize this complexity as a "*three-dimensional...space*" (p. 50). Within this space, our lives and our stories unfold. This space holds its shape as relationships, time, and location interact, each dimension being dependent upon and influenced by the others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As I live life, together with my students, on the complex classroom landscape, I realize that "new stories...[will] be extensions of past stories and they...[will] also become touchstones for future ones" (Nelson, 2008, p. 210). As researcher, I deliberately draw on my past, past experiences as a child and as an adult. Clandinin (2013) states that as narrative inquirers, this remembering "allows us to shape our research puzzles and to begin to justify our inquiries personally, practically, and socially" (pp. 43-44). I realize that "who I am, what I believe, what experiences I have had all impact what, how, and why I research" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 470). It is my past which influences my present and encourages me to look to the future.

The purpose of this research project was to examine the interplay of writing and identity within a mainstream Grade 8 classroom graced with multilingual and multicultural students. Lee and Anderson (2009) state:

Present discourses in the media and social sciences research about accelerating global change increasingly locate individuals and their interactions across multiple boundaries: linguistic, cultural, ethnic, racial, economic, religious, political, national, and digital. The fluidity of both perceived and actual movements of persons and messages makes it

necessary to reconsider how identities are conceptualized and framed as "mattering" in

social interactions across different contexts. (p. 181)

Does identity matter, and if so, how does it matter in the context of the writing classroom?

The following research questions guided my journey as I pondered identity in the writing classroom: 1) How do I, as the teacher in a mainstream Grade 8 language arts classroom, position both myself and my L1 and L2 students within the writing environment, in a way that recognizes and honours our multiple identities? 2) How can I, as writing teacher within a mainstream Grade 8 language arts classroom composed of both L1 and L2 students, recognize and honour student identity in a way that enhances the teaching of writing in all its complexity? 3) In what ways do I, as writing teacher within a mainstream Grade 8 language arts classroom composed of both L1 and L2 students, honour my own identity as a teacher and a writer?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Identity can be an elusive phenomenon, hard to define. Attempts to describe identity focus on many aspects of identity's nature. These include culture, language, individuality, specific contexts, and even age. The research in this study is based on a social constructionist framework (Lee & Anderson, 2009). Conducted within the writing classroom, language was a major component; thus, the research project also incorporates the sociolinguistic perspective (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Finally, the research and its conclusions have, as their foundation and center, an ethic of caring bounded in relationship (Noddings, 1986; Noddings, 2012). Influenced by the work of the above individuals, I created the following diagram to help bring focus to my research as well as provide a guiding perspective for the reader.

Care Ethics - Relationships

Sociolinguistic Perspective

Social Constructionist Framework
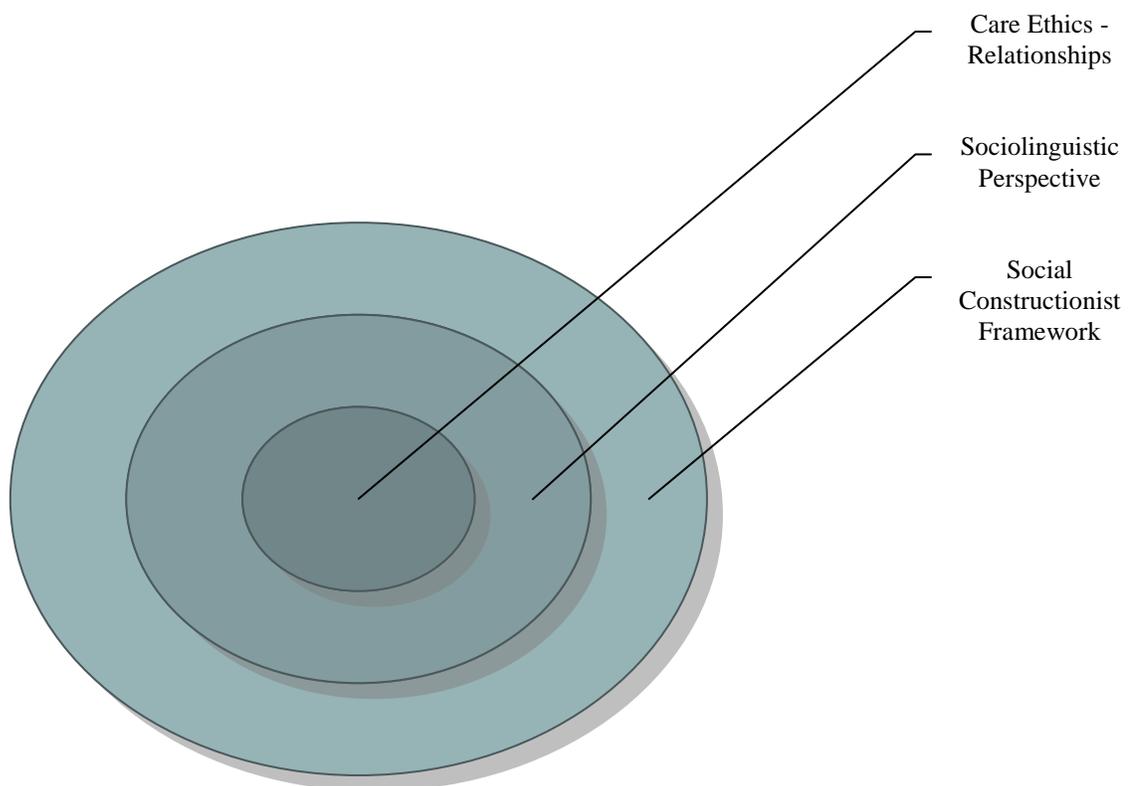
Identity Broadly Defined

Identity is an abstract phenomenon, yet powerful in its impact. How identity is perceived and handled has far-reaching effects. Lee and Anderson (2009) discuss two differing views which they describe as being "at opposite ends of an ontological continuum" (p. 186). The essentialist understands identity as "fixed, internal, and in direct correlation with measurable characteristics," whereas the social constructionist understands identity as "fluid, social, and variably related to contestable and constructed categories" (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p. 186). The social constructionist perspective understands that "ascriptions of being a minority, or linguistically/culturally 'other,' and the values associated with these categories are not truths about individuals but are socially and locally constructed assumptions or beliefs" (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p. 191). As I discuss the nuances of identity in the following pages, I do so through the lens of the social constructionist framework, recognizing, however, that the essentialist viewpoint leaves its traces within this opposing framework.

The social constructionist framework.

Various scholars follow the social constructionist perspective. Gee (2000-2001), who views identity through a multilayered lens, states that "all people have multiple identities connected not to their 'internal states' but to their performances in society" (p. 99). Within this framework, identity is influenced by the external; it is made visible by oneself or others and dependent on outside recognition. In like manner, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) view "identity as a relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories" (pp. 585-586). Bucholtz and Hall, who build their view of identity on a broad sociocultural linguistic framework, contend that identity "is intersubjectively rather than

individually produced and interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion" (p. 587). As does Gee, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) view identity as a layered phenomenon, noting that "from the perspective of the analyst, it is not a matter of choosing one dimension of identity over others, but of considering multiple facets in order to achieve a more complete understanding of how identity works" (p. 593). In other words, identity forms as we interact with others. Thus, we come to understand each other better "by anchoring identity in interaction" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 607). Similarly, Nelson (2008) suggests that "change in our identities can be thought of as a series of shifts that take place over time during which many experiences have been encountered and thus affect who we are in our worlds" (p. 216). These explanations view identity as dependent on relationships and context. It follows, then, that my actions, reactions, and words as a teacher have potential to affect the identities of my students in profound ways.

Though the multilayered view of identity presented by Gee (2000-2001) fits within the social constructionist framework, there exists within his explanation a trace of the essentialist perspective. Gee explains identity as four interconnected layers: "Nature-identity," "Institution-identity," "Discourse-identity," and "Affinity-identity" (p. 100). Gee states, "It is crucial to realize that these four perspectives are *not* separate from each other" (p. 101). Rather, the purpose of deconstructing the concept of identity in this way is to help "focus our attention on different aspects of how identities are formed and sustained" (Gee, 2000-2001, p. 101). In other words, context matters, and these layers help "to formulate questions about how identity is functioning for a specific person (child or adult) in a given context or across a set of different contexts" (Gee, 2000-2001, p. 101).

According to Gee (2000-2001), "Nature-identity" is a characteristic inherent by birth and given identity status because of external acknowledgement. For example, part of my identity is

being the youngest child in my family, a characteristic recognized by my siblings. "Institution-identity" comes to be through the actions of an institution and can be either positive or negative (Gee, 2000-2001). Gee explains that it can be "either a *calling* or an *imposition*" (p. 103). For example, I was hired as a Grade 8 teacher. Though this title has been given me by my school, it is an aspect of my identity that I enjoy and in which I had some choice. I see the title as a positive aspect of my identity as an individual. On the other hand, as Gee explains, a learning disability diagnosis such as ADHD can be attached to a student by others, the student having no say in the formation of this aspect of his identity. "Discourse-identity" is an aspect of identity in which a personal trait becomes a known characteristic of an individual, made visible as individuals are in relation with one another (Gee, 2000-2001). For example, I may label a student as disrespectful based on my perceptions and interpretations of his actions and words in class. However, he may simply be using verbal and body language commonplace to his after-school environment. The student's intentions may not be negative in the least, but I can interpret his actions in a negative way and consequently label him disrespectful. Gee explains that this aspect of identity may be "an *ascription* or an *achievement*" (p. 104). In other words, a student may be given this disrespectful-student label with no intentionality on his part or he may, with intentionality, pursue this label and identity. "Affinity-identity" is that aspect of identity gained through "*participation* or *sharing*" (Gee, 2000-2001, p. 105). It is a layer of identity gained through personal choice; members choose to be part of a group through their deliberate engagement in activities common to the group (Gee, 2000-2001). These four interconnected layers proposed by Gee seem to combine both the "internal" essentialist perspective, to a lesser degree, and the "fluid" social constructionist perspective, to a larger degree (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p. 186).

Wright and Taylor (1995) also acknowledge both the internal and the external influences on identity, doing so even more specifically than does Gee (2000-2001). Wright and Taylor present identity as two-fold, stating that it "includes at least two components or levels: the personal identity and the social or collective identity" (p. 242). This perspective identifies personal identity as "those aspects of the self that make the individual unique—personal attributes, skills, and experiences" and social or collective identity as "those aspects of the individual that connect her or him with others—group memberships" (Wright & Taylor, 1995, p. 242). Thus, neither the internal nor the external can be ignored when addressing identity.

Importance of context.

As has already been established, identity, with its layers formed through multiple relationships and contexts, is complex in its functioning. The social constructionist perspective (Lee & Anderson, 2009) allows for this complexity. An identity principle put forth by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) states that "identities encompass (a) macro-level demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles" (p. 592). In other words, identity is multifaceted and encompasses both the broad and the specific. Identity is not only informed by demographics such as race but also by local culture and by the even more narrowly defined individual context within that culture. Context is central to identity (Gee, 2000-2001; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Peirce (1995) contends "that the individual language learner is not ahistorical and unidimensional but has a complex and sometimes contradictory social identity, changing across time and space" (pp. 25-26). Identity, then, cannot be divorced from context.

Context matters to identity. Both past and present context influence how I see myself in the present. Bruner (2004) highlights the significance and complexity of context in his work

with four members of a family who each tell their life stories. He notes that in each of their accounts "place is not simply a piece of geography" but rather "an intricate construct" (Bruner, 2004, p. 703). Bruner goes on to describe place for these family members as "psychic geography" (p. 703). For all four family members, who distinguished "home" from "the real world," "home" was an "inside, private, forgiving, intimate, predictably safe" place, whereas "the real world" was an "outside, demanding, anonymous, open, unpredictable, and consequently dangerous" place (Bruner, 2004, p. 703). Context, as Bruner explains it in all its complexity, influences identity and is integral to its shaping. Gee (2000-2001) sums this up, acknowledging that identity "at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable" (p. 90).

As a sociocultural phenomenon, identity is shaped by context and context includes culture. Culture is not a rigid phenomenon (Irizarry, 2007; Crippen, 2011; Asher, 2008). Irizarry (2007) encourages educators to develop a "*culturally connected* teacher identity," which understands that culture is always in motion and is more than just a set of "racial/ethnic characteristics" (p. 27). Bucholtz and Hall (2005) also focus attention on the role of "language, culture, and society" (p. 586) in identity formation and define identity as "*the social positioning of self and other*" (p. 586). Park (2013) also speaks to the complexity of identity and this interconnectedness of layers when she states:

> As complex and nuanced as identity construction is, identity is also connected to how one has been socialized in the community, which is layered with certain values, beliefs, dispositions, and power relations that allow one to move in and out of social contexts. (p. 341)

Pollock and Van Reken (2009) likewise remind us that "understanding who we are and where we belong is a developmental task that takes place in the context of the surrounding community" (Chapter 4, p. 43). Thus, identity cannot be separated from context or from the relationships and culture integral and unique to that context.

This intertwining of identity with culture and context comes to light in a reference made by Lee and Anderson (2009) describing a woman born in France whose parents are of Mexican and Chinese heritage but who has spent most of her life living in the United States. In this example, Lee and Anderson point to "the complexities and multifaceted nature of identities" and state "that there cannot be just one identity for any individual" (p.204). My students and I are no different. We are all given the task of handling our multiple identities as we maneuver our way through the maze of contexts we occupy each day. These contexts include the world of school, the world of community, the world of church, the world of home, the world of sports, the world of family, to name a few. My students, as well as myself, "'travel' between these 'worlds'" within the space of a day; we "inhabit more than one of these 'worlds' at the very same time"; we "are 'world travellers' as a matter of necessity and of survival" (Lugones, 1987, pp. 10-11).

The layers of unique contexts, cultures, relationships, internal qualities, languages, and experiences that intertwine to influence and shape identity weave themselves into an identity tapestry. For me, this tapestry emerged as one characterized by hybridity, an identity that can also be referred to as a "transnational" identity (De Fina and Perrino, 2013). Because I personally identify with this hybrid identity, it is the identity from which my research puzzle has grown. Thus, I use the following section to review the characteristics of this sometimes hidden identity, highlighting its inherent strengths and often co-existing tensions.

Hybrid identity.

Hybridity denotes the involvement of more than one piece. Schreiter (2011) explains that "hybridity tries to capture the cultural process of mixing that goes on with contact between cultures" (p. 30). Referring to this meeting of cultures, Bhabha (2013) states that "the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presenting" (p. 107). Sakamoto (1996), speaking of the history of Japan's national identity, explains that one perception sees hybrid identity as a phenomenon that "retains a sense of difference and tension between two cultures, but without assuming hierarchy. It is not just a new identity but a new form of identity, open to the Other and internally split" (pp. 115-116). With globalization an ever present and growing reality in our world today, cultures are continually bumping into each other and overlapping in homes, schools, communities, and countries. Truly, as Pollock and Van Reken (2009) explain, "Cultural mixing and matching in every country is happening faster than we can understand" (Chapter 4, p. 45). This is creating for many "a new form of identity" (Sakamoto, 1996, p. 116), an identity negotiated through the weaving of place, language, and culture (Young, 2009). Asher (2008) notes that these hybrid identities grow through "dynamic, context-specific intersections of race, class, culture, and gender" (p. 14). Hybrid identity is complex and intricate, weaving together "the multiple and varied layering of cultural environments" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 3, p. 32). Hybrid identities are much like those sidewalk plants that wield their way between the cracks of cement. These are identities that "emerge in the interstices between different cultures" (Asher, 2008, p. 13).

When cultures mix, people gain new perspectives, learn new ways of doing, see the world in a different light. Bhabha (2013) suggests that "the borderline work of culture....renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present" (p. 109). In similar manner, Schreiter (2011) explains that "when

cultures come into contact, they constantly borrow and reconfigure themselves through new knowledge and practices" (p. 31). Hybrid identities come alive in the present because of the influences of the past. As Bhabha (2013) notes, "The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living" (p. 109).

Irizarry (2007) highlights yet another aspect of the multilayered complexity of hybrid identities, noting that these identities can be shaped not only by race or ethnicity but also socially through relationships. Irizarry states:

Essentialist notions of culturally responsive pedagogy fail to address the cultural identities of students who have complex identities because of their experiences with peers of many varied identities; those whose urban roots have resulted in hybrid identities and those who are multiethnic/multiracial. That is, their identities are not created solely based on their race or ethnicity. Rather, their identities are complex because of the experiences and relationships they create with others. (p. 22)

Bushong (2013) confirms, stating that "a cross-cultural childhood is becoming the 'new normal' across our globe for virtually everyone rather than something that only affects globally mobile kids" (Chapter 1, p. 10). Hybrid identities, then, exist in rich variety and in varying degrees.

For me, my hybrid identity began to noticeably form when I moved with my family from the country of my birth, Canada, to the country where I would grow up, Venezuela, South America. My life of "border crossing" (Wallace, 2004, p. 208) began at the age of five. No longer could I claim only one country as home; crossing continents had catapulted me into being "a 'citizen of the world'" (Schreiter, 2011, p. 19). My identity began to significantly shift at a young age. Pollock and Van Reken (2009) use the analogy of a root system to describe the growth of the complex hybrid identity. The analogy emphasizes the significance of this root

system for children. The root system is enduring and powerful because it begins during a child's

formative years "when that child's sense of identity, relationships with others, and view of the

world are being formed in the most basic ways" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 2, pp. 21-

22). The roots of my development were located in different countries; as I grew, I often found

myself in places of knowing I was different, a feeling that plagued me both in Canada and in

Venezuela. De Fina and Perrino (2013) state:

> Given their past or ongoing participation in processes of movement, dislocation and
>
> uprooting, transnational communities and individuals are particularly exposed to the
>
> contradictions of in-betweenness and hybridity. For this reason, self-other
>
> differentiation, proclamations of sameness, and strategic identity positionings are
>
> especially complex and ambiguous in their case. (p. 512)

I often experienced this "in-betweenness" as a child and continue to both appreciate and feel its

effects as an adult.

This space of "in-betweenness" is a place "where strangeness and contradiction cannot be

negated and must be continually negotiated and worked through" (Bhabha, 1998, p. 35). What

follows is a review of the "contradictions of in-betweenness" (De Fina & Perrino, 2013, p. 512)

common to hybrid identity, with a look at both tensions and strengths.

Characteristics.

Fluid...yet rooted.

Hybrid identities, like underwater plants, thrive as they retain their roots yet

simultaneously sway to the rhythm of the currents around them. Trueba (2002) highlights this

grounded flexibility when he credits the wellbeing and positive contributions of immigrants to

"their creative ability to become" the insider while at the same time remaining the outsider, thus

living competently "in different worlds" at the same time (p. 10). As the reflection of a prism's

colours are dependent upon the angle and intensity of the sun's rays, so hybrid identities move in

rhythm to the movements and changes inherent in the passage of time or in the change of

location or setting (Young, 2009; Goncalves, 2013).

   Because of this flexibility, hybrid identity might be thought of as elusive, hard to define.

By its very nature, it cannot be confined. Renn (2009) speaks to the fluid nature of hybrid

identity when he argues that hybrid identity, with its mixture of roots, cannot be confined to a

one-only categorical system. Renn draws attention to the problem on many school, camp, and

sports forms that allows students to identify themselves by one race only. He contends that this

masks reality and is not an honest picture of a student's true identity. Though Renn warns

against ignoring the multiple roots of hybrid identities, he also acknowledges the "slippery" (p.

177) nature of these root systems; data from one form to the next or from one day to the next is

always subject to change, because hybrid identities cannot be permanently labeled and boxed. It

is this very elusiveness, however, that gifts hybrid identity with uniqueness and richness.

   This elusiveness is what Young (2009) describes as "indefinable, embodying multiple

positionalities that emerge in moments of change" (p. 141). Young explains that "such identities

are continuously being made and remade through social interactions" (p. 141). This continual

development of hybrid identity is noted by Pascual (2002) in his review of the British film *My

Beautiful Laundrette*. Pascual points out that hybrid identity develops as two cultures are

brought together. He explains how the main character in the film illustrates this progression.

Omar's father is from Pakistan and his mother from Britain, an English woman. Where then

does Omar fit? Pascual highlights the film's use of the train as a hybrid identity metaphor. The

purpose of trains is travel, movement. Yet, a train's travel is not haphazard; the tracks are the

boundaries to which the train is anchored. So, too, Omar could not deny the cultures to which

his identity was anchored. "Trains running in all directions might symbolise the fluidity of

Omar's hybrid 'identity' as the site of conflict and struggle for predominance between his

identifications as *both* a Pakistani *and* an Englishman —or as *neither* of them but as a *new* space

resulting from the interaction of both" (Pascual, 2002, pp. 61-62). Pascual (2002) interprets the

formation of this new identity space as a dissolving and mixing of identities, explaining that his

"relative identifications with both his Pakistani and English heritage undergoes a process of

continuous negotiation until the limits between both dissolve" (p. 62). As Pascual interprets the

nuances of the film, he not only points out the fluid nature of hybrid identities but also the

melding from which these hybrid identities emerge. Pascual concludes by stating that "the

British-Asian protagonist is represented in his individualistic struggle as reconstructing his sense

of 'identity' out of the traces he finds most convenient from each of the different cultures that

inform his ethnic hybridity" (p. 68).

Though hybrid identity often positions the individual in places of differentness, it also

positions one in places of privilege. Wortham and Rhodes (2013) describe the differences

between eight-year-old Allie and her father, members of a Mexican migrant family living and

working in the United States. Allie treasures her Mexican heritage. She also treasures her

school experiences, experiences so unlike those lived by her dad during his childhood in Mexico.

Wortham and Rhodes explain that "like many migrants in transnational situations, she

encounters various ways of engaging others and understanding herself, and she has available

various resources for identifying herself as she becomes a student, a reader, and a daughter" (p.

537). Allie is growing up in a different world from the one in which her father grew up, yet this

privileged space is lived within the shadow of her father's world. Allie's world cannot be separated from her father's world; the one influences the other.

Family heritage and life experiences, depicted through the analogies of train tracks or a root system, are the permanent, enduring aspects of hybrid identity; yet the cars on those tracks or the foliage emerging from those roots take on new characteristics and move in new directions with time. Ling (2003) faces the fluid nature of her hybrid identity when she begins to think deeply about her own root system. In analyzing the faces of her Chinese, English, and Scottish identities, a root system forever a part of her unique self, she realizes that others perceive aspects of her identity as either powerful or weak; however, with hope she also understands this complex system to be one she can reshape. Rather than being labeled by others, Ling desires to emerge from her roots as a compassionate and unique individual. It is the permanent that drives hybrid identity into new worlds of being and acting.

Invisible...yet real.

Hybrid identity experiences invisibility both outwardly and inwardly. I have experienced both. Here in Canada, for those who do not know my story, my hybrid identity remains hidden; outwardly, I appear to fit in, yet inwardly, I have often felt I do not. Here in Canada, my outward characteristics belie the hidden reality. Kouritzin (2016) and Ling (2003) also speak to this tension. Kouritzin (2016) was born in Canada; her husband comes from the Amami islands of Japan. She is White Canadian; her husband is Indigenous Amami. Describing the fluid nature of their hybrid identities when traveling between countries, Kouritzin explains, "I move from invisibility to visibility, from unmarked to marked, while my husband shifts in an opposite manner" (p. 3). Ling (2003), on the other hand, feels she never escapes this feeling of invisibility. As the daughter of a White mom and a Chinese dad, Ling describes her "mixed

race" self as remaining invisible whether in White society or Chinese. Wallace (2004) heard this same dilemma voiced among her study participants, students of biracial and mixed heritage. Students were presumed to be or not be of a certain racial background, based on outward appearance and physical characteristics such as style of dress or skin colour. Though the reality of hybrid identity cannot be denied, in the above situations, physical characteristics determined its visibility; the outward either drew attention to hybrid identity or masked its presence.

The visibility or invisibility of a hybrid identity refers not only to the outward physical characteristics that cause one to stand out or blend in but also to what Bushong (2013) describes as one's "invisible world and upbringing" (Chapter 3, p. 53). This invisible space can be geographical; as such, it is a place that has been integral to the shaping of one's identity but a place where one no longer lives (Bushong, 2013, Chapter 3). Therefore, to oneself and to others, it is now invisible, nevertheless very much *there*. It can also be an inner space, a space of "worldview, values, and beliefs" (Bushong, 2013, Chapter 5, p. 88). Weaver (2001) describes this inner space when referring to culture. Using the analogy of an iceberg, Weaver explains that as an iceberg consists of both the visible and invisible, so does culture. An individual's visible outward actions and choices result from the invisible inner place of "values and thought patterns" (Weaver, 2001, p. 2, illustration), an invisible space that "includes our way of thinking and perceiving" (Weaver, 2001, p. 2). Thus, hybrid identity may not only appear invisible to others, but it may also feel misunderstood because of the invisible world from which it originates, a world that can be either a geographical place to which others have not been or an inward place to which only the individual can travel. I have at times remained silent about my past because of the invisibility of my worlds, both geographical and inward. These are places unique to me, my invisible reality.

The inward invisibility experienced by those with hybrid identity is highlighted by Pollock and Van Reken (2009) in their account of Jennifer, a young girl born and raised in Canada. Jennifer's experience of invisibility was made all the more profound by the fact that Jennifer had grown up in the country of her birth. However, her hybrid identity began to take root as a child when she, together with her teacher parents, relocated from Toronto to a First Nation reserve in British Colombia. Jennifer developed strong friendships with her First Nation peers. Their values began to take root in her life; their concerns became her concerns; her sense of loyalty took on a rich, broad dimension. Jennifer's hybrid identity, however, was not shared by others when the family returned to Toronto for her high school years. Jennifer became "someone raised in that world between worlds – within her own country" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 3, pp. 36-37). Perhaps this invisible attribute of hybrid identity is most painful when it produces "unexpected or unrecognized cultural misunderstandings" between the individual and significant others in his or her life (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapters 4 and 7, pp. 57, 110). These painful moments result from the "outside" not matching "the invisible places within" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 4, p. 57).

Such painful moments can result, at times, in feelings of "*statuslessness*" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 5, p. 70). These emotions result from not being known. Those with hybrid identities may "carry knowledge from past experiences – often including special knowledge of people, places, and processes – but none of that knowledge has use....No one knows about...[their] history, abilities, talents, normal responses, accomplishments or areas of expertise" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 5, p. 70). Here again, both the geographical world of an individual and their inner world are very much real and yet can appear so invisible to others.

Insider...yet outsider.

With my hybrid identity, I have found myself in situations where I look like an insider while feeling like an outsider. There have been times I have felt like a "hidden immigrant" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapters 4 and 7, pp. 54-56, 101-102), appearing to blend in with the majority culture and yet remaining an outsider within. Such spaces can produce tensions, feelings of insecurity.

Such tensions are normal to hybrid identity. Kouritzin's (2016) family lives in a world caught between Canada and the Amami islands of Japan. She explains, "Our children remain hybrids, outsiders in both, belonging to neither" (p. 3). Young (2009), the daughter of a White American father and a Korean mother, has similar feelings when others ask where she is from. Because she shares the physical characteristics of both her parents, she describes herself as "visually ambiguous and racially uncategorizable" (p. 145). Hybrid identity often faces a belonging tension while at the same time able to adapt and feel at home in a variety of locations.

Young (2009) describes this paradox when speaking of her mother, whose hybrid identity derives from emigrating from Korea to the United States as a young bride. Young's mother sees herself "as neither distinctly Korean, nor altogether American, but, rather, in-between" (p. 148). Young describes her mother as "symbolically and existentially located between the borders of insider and outsider," living in a world of "both/and contradictory experiences" (p. 147). Bushong (2013) tells a similar story of a young lady whose parents are Jamaican. However, Elizabeth's birth country is England. With a childhood spent in both England and South America, Elizabeth's world has been influenced by British schooling, the Spanish language, Jamaican richness, and multicultural peers. With a move to the United States, Elizabeth's hybrid identity is jarringly revealed. In a panel discussion, Elizabeth brings up the issue of others

assuming she is an African American when in reality she does not identify herself in this way. A man of colour in the audience takes offence. For Elizabeth, however, her identity root system is much broader than African or American (Bushong, 2013, Chapter 5, pp. 79-80). Iyer's (2013) experience is just as complex. He describes himself as being of pure Indian blood but one who "can't speak even one word of its more than 22,000 dialects" (para. 2), has grown up in England, has lived in the United States for 48 years, enjoys spending significant amounts of time in Japan, and understands what it means to be labeled, at least on paper, as a "permanent alien" and as a "tourist" (para. 2 & 4). For Iyer, "home has really less to do with a piece of soil than...a piece of soul" (para. 6). Hybrid identity, the result of outward circumstances, hides an inward place of richness yet lives with accompanying tensions.

Hybrid identity is complex. It is an identity that at times appears elusive. Like a sea creature, it is alive and very real, yet difficult to catch and identify. Those with hybrid identities sometimes act as chameleons, disclosing only as much as allows them to comfortably fit in; their goal is to resemble those around them and avoid being the outsider (Bushong, 2013, Chapter 10, p. 162; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapters 4 and 7, pp. 57, 99-101). Being transnational can make conversations about self complicated (Li & Zhu, 2013). Sometimes it becomes easier to live in the here and now, where less explanation is needed, where there presents less opportunity for awkward questions. Referring to their Chinese student participants, Li and Zhu (2013) comment that these transnational individuals "recognize the complexity in one's identity choices, they realize the need to present themselves differently to different people in different contexts, and they are also aware of the value of having different people in their social networks" (pp. 526-527). Bushong (2013) uses the term "*hidden identity*" to describe this mysterious nature of hybrid identity (Chapter 5, p. 93). In other words, "what you see is often not what you get,"

creating a disconnect between others' perceptions and judgments and the inside reality and truth of the hybrid individual (Bushong, 2013, p. 93).

Inherent in hybrid identity is this interplay, and sometimes tension, between cultures. Ling (2003) speaks to the frustration of different identities in conflict within her. As a descendant of Chinese, Scottish, and English heritage, the identities of colonizer and de-colonizer rage within her. Ling wants to be recognized and appreciated for who she is as an individual. Yet she struggles with the tension of being labeled by others as either the dominator or the dominated. Ling wants to fling off these "social mirrors" (p. 5), an analogy picturing how the views of others influence the way an individual perceives his or her identity. Ling admits to varied emotions. Sometimes these are directed towards herself, sometimes towards others. These emotions dance between annoyance and pain on the one hand and hopeful determination to challenge on the other. She shares how her deep passions bubble up "from a lot of different places – frustration, hurt, anger"; she shares the complexity of her struggle through "several different voices – my voice of how I see myself, my voice that sees/hears how White people construct me and my voice that sees/hears how Chinese people construct me" (p. 5). A sense of insecurity can arise with the negotiating of these sometimes very different worlds (Goncalves, 2013). Yet, in this negotiating, character is developed.

Strengths.

With their multiple layers and intricate complexities, hybrid identities present hurdles individuals must have the courage to face, but these same hurdles hold potential to exercise and strengthen character. Pollock and Van Reken (2009) explain that "a challenge isn't necessarily a liability," acknowledging that the hurdles are real but the resulting personal growth is worth the effort and perseverance (Chapter 5, p. 64; Chapter 6, p. 87). Crippen (2011) refers to these

stretching experiences as "transformative opportunities" (p. 7). Bushong (2013) views these hurdles and rewards as a "PARADOX," reminding us that the "*either-/or*" mentality tends to be our default but that hybrid identities are best understood as "*both/and* realities" (Chapter 2, pp. 28-30; Ling, 2003).

Some of the rewards of owning hybrid identity are obvious, others more subtle.

Inner character.

To persevere through the hurdles requires determination. Weaver (2001) refers to this perseverance as "risk-taking," referring to early immigrants to the United States who left what they knew to sail over dangerous waters to a place they did not know (p. 5). He highlights the work ethic of these immigrants, whose lives depended on strength of mind and firm resolve. Trueba (2002) uses the word "resiliency" to describe present-day immigrants and contends that "simultaneous multiple identities...require a unique skill and flexibility on the part of immigrant youths from all ethnic groups" (pp. 7-8). This "flexibility" is what Crippen (2011) describes as an "ability to code switch, or switch cultural codes according to context" (p. 9). Circumstances that demand physical, mental, and emotional strength have potential to produce "a great sense of inner confidence and strong feelings of self-reliance" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 8, p. 115).

Relational skills.

Life lived among differing cultures often develops a sensitive, understanding, and positive acceptance of others. Pollock and Van Reken (2009) explain that with inner strength often comes an understanding that every human, no matter the country or the skin-colour, is an individual of dignity and value. Life lived among differing cultures can reward those with hybrid identity a world characterized by "cultural belonging, increased cultural literacy,

culturally [*sic*] adaptability, and heightened empathy" (Crippen, 2011, p. 8). Such a world grows

out of "border crossing" (Wallace, 2004, p. 208). This involves movement between cultures,

either within a family, within a community or school, or between countries.

Crippen (2011) identifies "heightened cultural awareness and empathy" and a "sensitivity

to and appreciation for cultural differences" as "interpersonal skills" (p. 9). Empathy and

sensitivity are nurtured by the broader worldview experienced by those who live within multiple

cultures (Crippen, 2011, p. 9; Bushong, 2013, Chapter 5, p. 90; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009,

Chapter 6, p. 87). Out of a broader worldview emerges an ability to interact respectfully with

others of different cultures (Bushong, 2013, Chapter 5, p. 93; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009,

Chapter 8, pp. 111-112). In these interactions, the individual with hybrid identity can become a

leader in their world, a "bridge" that unifies members in their communities of school or work

(Bushong, 2013, Chapter 5, p. 93; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 8, p. 112). "Cultural

adaptability" allows individuals to accept new cultural circumstances without fluster (Pollock &

Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 7, pp. 100, 110). Hybrid identities learn to move between their

worlds with fluid mobility (Goncalves, 2013).

An "innate global awareness" gifts hybrid identities with a sensitive and caring spirit

(Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 8, pp. 112-113). This awareness fosters an eye for detail

and a depth of understanding, the ability "to be a careful observer" who listens and watches

"before barging ahead" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, pp. 115, 122).

A personal, vibrant reality.

Depth of character and relational skills are often accompanied by more obvious gifts such

as multilingualism (Goncalves, 2013; Crippen, 2011, p. 9; Bushong, 2013, Chapter 2, p. 30;

Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 8, pp. 118-122), a rich treasury of world-wide friends

(Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 6, p. 87), and "a 3-dimensional view of the world" (Bushong, 2013, Chapter 2, p. 29; Chapter 8, p. 128; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, Chapter 6, p. 92). People, events, and experiences are concrete reality, not abstract pictures or concepts. Such concrete reality fosters a true-to-life imagination, allowing the hybrid individual to understand literature in depth and write with feeling and detail (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, pp. 92-93).

Identity, with its myriad layers and influences, is lived out in an equally complex environment, the classroom. In the following section, the focus turns to the intricacies of this landscape, specifically the possibilities for positive influence and the potentialities for negative, as these relate to identity.

The Classroom Context

A space of interconnectedness.

Language is central to the learning context, and the learning context is central to language growth. Gee (1992) states that "writing, reading, and language are not private psychic possessions of decontextualized heads, nor are they generalized skills isolable from specific contents and contexts" (p. 33). The social constructionist framework allows for more than isolation; it allows for interconnectedness, the interplay of a wide range of factors, including language, relationships, and context. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) explain that the "general sociocultural linguistic perspective" is an approach "that focuses on both the details of language and the workings of culture and society" (p. 586). It is the space where "language, culture, and society" meet (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586). If context is important to language growth and language is important to context, both are inseparable from identity. As the anchor on the learning landscape, I as the teacher must consider the following questions, each related to context, language, and identity: 1) How do both my interactions with students and my use of

language in these interactions inform student identity? 2) How do we, both the students and I, use language to share our identities? 3) How do I use language to honour my own identity as well as the identities of my students? Language is integral to the classroom context; it is also deeply rooted in identity. The kinds of words I as the teacher use, the tones in which I use these words, the wording I choose when presenting assignments, the effect of my words on students, the kinds of words my students use, the reasons they use these kinds of words, the timing of these words...all become part of the linguistic nuances informing identity. As Gee (1992) argues, academic growth involves much more than the solitary student; rather, it is heavily reliant on context.

The kind of context I create affects both the academic growth and the identity of each student. Gee states, "Intelligence and aptitude, as measured by tests, are artificially constructed measures of aspects of social practices taken out of context and attributed to individuals" (p. 41). Growth cannot be removed from context. Li and Girvan (2004) describe a positive context where one culture is not elevated above another but where cultures are combined into a unique "interculture." Li and Girvan explain that "classroom interculture is a combination of the national culture and multicultures of individuals" that "involves a delicate negotiation among students and the teacher" (p. 12). Li and Girvan propose "that truly learning an additional language necessitates not only learning culture, but also creating culture: a far more dynamic and rich process" (p. 13). Clearly, those of us who work with L2 students have a unique responsibility and opportunity. It is ours to appreciate our own culture and the cultures of our individual students but also ours to create and own a unique classroom culture. Li and Girvan describe such a sensitive classroom as "a rich and stimulating environment for all participants" (p. 13).

Unlike the context described by Li and Girvan (2004), Nakagawa (2013) tells of a negative learning environment. Once again, the crucial role of "language, culture, and society" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 586) in identity formation is clearly seen. Nakagawa shares of growing up in a school system that devalued his L1and forbade its use in school. He writes, "I still remember how I looked at my friends as low class, dirty beings when they used the Tokunoshima language" (p. 21). His is a clear example that "writing, reading, and language are not...isolable from specific...contexts" (Gee, 1992, p. 33). The school environment in which Nakagawa learned reading and writing owned and perpetuated specific "values, beliefs, and ways of acting and interacting with ways of using oral and...written language" (Gee, 1992, p. 40). Nakagawa's worlds, his multiple identities, were placed in opposition, by others.

The classroom landscape, then, with its interconnectedness of language, characters, and context, can be a place of positive empowerment (Li and Girvan, 2004) or a space of negative power (Nakagawa, 2013).

A space of power.

The stories behind identities are played out every day on the classroom landscape. These stories are enacted by many players and a multitude of words. "Stories often require heroes and villains, but who is chosen for which role has everything to do with the relations of power that exist at the time" (Janks, 2011, p. 47). In Nakagawa's (2013) case, his L1 was constructed as the villain along with those students who spoke it. Reading and writing are relational activities taking place within unique relationship-oriented contexts espousing "ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing, and believing" (Gee, 1992, p. 32). It follows, then, that a teacher's way of relationally being in the classroom is a monumental responsibility, for it directly influences the narratives of student identity. Chosen words, decisions, and actions have potential to affect

students either positively or negatively (Wright & Taylor, 1995; Lee & Anderson, 2009). This influence can manifest itself in "both subtle and overt" ways (Wright & Taylor, 1995, p. 242).

Critical players in the narratives of identity formation include not only the teacher but also the student. Wallace (2004) states that "schooling contexts are critical avenues where students enact, challenge, and negotiate identity" (p. 209). She explains that students from biracial and multiethnic homes "are an especially diverse population whose experiences often are overlooked, stereotyped, or otherwise misinterpreted" (p. 209). These individuals can occupy any number of worlds, Discourses, or identities simultaneously (Lugones, 1987; Gee, 1992; Wright & Taylor, 1995). Gee (1992) explains that "a Discourse is a socio-culturally distinctive and integrated way of thinking, acting, interacting, talking and valuing connected with a particular social identity or role" (p. 33) and makes a powerful argument, stating:

> Trust requires that the teacher be sensitive to the apprentice's other Discourses (especially home- and community-based Discourses), acknowledge the oppositions and conflicts that exist among Discourses, and be aware that the 'same' words and actions mean differently in different Discourses (and mean nothing outside of any Discourse). (p. 40)

Power relations are affected by a teacher's sensitivity to and awareness of a student's multiple identities and worlds, and a teacher's way of being as she interacts with these worlds influences student identities.

As power relations affect identity, so words affect power relations. Lee and Anderson (2009) problematize the notion that different means deficient. In other words, potential disaster exists when the identities of linguistically or culturally diverse students are viewed as "deficient rather than legitimate" (p. 197).

Identity categories become problematic when they are essentialized as absolute truths about persons and when they impose limitations on potential actions or conceptions. When labels such as *English learner*, *learning disabled*, *underachiever*, and *gifted* are consistently used across contexts and in institutional discourses, the terms become tools to shape students' identities. (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p. 189)

With time then, labels hold potential, power, to become living identities; these labels are not always neutral, but rather "often bring about connotations of ethnic and linguistic deficiencies" (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p. 191).

Clearly, the responsibility of how power is negotiated in the classroom rests heavily on the shoulders of the teacher. Cornelius and Herrenkohl (2004) view "relationships of power as existing on a balance scale, with situational factors causing the positions of persons in an environment to constantly shift and change with the potential of being tipped in different directions" (p. 469). They describe an example of this power shifting lived out in the life of one of their participants. A student who had been very invested in a particular scientific learning process in Grade 6 appeared to be a very different science student in Grade 7. In a different learning environment, this participant had become less invested in her learning, more passive and less engaged. In light of this change in behaviour, Cornelius and Herrenkohl state, "We feel even more confident in attributing the patterns of participation...to the support offered by the classroom environment and not some notion of the students' personal backgrounds or dispositions" (p. 492). The classroom landscape is a space of power, power that either motivates or power that deflates.

A space for *em*powerment.

If educators have power (which they do), then they can use their power to *em*power. Lee and Anderson (2009) state:

> The balancing of power, whether between students, languages, or ideologies, is a critical component in the creation of classrooms that offer spaces for minority students to develop positive academic identities, as well as a methodological focus for analyzing how identities are ascribed in classrooms and research accounts. (p. 199)

The goal in teaching should not be self-empowerment but other-empowerment, specifically student-empowerment. Noddings (1986), along the same lines, asserts that "since the self is a relational being, it is actualized by ever-increasing fidelity in relation" (p. 501). When a teacher lives and works within this fidelity, a caring, conscientious commitment to students forms the foundation of teaching. Noddings states:

> The self does not grow more individually powerful, more cruel in the pursuit of highly valued goals, more unlike the human beings it seeks to dominate. Rather, the self is surpassed in relation, in the realization of interdependence and the joy of empowering others. (p. 501)

Classrooms can be and should be spaces where students grow because they are given the power to do so.

Being given power means being invited into the process. When students are given power, they are seen as integral participants in their learning journey, not simply observers listening on the sidelines. Drawing on studies completed in North America, the Middle East, and Africa, Norton (2013) highlights the importance of the careful negotiation of power. She admonishes "to take seriously the findings which suggest that...if there is little ownership over meaning-making, learning becomes meaningless and ritualized" (p. 92). To avoid this

meaninglessness, Norton suggests students must be placed "in a position of relative power within

a given literacy event" (p. 92).

Inviting student identity into lesson planning and learning is crucial to meaning-making.

When this takes place, students are positioned as significant agents in their own learning; they

are given power. Researching the role of Archie comic books in the lives of preteen students,

Norton (2003) uncovered a disconnect between school learning and natural, child-sustained

learning. Comic books, she discovered, were not valued by teachers and parents; however,

students derived much benefit from the genre. These comic books built community among

students and were the source of literary conversations. Pointing to the sometimes stale literacy

classroom environment where students are disengaged, Norton poses the question, "Have we put

too much emphasis on the 'right answers' and the 'correct interpretations' of characters and

events, thereby changing reading from an enjoyable activity to a challenging and often

meaningless ritual?" (p.144). Norton goes on to explain that "although children derive great

pleasure from their Archie comics, and are clearly actively engaged in meaning making, this

practice is considered a waste of time and is consequently not authorized by more powerful

adults" (pp. 144-145). Classroom texts appeared to be "abstract and unconnected to their

everyday lives," while comic books seemed to be "an extension of children's own personal

worlds" (p. 145). The study emphasizes the importance of student ownership in learning, an

ownership that "gives children the confidence to engage...energetically and critically" (p. 145).

Such a sense of ownership allows students "to draw on their own knowledge and experience to

reflect, engage, and defend" (p. 146). Norton challenges educators "to structure activities and

relationships in such a way that children can develop greater ownership of school authorized

literacy practices" (p. 146). In so doing, they will encourage the return of literacy to its rightful

place of being "a meaning-making practice rather than a site of ritual" (p. 146).

Empowerment embedded in ownership is a concept also brought forth by Cornelius and

Herrenkohl (2004). They see embedded in power the concept of "*ownership of ideas*" (p. 470).

By this they mean "a relation of power between the individual and a concept" (p. 470).

Cornelius and Herrenkohl see a correlation between depth of learning and personal attachment to

an idea. If a student sees an idea as his, he is more likely to own his learning. Cornelius and

Herrenkohl state that "ownership of ideas...goes beyond a student's claims of authorship for

some product he has created in school" (p. 481). Such ownership is of a superficial nature.

Rather, Cornelius and Herrenkohl see ownership as encompassing more, as liberating students,

setting them free to think, make mistakes, try again, and build on successes. They explain that

"in taking ownership over an idea or concept, the student perceives a higher degree of flexibility

in using it, in asking questions of it, and sometimes...in dismissing it when it fails to explain

observable phenomena" (p. 481).

Cornelius and Herrenkohl (2004) describe a context where such student empowerment

was exemplified. During a Grade 6 science unit, power was given to students in structured ways.

For example, visual aids and tools were implemented, teaching students how to engage in

discussions and giving them specific parameters in recording experimental data. The learning

tools used "were attempts to model different aspects of disciplinary thinking" (p. 473). Rather

than being characterized as "passive listeners," students became "active participants in the

creation of meaning" (p. 474). In learning about a scientific topic, students were also taught how

to behave and learn as scientists. Learning how to think and act as scientists enabled students to

engage more deeply and personally in their learning. These learning tools were seen "as a

contribution to the power dynamics" (p. 475) of the learning environment. Because of the curriculum structuring, the learning tools implemented, and the positioning of the teacher, "students were positioned as stakeholders in their own understandings of the content" (p. 477). In this study, power was intentionally given, not withheld.

When students are empowered, their participation, experiences, languages, and engagement are invited into the classroom. Empowerment is fostered through deliberate lesson planning decisions. Ludhra and Jones (2008), who worked with Advanced Bilingual Learners in a school in London, state, "It is important that the cultures and languages of both home and school be intertwined" (p. 67). They note that "where opportunities are created for a connection to be made from a cultural perspective, children will draw upon their personal experiences" (p. 67). When given the power and opportunity to draw on knowledge and experience rooted in their personal identities, students naturally do so.

Learning takes on a more natural fluidity when personal identity is valued. Faircloth (2012) speaks to this learning empowerment when she states that we must "provide students with opportunities to connect learning with issues relevant to their own identity" (p. 189). She provides two examples of the importance of connecting. Davey claimed identity as a non-reader; however, he also loved rock music. Rock music framed his identity. When allowed to read and research a topic that embodied who he was – the way in which he identified himself – he very quickly began to own the assignment. He made a vital connection between his identity and his education, a connection vital to sustainable learning. Faircloth states, "Once this connection was established, his participation in class moved from frustrated, drifting, non-participant to engrossed eager community member" (p. 190). Another example involved unmotivated Grade 9 students. One student summed up their nonchalant attitude by commenting that the characters in

the books they were assigned to read were White. These Grade 9 students could not relate. Faircloth recounts that when the reading selections were modified "to include characters whose demographics, culture, and life situations mirrored the students'" (p. 190) attitudes changed. The irrelevant became relevant. Motivation replaced boredom. Reading even began taking place outside of class.

Faircloth (2012) also highlights the value students placed on being offered opportunities to express their own voices, stating, "Many were willing to invest more time in activities that invited telling their own story" (pp. 190-191). Such opportunities included writing personal narratives and journaling about personal opinions or perspectives. Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) further confirm the importance of inviting student identity into the classroom. They highlight the voices of three middle-school girls with whom they worked for three years. In response to language arts assignments, each "expressed a desire to read and write about issues in their lives – a friend who drowned, a conflict at home, or a favorite pop group" (p. 352). Fairbanks and Ariail suggest that sustainable and profitable learning takes place "in contexts that both value and nurture students' voices," in environments where the personal lives of students "matter" (p. 352).

Irizarry (2007) describes what this valuing of student life experiences looks like in the classroom and the impact such valuing has on students. He highlights three areas that characterized culturally responsive pedagogy in Mr. Talbert's classroom. The first characteristic was community. Students appreciated their teacher sharing stories from his own life, being vulnerable. They also appreciated his living in a city neighbourhood not unlike theirs, in contrast to living in a more affluent suburban community. The second characteristic was language. Mr. Talbert identified with the students in his allowance of and appreciation for both "Ebonics" and "'tagging'" (p. 25). Ebonics is "a shared language among Black and Latino urban youth" and

"'tagging' is a style of writing that is used by many graffiti artists and is viewed as a valuable art form and style of writing by many youth in urban communities" (p. 25). The third characteristic was music. Mr. Talbert had students sharing goals and perspectives in the form of rap music. Students shared at a heart level using a form of presentation with which they personally connected. Irizarry states:

> A culturally responsive approach to teaching that views culture as dynamic places value on what students bring into class. Instead of being seen as deficient and being punished for being who they are, students in classrooms with culturally responsive teachers are free to share those parts of their identities that are not usually represented in the classroom and use them as tools for learning. (p. 25)

The above examples highlight the fact that students are empowered when teachers value "the dynamic, context-specific identities and representations" (Asher, 2008, p. 18) of their students. It is in this exchange of power between teacher and student that an "overemphasis on individualism and competition" has opportunity to be counterbalanced by a spirit of "collectivism and cooperation" (Weaver, 2001, p. 11).

A space for growing.

Empowerment leads to growth. Seeds need the right amount of moisture, nutrition, and sunlight to germinate and grow. The same holds true for the students who enter our classrooms with multiple identities; the classroom environment must be one that promotes and invites growth. Engle and Conant (2002) identify four characteristics of classrooms where conditions are conducive to growth, where students are actively engaged in learning. "*Problematizing*" guides students to engage directly and personally in problem solving; "*authority*" gives students responsibility for their own learning and for sharing that learning with others; "*accountability*"

provides students with academic and classroom structure, keeping them accountable for their actions, words, and academic contributions; and "*resources*" ensures students are given the tools needed to be successful and responsible in their problem solving (pp. 400-401, 404-406). Engle and Conant emphasize that the above characteristics are co-dependent, stating, "Synergy among problematizing, authority, accountability, and resources helps students avoid disengagement due to boredom, frustration, or lack of personal interest. This synergy also helps students avoid the kinds of engagement that have few disciplinary connections or make little progress" (p. 409). In classrooms where such cooperation between teacher and student and between learning and teaching is alive and working, sustainable learning takes place.

Growing spaces are safe spaces. Norton and Gao (2008) point to literature suggesting "that learners are more likely to speak when the community is safe and supportive" (p. 118). They challenge English language educators to "consider how they could restructure their classroom to provide safe spaces for oral and written interaction" (p. 118). Finnan and Kombe (2011), who worked with an accelerated learning program designed for struggling, overage students in Grade 7, likewise suggest that a healthy environment involves "belonging" and purpose (p. 8). They note, "To the Accelerated Program students, belonging included learning in a family context, forming connections, and being expected to take responsibility for actions" (p. 8). When safety is given its proper place, students feel freer to take learning risks because their sense of security is not endangered.

Safe spaces are motivating spaces. Motivation often begins with imagination. This space of imagination is what Kanno and Norton (2003) have labeled "*imagined communities*" (p. 241). Kanno and Norton explain that these communities "refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (p. 241)

and "include future relationships that exist only in the learner's imagination as well as affiliations...that extend beyond local sets of relationships" (p. 242). For the learner, these communities are not unrealistic "fantasy" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 244) but rather places of potential "impact on...current actions and investment" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 242). For Kanno and Norton, imagined communities provide an explanation for the motivating effect of future possibilities on present decisions and actions. Kanno and Norton point out "that the notion of imagined communities provides a theoretical framework for the exploration of creativity, hope, and desire in identity construction" (p. 248), concluding that "our identities...must be understood not only in terms of our investment in the 'real' world but also in terms of our investment in *possible* worlds" (p. 248). Motivating spaces encourage academic and identity growth.

Identities are always in a state of motion, as we grow as individuals, move to different locations, acquire more knowledge, and build on new experiences. Norton (1997) states, "In my own work, I use the term *identity* to refer to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (p. 410). Norton explains that "whereas immigrant learners' experiences in their native country may be a significant part of their identity, these experiences are constantly being mediated by their experiences in the new country, across multiple sites in the home, workplace, and community" (p. 413). The ways in which educators handle these student experiences, within a safe, motivating learning environment, will affect students' multiple identities, including their "academic identities" (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p. 199).

The Writing Classroom

Mediating student experiences in a positive manner involves legitimizing identities. Writing provides a space to legitimize, a non-threatening space for "individuals to regain control over the self, the world, and their own life story narrative" (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 325). Danzak (2011) notes that incorporating student experiences into a writing project helps to create "a safe and welcoming space for teen ELs to share their stories" (p. 195). Pavlenko (2001), along similar lines, asserts that "written texts, such as diaries, journals, or memoirs, represent uniquely safe spaces in which new identities can be invented and new voices 'tried on'" (p. 325). In the midst of this shaping of identities, honest and authentic writing allows those with hybrid identities to "reimagine and rewrite America" (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 338). In the Canadian context of my Grade 8 writing classroom, student stories and student identities matter not only to personal student growth but also to the classroom community and the larger Canadian landscape. In opening up spaces for student voices within the writing classroom, "we can legitimize and validate...lived experiences and identities as valuable assets and resources" (Park, 2013, p. 343). Danzak (2011) explains such a literacy project, one that invited middle school students to share the immigration experiences of their families. This project not only highlighted these L2 students as competent authors but also provided an opportunity for non-immigrants to enter their world. As is evident here, written text can become a powerful, positive tool, not only personally for the author but also for the reader and the wider community. The writing classroom provides a space for this powerful tool to grow.

As writing grows within the classroom so do identities. The writing classroom can become a place for identities to come alive, old and new, private and academic. Pavlenko (2001) asserts "that cross-cultural autobiographies written by bilingual writers represent ideal discursive spaces for repositioning in terms of particular identities and the invention of new ones" (p. 339).

Writing opens up a space for individual students to grow both personally and academically. In her work with adult students, Park (2013) explains the potential power of writing opportunities centered on identity:

> Providing all writers, whether they consider themselves native, non-native, bilingual, or even multilingual, with opportunities to witness and experience writing as a form of identity (re)construction can become a critical tool in the academy to continue to nurture themselves as legitimate writers and authors. (p. 339)

Writing, then, holds potential to recognize and honour identity, to challenge growth, and to inspire future authors. In the honouring and growing of identities, the wider community also benefits, as readers are invited into new worlds. Thus, the writing classroom matters.

The world my students will enter after they leave my classroom, and the world that awaits them after they graduate from high school, is a world where writing matters (Graham & Perin, 2007, pp. 8-12) and where multicultural identities are equally valuable (Bushong, 2013, Chapter 11, p. 173). If identity can be discovered, negotiated, and legitimized within the writing classroom (Pavlenko, 2001; Park, 2013), the question remains: How is this to be done? Writing is complex, involving not only the mechanics but also the art (Graham & Perin, 2007). Using meta-analysis, Graham and Perin (2007) compiled a list of 11 characteristics common to successful writing instruction (p. 11). Despite the success of these strategies, Graham and Perin state:

> The rich nature of the practice of writing and its relative neglect in instructional research make it inevitable that a whole compendium of possible approaches has not yet been studied. Research is clearly needed not only to identify additional effective practices that already exist but to develop new ones. (p. 26)

Acknowledging my responsibility to my students, as coach in the writing classroom, and to my colleagues, as fellow teacher and researcher in the field, I have sought to "take on the challenge of studying writing instruction in all its complexity" (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 27), focusing specifically on the role of identity.

Process writing...writing in process.

Sfard and Prusak (2005) "*equate identities with stories about persons*" and differentiate this definition from one that views identities as merely "*finding their expression* in stories" (p. 14). Process writing allows for the creation of identity stories, while at the same time allowing for the inclusion of the identity stories students bring with them. Process writing prompts teachers to ask the following questions: What are the identity stories about which we might invite students to write? and What new identity stories will we help students create as they embark on this journey of learning to write?

All students bring with them, into the mainstream classroom, many identity stories. Danzak (2011) states that although students may not be first-generation immigrants, they "have acquired the immigration narratives passed down from parents and family members who lived these experiences and incorporated them into their sense of self" (p. 187). As Danzak emphasizes, these identity stories, when invited into the classroom, enrich and enhance the literacy journey. Danzak makes evident that the invitation to bring these personal narratives into the writing and language learning process helps students own their literacy journeys. Such an invitation is life-giving to "teens–especially international teens–[who] are constantly redefining their identities and seeking new ways to express themselves" (Danzak, 2011, p. 195). Process writing invites these identity stories to be written down, and, in that process, as Danzak notes,

encourages the growth of students' writing skills. Then, as identity stories come alive through pen and paper, new writing stories are created, new writing identities are born.

A hybrid process writing approach.

In my writing classroom, I adopt a hybrid process writing approach. This has been and continues to be a personal growth journey. This hybrid writing approach is congruent with the perspectives of researchers and teachers currently in the field. In a meta-analysis of studies involving the process writing approach, Graham and Sandmel (2011) found that a distinction existed between the success of the approach with at-risk students versus that experienced by non-struggling students. Because results did not show a significant benefit of the approach when used with L2 learners, Graham and Sandmel encourage a hybrid approach to the teaching and learning of writing, stating, "We suggest that advocates of process writing instruction integrate other effective writing practices into this approach" (p. 405). Likewise, Badger and White (2000) suggest an approach to the teaching of writing that integrates characteristics of the process, product, and genre approaches, stating that "an effective methodology...needs to incorporate the insights of" all three models (p. 157). Thus, when the term *process writing* is used in this research, a hybrid process writing approach is implied.

Characteristics of a hybrid process writing approach.

Process writing is a mentoring process. The teacher, herself an author, walks with students throughout the writing process – the planning, the rough drafts, the revising and editing, the publishing. Process writing involves "modeling, mentoring, and monitoring student practice until they truly understand how a language convention works and can really use it correctly, now and in the future" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007, Chapter 3, p. 61). Speaking to teachers of writing, Gallagher (2011) insists, "We go first, then they go" (Chapter 1, p. 16). Gallagher emphasizes

that "when teaching students how to write, the most effective strategy is a teacher who writes, and thinks out loud, in front of his or her students" (Chapter 1, p. 16). Process writing is a modeling process. The teacher models by going first but then also introduces the writing of other authors. Gallagher states, "I know my students learn from watching me, but, more important, I want them to learn by standing next to and emulating writing found in the real world" (Chapter 1, p. 16). Smith and Wilhelm (2007) state that "these models provide a map, a template, a set of implicit directions, a scaffold and safety net for student writers" (Chapter 4, p. 112). Process writing provides the resources students need in order to not feel alone on their writing journeys.

In process writing, grammar and punctuation are not ignored. In fact, Baines, Baines, Stanley, and Kunkel (1999) suggest that "the hard, dirty work of learning" (p. 71) these key writing elements is not something to be avoided; instead, constructive "*error*" (p. 71) feedback can and should be used to positively enhance the learning journey. The key to positive and constructive growth is to teach grammar and punctuation for specific purposes and within useful spaces (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007). Grammar and punctuation then are not the beginning and end of a writing product but rather two of the important vehicles that help drive writing to useful places. Smith and Wilhelm (2007) state that "writing...is a synthetic activity" (Chapter 2, p. 12). They explain:

> Just as taking apart a clock that someone else designed and put together doesn't mean
> that you can make a clock, taking apart and labeling sentences of someone else's
> construction doesn't mean that you can construct comparable sentences on your own.
> (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007, Chapter 2, p. 12).

Grammar and punctuation are not in the spotlight; writing is (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007, Chapter 2, p. 18). In process writing, then, conventions are not lost to the communication of ideas nor is communication of ideas lost to the learning of conventions. Rather, the two work together to reach the goal of successful written expression.

Because conventions and communication walk together in process writing, teachers are able to focus on the details of grammar and punctuation without losing sight of the bigger picture, the end product. Process writing, then, invites constructive teacher feedback, embedded within the writing project being realized. Thus, learning of conventions becomes practical and necessary. Brownlie (2005) states, "Descriptive feedback is much more effective in promoting extended thinking than assigning a mark, which tends to terminate thinking" (Chapter 4, p. 38). In process writing grades are not avoided, but they are not assigned until students have spent sufficient time experimenting, dialoguing, and practicing (Brownlie, 2005, Chapter 4, pp. 38-39). Constructive feedback highlights "one issue at a time," allowing students time to process and perfect before moving on to the next (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007, Chapter 3, pp. 60-61). Smith and Wilhelm (2007) note that as teachers "if we note every error students make on their papers, we're...undermining the effectiveness of our instruction by overwhelming students with it" (Chapter 3, p. 60). Process writing frees both students and teacher to enjoy the writing journey, the journey of becoming an author, because in the learning, each piece has purpose.

Process writing involves reading. They are two sides of the same coin. Students learn the art of writing by reading well-written texts and, in these texts, identifying significant and powerful writing techniques (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007; Gallagher, 2011). On the flip side, Brownlie (2005) suggests that having students write about their reading "helps deepen their thinking and their understanding – helps them to become more reflective readers" (Chapter 4, p.

25). Directing students' attention to well-written reading material "helps students read like writers and write like readers" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007, Chapter 4, p. 112).

Process writing results in a variety of products and takes time. These writing projects invite the students and their individual preferences and experiences into the process. Such an example is provided by Danzak (2011) who initiated a comic book project with her middle school L2 students. The process writing project involved students in researching and recording family "immigration narratives" (p. 187). During a span of half a year, these narratives were researched, written, designed and published in a comic-book or graphic novel style. It was during the process that language learning took place and writing skills were learned. Students were provided time and resources to themselves engage in the reading of graphic novels. They were not only immersed in reading they enjoyed, encouraging their language learning, but they also benefited from exposure to novels that then served as models to guide their own writing. During the six months of this writing project, smaller assignments were incorporated into the daily activities, assignments related to the written end product; these shorter tasks were designed to help students grow in their language skills while at the same time guiding them towards publishing their own graphic novels. These shorter activities included the discussion of writing and visual style, the writing of journal entries, the use of graphic organizers, and the development of vocabulary. Both the final book product as well as smaller related assignments completed during the six-month project invited students "to engage in authentic writing practices" (p. 193). In my own Grade 8 mainstream writing classroom, process writing takes various forms, including narratives, *This I Believe* (Allison & Gediman, 2006) essays, grade appropriate alphabet books, and letters to self. In the process of producing a final written product, our classroom becomes one of engagement, where students write about what matters to

them, where I meet one-on-one with students, where together we edit writing produced by the students themselves, where I am the coach, and where each student is an integral member of the writing team.

If the writing stories that my students live out in the writing classroom become their identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), then all that the writing journey entails holds significance – the dialogue, the feedback, the practice, the texts read, the pieces written. I, as teacher, am a main character in those stories, those identities.

Because I am a main character in my Grade 8 students' author identity stories, and because my research questions focused on my own identity as a teacher and author, I chose autoethnography as my research tool. In the following chapter, I focus on the appropriateness, significance, and implications of autoethnography to search out and piece together the wonderings and conclusions of my research journey.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The Research Puzzle Reviewed

The focus of my research was anchored in the following three questions: 1) How do I, as the teacher in a mainstream Grade 8 language arts classroom, position both myself and my L1 and L2 students within the writing environment, in a way that recognizes and honours our multiple identities? 2) How can I, as writing teacher within a mainstream Grade 8 language arts classroom composed of both L1 and L2 students, recognize and honour student identity in a way that enhances the teaching of writing in all its complexity? 3) In what ways do I, as writing teacher within a mainstream Grade 8 language arts classroom composed of both L1 and L2 students, honour my own identity as a teacher and a writer?

I liken identity to a diamond. A diamond consists of many different angles. An angle may shine more brightly in one context than another. So it is with identity. Identity consists of many angles, influenced by the internal and the external. To allow for identity's complexity, identity, throughout the research journey, was viewed through Gee's (2000-2001) multilayered lens, with a focus primarily on "*the nature perspective*" (p. 101), "*the institutional perspective*" (p. 102), and "*the discursive perspective*" (p. 103). Irizarry (2007) reminds educators to remain flexible, explaining that "since identities are shaped by the context in which they are developed and are constantly being renegotiated, it is extremely difficult to pre-package one set of academic strategies that are likely to work with all members of a cultural group" (p. 23). The multilayered lens allowed for this flexibility.

Throughout this research project, my search was for the "human significance" (Bailey and Tilley, 2002, p. 578) of identity within the teaching and learning of writing. In the sense in which Bailey and Tilley (2002) explain, it was "*meaning* not *truth*" (p. 575) guiding me to

conclusions. Bailey and Tilley (2002) describe "an alternative paradigm where 'meaning' rather than 'truth' as the legitimate end product of inquiry is explored" (p. 575). Citing the example of a patient recounting the same event in two different ways, Bailey and Tilley (2002) explain that "the qualitative researcher reads these stories for the *meaning* they convey; not to determine whether one account more accurately reflects the events of P8's childhood (i.e. the *truth*)" (p. 579). The researchers were looking for the personal significance behind the patient's words. Bailey and Tilley explain:

> Although stories identified in interview data frequently recount the experiences or events of everyday life, they are, by definition, *always* reconstructions of the events that they describe. Storytellers reconstruct their stories to convey a specific perspective of an event: it is *meaning* not *truth* that is conveyed in the form of stories. It is the truth of *their* experience, not an objective, decontextualized truth. (p. 581)

McIlveen (2008) also states that "it is the meaning of the story that is important" (p. 15). In this research project, it was this significance and meaning I pursued, not testable results. It is research in which there is "no final telling, no final story, and no one singular story" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 205), nor should there be, for it is research that provides a space where my colleagues and I can begin to "restory ourselves and perhaps begin to shift the institutional, social, and cultural narratives in which we are embedded" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34). As fellow sojourners read my teaching story, it is my hope that readers "will tell back because listening to, empathizing, and comparing experiences, feelings, and insights give new meanings to...events" (Ellis, 2013, p. 35).

Identity is a phenomenon that does not lend itself easily to measurable data such as numbers or test scores but rather makes its appearance in the ebb and flow of daily activities,

chatter, interactions, assignments and relationships, all of which connect teacher and students in inseparable ways. Thus, the phenomenon of identity and the role of identity in the teaching and learning of writing are illuminated through the stories that I recount and that have taken place in a specific context, the mainstream language arts classroom. The highlighting of these stories could only take place as I purposefully reflected on my teaching, with all the varied complexities of the classroom landscape, focusing especially on the role of identity within this layered space.

Reflecting, focusing on identity, and purposefully pursuing the complexities of teaching, learning, and life on the mainstream language arts landscape could only be done through an autoethnographic approach. Using autoethnography as the vehicle through which to pursue the meaning, significance, and complexity of identity, as identity weaves itself throughout the teaching and learning of writing, allowed story to come alive with truth. As life in the mainstream language arts classroom is fluid so is identity. Thus, this research project is based on a social constructionist framework (Lee & Anderson, 2009). Language being a foundational component of both the language arts classroom and identity, the research project also incorporates the sociolinguistic perspective (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Finally, the research and its conclusions have, as their foundation and center, an ethic of caring bounded in relationship (Noddings, 1986; Noddings, 2012). The framework of the research journey and the foundation on which it stands are pursued in the following sections.

Theoretical Framework

Owing to the complexity of identity, the complexity of the teaching and learning of writing, and the complexity of the classroom landscape, a social constructionist framework guided the research project. The project took place within a very specific context, a Grade 8 writing classroom; integral to this context were relationships. Thus, research was conducted

within the boundaries of a framework that allows for both complexity and flexibility (Lee & Anderson, 2009). Such a framework operates within the sociocultural paradigm, a paradigm that recognizes "that teacher learning is social, situated in physical and social contexts, and distributed across persons, tools, and activities" (Johnson, 2006, p. 243). This paradigm "depicts...teacher learning as normative and lifelong, as emerging out of and through experiences in social contexts....as socially negotiated and contingent on knowledge of self, students, subject matter, curricula, and setting" (Johnson, 2006, p. 239). The sociocultural paradigm is one that brings life to theory. It recognizes that "praxis, as a form of expertise, has a great deal of experiential knowledge in it, but...is organized around and transformed through theoretical knowledge" (Johnson, 2006, p. 239). The sociocultural paradigm asserts that learning is dependent on outside influences (Johnson, 2006), no matter the person in focus, whether teacher or student. Thus, the social constructionist framework, one that understands that identity finds its meaning within a multitude of layers, rests its case within the sociocultural paradigm.

The sociocultural paradigm makes room for the actual and very real complexity of language teaching (Johnson, 2006). This paradigm "shows L2 teachers as users and creators of legitimate forms of knowledge who make decisions about how best to teach their L2 students within complex socially, culturally, and historically situated contexts" (Johnson, 2006, p. 239). The sociocultural paradigm allows for the fluidity of setting, identity, and learning.

The sociocultural paradigm also allows for the "messy" (Lee & Anderson, 2009). Lee and Anderson (2009) state:

> We humbly call for approaching the messy work of studying identity from the vantage
> point of sociocultural theory and for examining different angles of the confluence where
> people and their learning converge across multiple grain sizes and through various

overlapping processes (e.g., participation at the micro-level, expectations and

institutional structures at the meso-level, and ideologies and policies at the macro-level).

(p. 203)

Vinz (1997) understands well this messy classroom landscape, stating, "Teaching just isn't clean

and tidy" (p. 140). Vinz explains, "'I fail' shadows us daily in this work and sometimes drives

us to distraction" (p. 140). The sociocultural paradigm allows sense to be made of the messy.

The sociocultural paradigm allows for the teacher to be researcher. Inherent in teaching

and in the sociocultural framework are relationships and unique contexts. To research within

such a framework is to become, as Vinz (1997) suggests, a teacher anthropologist. Vinz explains

that "anthropologists live among their subjects, observing and collecting and rigorously

analyzing the data gathered. Teacher anthropologists conduct research in classrooms, faculty

rooms, and other educational sites" (p. 145). The sociocultural paradigm allowed me the teacher

to become me the researcher within my unique classroom context.

The sociocultural paradigm allows for story. Narrative inquiry is about life and how it is

lived. Life is influenced by a myriad of experiences. It is enriched by innumerable angles; it is

coloured by a plethora of nuances. Thus, the research texts emerging from narrative inquiry,

explains Clandinin (2013), contain "gaps, silences, and white spaces" (p. 208), because these

texts "represent the complexity of storied lives" (p. 210). Stories told in honesty and with

authenticity have the potential to lead us to "explanatory propositions with which we can make

sense of the dilemmas and problematics of teaching" (Carter, 1993, p. 10). Along similar lines,

Ellis (2013) states that "writing autoethnography about recent and particular events...offers the

possibility of continuous, ongoing life review" (p. 43). Such researching and writing has a

purpose, a goal to move oneself and others forward. Referring to her writing about life, Ellis

points out, "I examine these experiences and my reactions to gain insight into how I want to live now and in the future and toward what ends my life be aimed. I write to figure out *what to do*" (p. 43). I, too, wrote to "figure out" the critical role of identity in the writing classroom, relying on stories, with all their characters, contexts, and angles, to help unlock the meaning.

As I probed the impact of identity within the writing classroom, I did so through the lens of the social constructionist framework, with an understanding, however, that I could not totally disregard the essentialist viewpoint. I situate myself near the social constructionist end of this "ontological continuum" (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p. 186), near but with a gap. I understand identity as influenced by the outside, yet I leave a gap on that continuum for the inner uniqueness of each individual regardless of outward circumstances and experiences.

These fluid spaces of identity and the teaching and learning of writing, ever-changing landscapes, were illuminated on this research journey through autoethnography.

Research Tool – Autoethnography

Because I conducted research from within, telling the teacher stories I experienced daily, I chose narrative inquiry, and more specifically autoethnography, as the research tool, a tool that allowed me to enter the messiness. Teacher stories are best understood through "Looking, Listening, Talking, and Thinking—which...are the four key components of ethnographic research" (Li & Zhu, 2013, p. 520). As teacher researcher within my own classroom, autoethnography allowed me to involve myself in this careful observing. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) draw attention to the importance of this careful reflection, pointing out how ethnographic research brings to the forefront or makes visible nuances that "through a wider analytic lens" (p. 597) often remain hidden. Subtle aspects of identity "become sharply differentiated when ethnographic details are brought into close focus" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 597). This

research project is my teaching story, told within the boundaries of an autoethnography. Autoethnography served as the research vehicle of "both process and product" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273).

Autoethnography is a story told with a specific purpose in mind. McIlveen (2008) states that "the defining feature of autoethnography is that it entails the scientist or practitioner performing narrative analysis pertaining to himself or herself as intimately related to a particular phenomenon" (pp. 14-15). Autoethnography is not simply a story about self. Rather, McIlveen differentiates between autoethnography and autobiography, emphasizing that autoethnography "is a specific form of critical enquiry that is embedded in theory and practice" (p. 15). As such, the narrative should encourage growth both for the researcher and the reader; "the reader should likely construct lessons for his or her own sphere of practice" (McIlveen, 2008, p. 16). The purpose of this autoethnographic story was and continues to be the illumination of identity and its significance within the writing classroom.

By its very nature, autoethnography must incorporate history of self; however, this looking at the past becomes a vehicle for both understanding the present and preparing for the future. Autoethnography, then, is a research method that intentionally combines "tenets of autobiography and ethnography" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273). Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) explain that just as autobiographers "retroactively and selectively" (p. 275) choose meaningful events to incorporate into their life stories so autoethnographers "retrospectively and selectively" (p. 276) choose to incorporate into their research data those events significant to their research puzzle. This process of choosing is of significant importance in the context of teaching and teacher research. Kelchtermans (1993) explains that "the biographical perspective allows a comprehensive in-depth approach of teachers' professional

development" (p. 444). The autobiographical inevitably found in autoethnography allows for the weaving together of all aspects of life, "the interwovenness of present, past, and future" (Kelchtermans, 1993, p. 448). It is this weaving that leads to rich insights.

Yet another crucial link between autobiography and autoethnography is the fact that the latter is often driven by the former. Tour (2012) points out "that an individual's worldview is a complex combination of socio-economic, political, ideological, cultural and educational heritage" (p. 79). Based on the history of her own experiences as student, teacher, and then researcher, Tour argues:

> Reflective practices are crucial for emerging researchers to understand who they are and what they want to be. To make the whole research experience more meaningful, it is critical to understand one's personal standpoint and what has shaped it before designing a study. (p. 79)

Similarly, Pensoneau-Conway and Toyosaki (2011), in their discussion of "the self within ethnography" (p. 385), explain "that the individual is never *merely* an individual, but an individual situated in a myriad of contexts, such as cultural, geographical, historical, political, and social" (p. 385). Kelchtermans (1993) sums up this connection between time, the inseparableness of past, present, and future, when stating that his "research experience with the biographical perspective only deepened...[his] belief that to understand the lives, one must get the story" (p. 454). Ethnography and autoethnography are complex research methods, where the components of researcher, participant, context, and history (autobiography) form inseparable fragments of the whole.

Its importance to the research journey.

Autoethnography not only highlighted my past in order to bring understanding to my present and meaning to my future, but it also became a space where two of my selves, my teacher self and my researcher self, were given permission to peacefully co-exist and simultaneously work and learn. "Autoethnography...acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 274). Autoethnography allowed the identities of my varied selves to be honestly illuminated.

Autoethnography allowed me to struggle. Lee and Anderson (2009) state:

As teachers themselves struggle daily with issues of negotiating different identities that represent their different spheres of influence, the fundamental question becomes, what can teachers do to thoughtfully engage all students to create more equitable learning environments that view different linguistic and cultural identities as resources? (p. 200)

Autoethnography allowed me the freedom to get messy in the exploration of these complex issues of identity and writing, teaching and learning. Autoethnography allowed me the freedom to live my story and tell that story. It now allows others the freedom to live their stories, sometimes messy stories, alongside mine and then retell their stories because of mine (Clandinin, 2013, p. 51). Bruner (2004) points out:

Any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told. That must surely be as true of the life stories we tell as of any others. In that case, we have come full round to the ancient homily that the only life worth living is the well-examined one. (p. 709)

McIlveen (2008) speaks to this potential of learning from story when he states that "an autoethnography should produce a narrative that is authentic and thus enable the reader to deeply

grasp the experience and interpretation of this one interesting case" (p. 15). Autoethnography allowed for authenticity as I daily lived out my research journey, reflecting on and journaling about the nuances of identity and the spaces of learning.

Autoethnography allowed me to make visible the sometimes messy "secret lived stories" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996, p. 25) of my classroom, stories that Clandinin and Connelly (1996) suggest often remain hidden behind four protective walls. Autoethnography provided the space for me to uncover those stories and the meaning within those stories. Vinz (1997) states "that the inherent meaning in what we do is found in the spaces (*silences?*) between the statements [curriculum guidelines], among the artifacts of our teaching, or in the stories that we tell ourselves and each other about our work" (p. 137). Autoethnography made me stop, reflect, process, and learn; it drove me to pay attention to both the obvious and the not so obvious. Autoethnography allowed me "to excavate deep understanding and meaning" (Barton, 2004, p. 519), because autoethnography "is about interpreting the threads of life woven in the fabric of our daily lives" (Barton, 2004, p. 525). Li and Larsen (2012) agree, stating that "the strength of narrative inquiry is its ability to inform educational researchers and educators about the complexity and interconnectedness of experience within specific contexts and individual experiences" (p. 44). Similarly, Carter (1993) states:

> At one level, story is a mode of knowing that captures in a special fashion the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs. We come to understand sorrow or love or joy or indecision in particularly rich ways through the characters and incidents we become familiar with in novels or plays. This richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions. It can only be demonstrated or evoked through story. (p. 6)

Autoethnography, then, made theory come alive through story; it allowed me, with specific purpose, to make visible the invisible, in all its "richness and nuance."

Making visible involves risk and vulnerability, but ultimately, growth. Autoethnography allowed me to become vulnerable and to invite fellow colleagues into this vulnerability. The question Vinz (1997) asks is, "'How Am I Becoming as a Teacher, as a Knower, Enabler, and Believer'" (p. 138)? Vinz goes on to explain that this continual "'becoming'" requires an "*un-knowing* and *not-knowing*" (p. 140). This "*un-knowing*" involves a willingness to ponder and question what has up to the present remained dormant, actions or experiences or beliefs that have been left unruffled by reflection. Vinz suggests that thinking and living narratively, taking the time to sit down and write about experiences and conversations, readies the soil for new growth. What might otherwise never be voiced, contemplated, known or even questioned becomes illuminated in the space of the narrative. "The telling itself brings the experience into existence again and offers an opportunity to un-know the known" (Vinz, 1997, p. 140). Just as venturing into the "*un-knowing*" requires courage so does leaping into the "*not-knowing.*" The "*not-knowing*" involves a willingness to enter into spaces of uncertainty with an understanding that from such precarious heights may spring moments of exhilarating growth (Vinz, 1997). Vinz states:

> As teachers, we continuously bend, pivot, and turn as various desires and agendas
> circulate and unfold in the classroom....We occupy places of *not-knowing* what will
> happen next. Such moments may cause us to yearn for certainty, order, and definiteness.
> After all, life would be easier this way. Without the disposition of *not-knowing* – trusting
> the possibility of having our minds move in unanticipated directions and acting
> instantaneously without rehearsal – what type of teachers would we become? (p. 142)

Embracing an attitude of "*un-knowing*" and leaning into spaces of "*not-knowing*" held

possibilities and continue to hold possibilities of leading myself and my colleagues "to see more

and differently" (Vinz, 1997, p. 145).

Autoethnography opens up space for an attitude of growth not only for the researcher but

also for the reader. McIlveen (2008) points out that autoethnography "has the potential to...act as

a stimulus to open new intellectual vistas for the reader through a uniquely personal meaning and

empathy" (p. 16). To advance that potential requires intentionality, for both researcher and

reader. Nelson (2008) suggests that "the challenge for teachers is to commit to attend to the

experiences they encounter every day in their classrooms and on their educational landscape with

imagination and curiosity" (p. 212). Clandinin (2013) underscores these points when stating that

"narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring

lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 17).

Autoethnography allowed me to intentionally embrace "lived experience" (Clandinin, 2013, p.

17), to intentionally embrace those spaces of vulnerability, uncertainty, and growth with

"imagination and curiosity" (Nelson, 2008, p. 212). Autoethnography gives me opportunity to

invite fellow sojourners to intentionally embrace and learn from their own unique contexts and

histories, as they journey alongside mine.

Method of Research

Reflective practice.

Reflection leading to insight and change requires space and time and is characterized by

intention. To understand identity and its impact on and relationship to the teaching and learning

of writing, I needed to create space and time to reflect. This space of purposeful reflection was

created as I sat down and journaled. Farrell (2006) suggests that "the old cliché 'Experience is

the greatest teacher' may not be as true as we think, for we do not learn as much from experience as we learn from reflecting on that experience" (p. 77). Gallagher (2011), a teacher for over twenty-five years and an author of numerous books, agrees on the importance of reflection, noting the following:

> Early in my teaching career I decided to keep a journal of my thinking after each day of teaching. No matter how exhausted I was at the end of the day, no matter how well or badly my day went, I sat down and considered the following: What worked in that lesson? What didn't work in that lesson? What can I do next time to strengthen the lesson? Did my students take what I wanted them to take from that lesson? More than any suggestion from a master teacher, more than any conference or workshop I have attended, more than any professional book I have read, this reflective log advanced my teaching more than anything else I have done in my career. It taught me the value of reflection. (p. 60)

Along the same lines, Brownlie (2005) states, "There is no better way to refine your practice than by considering the effect of your decisions on the lives of the students" (p. 76). Journaling throughout the research journey provided a space for me to reflect; it began to cultivate a place for growth. Journaling was the beginning that has no ending. These teacher journals lived on as they became the material for future reflection; they continue to live as they open a space for others, fellow colleagues, to journey alongside me and ponder their own teaching and learning.

A teacher who desires to grow will reflect. Such intentional reflection will, by its very nature, involve the use of "analytical skills" (Borg, 1998, p. 279), which Borg suggests cannot be divorced from the practice of reflection. Farrell (2013b), having worked with a group of qualified ESL teachers with many years of experience, concludes "that teaching experience does

not automatically translate into teacher expertise unless teachers consciously and actively reflect on these experiences" (p. 1080). This "reflection is effective when it leads the teacher to make meaning from the situation in ways that enhance understanding so that she or he comes to see and understand the practice setting from a variety of viewpoints" (Loughran, 2002, p. 36). Autoethnography opens up a research space for purposeful reflection and growth. It provides an appropriate "vehicle for reflexivity" (McIlveen, 2008, p. 17). It "formalises a reflexive attitude and processing into a research method" (McIlveen, 2008, p. 17).

Within autoethnography, an intentional reflexive research method, reflection contributes to personal professional growth, and consequently, to student growth. Farrell (2013a) states, "Reflecting on practice can help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking" (p. 465). McIlveen (2008) agrees, stating that "reflexivity in research and practice...is a process that in itself proffers new understandings and actions–transformation" (p. 17). Loughran (2002) characterizes such reflection as "effective reflective practice" (p. 36) and as "a powerful way of informing practice as it makes the tacit explicit, meaningful, and useful" (p. 38).

Journaling is an important discipline of reflective practice. Farrell (2013a) suggests that journaling lends itself to thoughtful reflection. In his work with an ESL teacher, Farrell (2013a) notes that "another aspect of journal writing that facilitated the reflective process...was that the very act of writing itself slowed the reflection process long enough to reflect on it" (p. 469). He further explains that "the act of writing gave her time and space to examine her practice that would have otherwise gone unexamined" (p. 469). Burton (2005) also highlights the importance of writing, stating that "as a reflective tool" it serves to provide both "documentation" and "analysis" (p. 3). Burton explains that this documentation, consisting of events and reflections,

provides material for further growth; reflective opportunities are made tangible. As analysis, writing requires thoughtful planning; it provides insight into the how's and why's of writing choices (Burton, 2005).

Clandinin (2013) characterizes narrative inquiry as "an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology" (p. 55). Of necessity, as I engaged in my research puzzle, I engaged in such reflective practice, writing about thoughts and events to help me process and then processing these thoughts and events to turn them into concrete learning.

The need for teacher voice.

While teachers need to intentionally take time to reflect, for their own growth, it is equally important that they share their knowledge with others. Burton (2005) states:

Most teachers, however, still see teaching as a consuming, complex activity, which is made even less manageable when research is an additional requirement, even though it is exactly that experience of teaching complexity that makes teachers' input vital to research and reflection on teaching. (p. 1)

While I did not take lightly the decision to commit to research while teaching, at the same time, I agree that teacher voices should be heard. The person living the experience understands its complexity in a way that outsiders can only attempt to imagine.

Experience cannot be denied; however, on the teaching landscape, neither can theory be ignored. When these two are invited to meet, praxis enters the classroom. The term praxis allows theory and experience to coexist, understands the integral importance of both on the teaching and learning landscape, and gives legitimacy to each (Johnson, 2006). Johnson states:

Knowledge that informs activity is not just abstracted from theory, codified in textbooks, and constructed through principled ways of examining phenomena, but also emerges out

of a dialogic and transformative process of reconsidering and reorganizing lived

experiences through the theoretical constructs and discourses that are publicly recognized

and valued within the communities of practice that hold power. (pg. 240-241)

Johnson highlights the need for L2 teachers to share their stories, stating that "a critical challenge

for L2 teacher education is to create public spaces that make visible how L2 teachers make sense

of and use the disciplinary knowledge that has informed and will continue to inform L2 teacher

education" (p. 241). In other words, there is a need in L2 teacher education and professional

development for reality to meet theory. Burton (2005) concurs, suggesting that it is context that

makes theory come alive. Burton points out that "when teachers complain of theory in articles

and books, it is often because what is written is divorced from context, or contexts which are

credible to teachers" (p. 6). Teachers need to share their experiences. Teacher experience lends

credibility. Reality and theory cannot and should not be separated. Theory forms the foundation

of reality and reality gives life to theory.

To help theory come alive on the teaching landscape, experience must be written down;

and to improve and continue the growth of theory, experience must be acknowledged. Burton

(2005), series editor of *Case Studies in TESOL Practice Series* (CSS)*, comments, "Common

sense isn't very often written down. In the teaching environment, it is often spoken – in the

school corridor, over the photocopier, as an aside in a staff meeting, over a drink" (p. 12).

Burton goes on to explain that "if a written account is meaningful (that is, its explanation and

evaluation resonate with readers), it is a useful document which can generate further inquiry and

reflection" (pg. 12-13). Using the corpus of case studies as evidence, Burton argues that teacher

writing is a viable and needed research tool. When writing emanates from real-life contexts, it

carries meaning for others in similar situations. Thus, Burton contends that teachers' written

accounts of their experiences promote reflection and professional development for all involved, teacher authors as well as their fellow teacher readers. The importance of teachers documenting their stories is also highlighted by Stoynoff (2004). Like Burton, Stoynoff speaks to the corpus of teacher writing found in the CSS and asserts that "one should not underestimate the power of a single relevant exemplar to improve professional practice" (p. 390).

The responsibility cannot be denied; teacher development necessitates teacher sharing. As teachers, we must give time not only to our students but also to our colleagues. We need to listen to each other; we need to speak and write for each other. Johnson (2006) legitimizes such teacher knowledge, stating that "teacher research positions teachers as investigators of and interveners in their own practice while making their investigations and interventions, in essence their learning, visible to others" (p. 242). Teachers need to share their knowledge, knowledge found within their teacher stories. Carter (1993) suggests:

Stories capture, more than scores or mathematical formulae ever can, the richness and

indeterminacy of our experiences as teachers and the complexity of our understandings

of what teaching is and how others can be prepared to engage in this profession. (p. 5)

Stories are avenues for "capturing the complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of the phenomenon with which we deal" (Carter, 1993, p. 6). Stories, shared honestly and with authenticity, have a way of bringing completeness to the teaching picture.

The practical nature and usefulness of teacher research is what motivated me to take a leap into the narrative and inquire into the teaching practices within my own classroom. Connelly (1978) states:

For the most part, greater authority is commanded by the experienced over the

inexperienced, by the old over the young, by practitioners over academics, by practical

men over theoretical men, and by those with reputation over those without. The proper

use of authority is...why young teachers consult experienced teachers and not scholars.

(p. 81)

Facing the realities in my own classroom, the realities of how I teach, the realities of positive and

negative reactions, the realities of my own identities, the realities of my own struggles, has given

me the opportunity to define in writing what I have discovered about identity and its importance

in the writing classroom.

The process.

Barkhuizen (2011) explains, "*Narrative knowledging*...is the meaning making, learning,

or knowledge construction that takes place during the narrative research activities of

(co)constructing narratives, analyzing narratives, reporting the findings, and

reading/watching/listening to research reports" (p. 395). The "*narrative knowledging*" of this

research project began with my field texts (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000,

Chapter 7). While the majority of field texts consisted of my personal teacher journaling, as well

as an ongoing collection of lesson plans, activity descriptions, and photos, other artifacts

included letters written while in high school and a tribute to my grandmother authored by my

mom. Most field texts were written over a span of three years; other artifacts date back to my

pre-teaching days.

Living takes time, is done together with other people, and happens in specific places,

dimensions Clandinin (2013) refers to as "temporality, sociality, and place" (p. 50). It is the

weaving of these three dimensions that brings richness to the final research text and that leads us

"to understand in deeper and more complex ways the experiences relevant to our research

puzzles" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 50). Clandinin goes on to explain that "when we make all three

dimensions of the inquiry space visible to public audiences and continue to think narratively, we make the complexity of storied lives visible" (p. 50). In order to make the "complexity" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 50) of identity within the writing classroom "visible" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 50), a rich body of field texts was compiled.

The compilation of these field texts allowed me to begin the formal process of my "*narrative knowledging*" (Barkhuizen, 2011), as I analyzed the data, looking for the "human significance" (Bailey and Tilley, 2002, p. 578) of identity, specifically within the teaching landscape but also throughout my life's journey as it has shaped and is shaping who I am as a teacher today.

Teaching writing is a complex activity. Teaching writing in the mainstream classroom where L1 and L2 learners live and work together is even more daunting in its complexity. My experiences in the Grade 8 writing classroom, along with my conclusions and final thoughts, are not intended to provide "final answers" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 51). Rather, in telling my stories, it is my desire to invite fellow sojourners "to engage in resonant remembering as they lay their experiences alongside" mine and "to rethink and reimagine" together with me what we teach, how we teach, and to whom we teach (Clandinin, 2013, p. 51).

Concerns addressed.

With joy and dignity, I want to be able to answer "yes" to the following question:

Have we [I] authored our [my] work in such a way that lives have changed for the better, most importantly, the lives of children who are crowded in school and classroom corridors, and together with their teachers, are hard at the work of creating their own *very* important educational stories? (Carter, 1993, p. 11)

I want, through my research and practice, to help create positive stories of learning and school, for my students, my colleagues, and myself.

We, as educators and students, live "storied lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p 2). I leave school with stories that I tell my family and friends and coworkers; likewise, my students go home with stories they tell their families and friends. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest, "Teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories" (p 2). As characters in our novels of life, we have the potential to embellish facts to suit our own likings, to make the story twist and turn in our favour. During this research journey, I have been both researcher and practitioner. Throughout this task, I have understood that ethically I was responsible to tell an authentic story, not simply one my researcher ears wanted to hear and my researcher voice wanted to tell. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state:

> In narrative inquiry, it is important that the researcher listen first to the practitioner's story, and that it is the practitioner who first tells his or her story. This does not mean that the researcher is silenced in the process of narrative inquiry. It does mean that the practitioner... is given the time and space to tell her or his story so that it too gains the authority and validity that the research story has long had. (p. 4)

I have done my best to tell my story as practitioner first, allowing myself "the time and space" to do so with authenticity and honesty. I then felt freedom as the researcher to interpret and share the findings of that story with "authority and validity."

To present a complete and authentic research picture, I knew I had to journal honestly, record lesson planning, activities, and photos carefully, and analyze all pieces of data thoughtfully. "Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and

meaningful ways" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10). However, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) caution narrative inquirers to remain truthful, to beware of turning this attraction into a tool for deception by manipulating the data and falsifying conclusions. They explain that the plot of the narrative story may not come to a fairy-tale ending. Nonetheless, no matter the ending, researchers must stay true to their data, all the while communicating authenticity to their readers. The narrative writer must help readers remain "as alert to the stories not told as to those that are" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10). Though Stoynoff (2004) speaks of case studies, his words apply to my research project and its genuineness as well. He cautions:

> If a case study is to realize its full potential to inform, those applying the method must scrupulously observe and report on the object of interest, ensuring that what is captured is at once accurate and adequate in terms of representing the case in its totality as well as its complexity. (p. 380)

As researcher, I was aware of my responsibility. It is my desire that the field texts shared and the conclusions drawn beckon the reader to walk alongside this researcher teacher and learn from the "authentic portraits of teaching" (Borg, 1998, p. 274) presented in this autoethnography.

The Ethics Underlying the Research

Exploring the intricacies of identity and its impact on the life of the classroom necessitated a solid foundation. Meaning comes alive within relationship. Thus, as I purposefully reflected on the life of the writing classroom, focusing on the role of identity within the writing space, relationship was the foundation upon which the research project was built. Chan (2006) states:

> We have the expectation that children of ethnic minority background need to 'adapt' to 'our' school communities, but we may overlook that, as a host country for immigrants,

we also need to explore the extent to which this relationship may be reciprocal. We need to explore ways of accommodating for diverse cultures in ways that are respectful of the differences. At the same time, we need to provide as rich an experience of 'our' schooling as possible for the children involved. (p. 173)

As I worked, played, lived, and grew together with my students in the classroom, using autoethnography as my research vehicle, my desire was to explore the interconnectedness of identity and writing through this positive two-way relationship of which Chan (2006) speaks.

As Lugones (1987) emphasizes, such a relationship must be approached with a sense of expectation, delight, and spontaneity, devoid of arrogance. Entering my students' worlds is a deliberate journey, a choice to enjoy the worlds of my students, not because I want "to try to conquer the other 'world'" or "to try to erase the other 'world'" (Lugones, 1987, p. 16), but because I want to understand that world, to value it, and, ultimately, to value the person who belongs to that world. Recounting her personal journey to love her mother, Lugones says:

Loving my mother also required that I see with her eyes, that I go into my mother's world, that I see both of us as we are constructed in her world, that I witness her own sense of herself from within her world. Only through this travelling to her 'world' could I identify with her because only then could I cease to ignore her and to be excluded and separate from her. (p. 8)

In a reciprocal relationship (Chan, 2006), entering my students' worlds and allowing their worlds to enter the classroom (Lugones, 1987) requires "fidelity" (Noddings, 1986). For Noddings (1986), fidelity, a caring and conscientious commitment, means that people and relationships are at the foreground; fidelity is the spring from which actions flow. Noddings explains that "fidelity is not seen as faithfulness to duty or principle but as a direct response to

individuals with whom one is in relation" (p. 497). Thus, if fidelity forms the foundation of one's teaching, and I might add research, then "development of the whole person is necessarily our concern" (Noddings, 1986, p. 498). Fidelity, then, becomes "an anchor to throw out when we are in danger of drifting away from persons and relations" (Noddings, 1986, p. 503). Though failing at times and sometimes plagued by imperfect efforts, I have always sought, and no less during this research journey, to make relationship the foundation of my teaching. Because this research journey took place on the teaching and learning landscape, relationship formed the foundation of the research project.

With a view towards students.

"Teaching is about love because it involves trust and respect, and because at its best teaching depends upon close and special relationships between students and teachers" (Nieto, Gordon, & Yearwood, 2002, p. 350). This "love...is not a maudlin emotion; it is a blend of confidence, faith, and admiration for students, and appreciation for the strengths they bring with them" (Nieto, Gordon, & Yearwood, 2002, p. 350). It is with this trust, respect, and love that I seek to teach and that I sought to guide me as I carried out my research.

I believe the study of identity must be anchored in love because identity is about the uniqueness of the individual and that uniqueness being shaped within relationships and specific contexts. This is an authentic, genuine love that cares about the individual (Nieto, Gordon, & Yearwood, 2002) and is lived out within relationship (Noddings, 1986). Noddings (2012) explains, "In care ethics, relation is ontologically basic, and the caring relation is ethically (morally) basic. Every human life starts in relation, and it is through relations that a human individual emerges" (p. 771). Identity is rooted within relationship.

A classroom where relationships function within an environment of care means that both "*expressed* needs" and "needs assumed by the school as an institution and the curriculum as a prescribed course of study" (Noddings, 2012, p. 772) are important. It is not a matter of one type of need taking precedence over another. Noddings (1986) states that "to suppose...that attention to affective needs necessarily implies less time for arithmetic is simply a mistake. Such tasks can be accomplished simultaneously, but the one is undertaken in light of the other" (p. 499). In other words, the teacher guided by an ethic of caring is one who is concerned with the individual, the student's experiences, emotions, likes, dislikes, home life, aspirations, and growth as a person. Noddings (2012), and I agree with her assertion, states that such educators "will not ignore assumed needs—the curriculum cannot be ignored—but they will attempt to address the more basic expressed needs" of individual students (p. 774).

Noddings (2012) asserts that "a climate in which caring relations can flourish should be a goal for all teachers and educational policymakers" (p. 777). She acknowledges that some teachers find this a burden, yet another job to be added to the already overwhelming number of required tasks. However, Noddings contends "that establishing such a climate is not 'on top' of other things, it is *underneath* all we do as teachers" (p. 777).

As I embarked on this research journey, paying careful attention to the weaving of writing and identity, the principle that I seek to make foundational to my teaching was the one on which I relied to guide my research, the desire to care for the dignity of every individual within a climate "of care and trust" (Noddings, 2012, p. 774).

With a view towards researcher.

Ellis (2013) faced the ethics of writing about life with honesty. Like Ellis, I, too, grappled with the questions raised by "the autoethnographic voices in my head" (p. 43). As I

recorded and wrote, my dilemmas were similar to those of Ellis who asked, "'Was my heart really as open as I was claiming?'....'Was I taking on a role that would make me look good in my story?'....'Would I have shown just as much concern to others without writing and reflecting?'" (Ellis, 2013, p. 43). Like Ellis, I needed to face my writing with honesty. This tension of honesty kept me grounded, alerting me to the weakness of human pride, urging me to stay truthful to myself, to the reality of the research environment, and to my readers. To not have embarked on this vulnerable journey for fear of presenting myself dishonestly would be to have deprived myself and others of the possibilities for growth. The rewards outweighed the risks.

With a view towards readers.

As much as I needed to remain true to myself as researcher throughout the research journey, I also needed to remain true to my readers. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) point out that "the questions most important to autoethnographers are: who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?" (p. 284).

To create such narratives of impact, autoethnographers must of necessity invest significant time in the research process. "Writing to inquire into the meanings of experience requires revision after revision, until the author has examined events, feelings, and thoughts in as deep and thorough a way as possible" (Ellis, 2013, pp. 43-44). The final product must keep readers absorbed. Ellis (2000) characterizes such well-written narrative ethnographies as those that activate both the "thinking and feeling" compartments of the brain (p. 273). These ethnographies keep the reader "immersed in the flow of the story, lost in time and space, not wanting to come to the end (as in a good novel), and afterwards unable to stop thinking about or feeling" (Ellis, 2000, p. 273). To successfully present an accurate picture to the reader, and thereby fulfill the ethical responsibilities readers deserve, the autoethnographer must explore

well and present creatively. I have sought to do this, throughout the gathering of my research texts, in their representation and presentation, and in the final conclusions.

The Justification

Embedded within the narrative inquiry process is the responsibility to justify the research. Clandinin (2013) explains this justification as a three-fold responsibility, involving the personal, the practical, and the social (p. 35). Personal justification infuses the research process with unique significance for the researcher; practical justification makes the research applicable to the wider teaching world and educational practices; social or theoretical justification enlightens and moves theories and social issues forward (Clandinin, 2013).

I remember my mom's advice as I journeyed through life and school experiences as a child. "Just start," she would remind me. Yes, there is power in taking that first step. There is also, at times, tremendous fear and risk. But, it is in taking that first step, in overcoming that initial fear, in making that choice to risk, that growth is seeded, making change a possibility. My desire, in this research journey, is to invite my readers and colleagues to "come alongside me in my wonderings" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 24) regarding identity. As I engaged in this research project, I wanted to grow as an individual and as a professional; I also hoped to encourage others. It is my desire that this research journey of growth continue, that I never lose the challenge to listen to the heartbeats of students and to remain sensitive to the worlds from which they come, because I am sensitive to my own. This research project has potential to become one way "we [my colleagues and I] restory ourselves and perhaps begin to shift the institutional, social, and cultural narratives in which we are embedded" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34). To challenge myself, and possibly others, to new growth is the personal justification for this research project.

This autoethnography can be likened, in some sense, to a case study. Connelly (1978) states that "a case study describes a particular event with its own special circumstances" (p. 79). I, the researcher, worked within the context in which I, the teacher, live. The context of research was unique to me. Is the research, then, justified? According to Connelly, yes. Connelly states:

> The author...needs to be sufficiently aware of like circumstances to know that, give or take a few particulars, similar situations occur for a reasonable number of potential readers. The onus is then on the reader to compare his situation with that of the case study to determine whether the reported trials and tribulations have meaning for him. (p. 79)

Many classrooms are similar to mine, filled with L1 and L2 learners, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, students with hybrid identities. It is my hope that "the rich descriptive and interpretive information" (Borg, 1998, p. 274) found in my research data will create for readers "vivid portraits of teaching" (Borg, 1998, p. 273), consequently stirring in them a reflective vision that leads to continued professional growth. It is my desire that the research presented here, along with its conclusions, be "*for* teaching instead of simply research *on* teaching" (Noddings, 1986, p. 506). This, then, is the practical justification (Clandinin, 2013) of the research project.

The teachers with whom Nieto et al. (2002) worked "often expressed the view that, unless they understood, respected, and honored their students' identities, they could never hope to become their teachers in any meaningful way" (p. 346). Along similar lines, Shulman (1987) notes that "critical features of teaching, such as the subject matter being taught, the classroom context, the physical and psychological characteristics of the students, or the accomplishment of purposes not readily assessed on standardized tests, are typically ignored in the quest for general

principles of effective teaching" (p. 6). The significance of identity on the teaching landscape

cannot be denied. Its complexities and impact cannot be quantifiably measured, yet its story

must be told for it is a part of "the deeply textured, multilayered enterprise of teaching" (Ladson-

Billings, 1995, p. 484). Moving forward the understanding of identity, its implications and

significance to teaching and learning, is the social justification of this research project.

Chapter 4: Glimpses of Identity Through Windows of Writing

The four pieces of writing documented in this section were completed in the same school year. As I wrote for and with my students, providing a model as we embarked on different pieces of writing, my personal life flowed onto the pages. I did not write these original student models as pieces to intentionally incorporate into my research text. However, they provide a unique backdrop for my "research puzzle" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124) and complement the research texts I have included in Chapter 5.

After each model included here, I use that particular style of writing to tell a new story, a story I am currently living as the writing teacher in my Grade 8 mainstream language arts classroom. Here again, the personal and the past weave themselves into my teacher story. Narrative inquiry privileges this, for it is a space where, with dignity, "researchers' personal, private, and professional lives flow across the boundaries into the research site" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 115). The four current teacher stories, written in the styles of journal entry, narrative, letter to self, and *This I Believe* (Allison & Gediman, 2006) essay, become here a way to "assert the relevance, the legitimacy, indeed the necessity of including the full range of our humanness in our work of re/membering ourselves in/to the world, embracing the world, with all our relations" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 10).

The Journal

       Background to journal one.

The school year began with a fun historical fiction novel, <u>Cue for Treason</u>, and corresponding journal entries. Through the novel, we were transported back to the Elizabethan time period, entering the world of Shakespearean theatre, lords, knights, peasants, and travelling acting companies. Journal entries written during the reading of this novel focused on significant

quotes or events, individually chosen by students, along with personal reactions to these chosen texts. Our journals followed the style Brownlie (2005) refers to as "the double-entry journal" (Chapter 4, pp. 27-32).

Among the writing skills highlighted during this unit was word choice, with a focus on figurative language, verbs, and adjectives. In the following piece, as I modeled the writing of a journal entry, I walked the process with students, showing them how I had chosen a quote and followed this with my personal reactions. Because word choice was a focus in this unit, I drew students' attention to my use of adjectives and figurative language.

The teacher's journal - one.

Date: October 6th

Quote:

"Suddenly the lid lifted, there was a gasp of amazement, and there in the yellow lantern light was a plump woman's face hanging over me like a harvest moon" (Trease, 1940, p. 47).

My Thinking:

I love this introduction to Mrs. Desmond. This quote introduces her as a motherly figure, almost like someone to replace Peter's mom whom he has just had to leave.

She seems to be a pleasant person, as she does not yell when she sees Peter but simply gasps in amazement. She goes on to tell her husband that "the fairies" have left something for them in the chest.

Mrs. Desmond is like a mother hen, sending the actors for stew and wine to help revive an exhausted and dehydrated Peter.

Continuing on, though, it's clear that Mrs. Desmond can also be stern when it is needed. When Peter suggests he jump from the wagon to avoid the strange men, she gives him strict

---

orders to stay put, without even looking at him! Just from the tone of her voice, Peter knows he

has no option but to obey.

We are not told if Mr. and Mrs. Desmond had children, but I can only imagine that if they

did, Mrs. Desmond would have been a great mom – a perfect blend of gentleness and spunkiness.

Background to journal two.

As the year progressed and our novel changed, our entries grew in depth. Our journals

took on characteristics of what Brownlie (2005) describes as "the united journal" (Chapter 4, pp.

32-33). Again, I worked with students to model and guide. My goal as the teacher was to lead

my students into worlds where they could get "practice at life" (Park, 2015, 2:03), worlds where

"empathy" could grow (Park, 2015, 4:22). Our journal writing during this unit was to highlight

this "practice at life" that we were experiencing through our reading.

In the following journal entry, I focused on a character in the novel I Am David, the book

we were reading as a class. In the entry, I chose to discuss a struggle with which the main

character David was wrestling. My goal was to model for my students the richness of books; I

wanted to show them the possibilities books present us to grow and to look at life in new ways; I

wanted to help them see the lessons we can learn from characters and their struggles and choices.

Once again, the assignment combined reading and writing. Students were asked to focus on such

writing skills as sentence variety and smooth transitions, while at the same time being engaged in

a writing assignment where reading and writing depended on each other and were made

personal.

The teacher's journal - two.

Date: January 22nd

A smile. What is so significant about a smile? This is something David was discovering. And I believe this is why the beauty of the Italians was so striking to David. David's world up to this point had been one of darkness, cruelty, loneliness, and despair. Then he arrives in Italy, and one of the things he notices is people laughing from the heart, genuine laughter. Again, here is one more thing he needs to learn…how to laugh, how to smile.

David contrasts the beauty of the Italian people with the darkness of the guards, using such words as "ugly laughter" and "hard of face." Perhaps the guards, in a different place, at a different time, were once handsome or beautiful. It seems, though, that the camp, its philosophy, its lifestyle, had killed beauty.

Reading through this I was suddenly reminded of my mom and the awkward days of my teenage years, those days when I felt ugly. It seemed to me I was sort of like the ugly duckling. Other girls could wear their hair long. My hair was fine and limp, so long hair did not look good on me. I would sometimes complain to my mom. Her answer? Smile. A smile is what people will see; a smile is what makes a person beautiful.

(Partial entry)

A teacher's reflections on writing and identity – journal style.

I once heard that writing is simply talking on paper. I have used this quote with my students, especially those who struggle with wording thoughts clearly. I tell them that when they and I are talking, I understand what they are saying; so, they simply need to write as though they were talking. This works especially with those L2 learners who link the quality of writing with the look of sophistication. In this confusion, their intended meaning is lost in a murky puddle of

words. As they begin to understand that writing is simply communication put on paper, the waters begin to clear.

Sometimes this talking that we put on paper includes thoughts we have heard before, thoughts we might even take for granted. We may doubt their importance; we might think to ourselves, "*Why should I share that? Everyone knows that. That's so obvious I would look foolish to say it.*" Yet, even if a thought is not new, is it not refreshing to be reminded of those things we seem to so easily take for granted? Is it not refreshing to hear them from another person's perspective or experience, worded perhaps in a way that grabs our attention anew?

Besides, writing makes us stop and listen, to our own thoughts as we sit and write them and to the thoughts of others when we sit to read them. Sometimes, we need to just stop and listen, in order to hear something new in the old.

Truth be told, I find it much easier to express some thoughts in writing rather than in conversation. Writing allows me to put extra thought into what I want to say, to strive for clarity, to ensure I am saying no more than needed, in an effort to protect, but everything that is needed, in order to leave no doubt.

Within these last two years, writing has allowed me to deal with tensions. I have been able to express in writing what would have left me tongue tied in conversation. It was my writing that became the catalyst to begin a needed conversation, one necessary for growth and change. And something put into writing cannot easily be erased.

So as I teach my students this important task of writing, we grow together. As I write with them, as I engage in the same assignments I am asking them to complete, we learn the how and the why of sharing thoughts in writing. We learn that reflection is good, that it helps us

grow and survive and process. We learn "that writing can be used as a vehicle to express ourselves as we negotiate the journey through our lives" (Gallagher, 2011, Chapter 2, p. 24).

And as we share our writing with each other, our worlds grow bigger. I learn about the things that matter to my students; they learn about the experiences and values that matter to me. We enter each others' worlds (Lugones, 1987). We learn to feel in new ways, to understand differently, to handle more graciously. We begin to see with more clarity, or even to see for the first time.

This writing skill really is a big deal, for "the smartest and most interesting people in this world are reflective people" (Gallagher, 2011, Chapter 2, p. 60), and writing becomes the door to a wide-open place where we can stop and reflect.

The Narrative

To be born is to begin a life of stories. "Life—as we come to it and as it comes to others—is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). Some of our stories are sad, some mundane, some happy, some exciting, some best kept private, others worth being told. In his greeting, Blood (as cited in Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009) states that "ultimately, all we have are our life stories" (p. xvi).

Stories happen in the classroom, and stories happen outside the classroom. In this unit, we wrote stories about ourselves, working to clarify the purpose behind the telling of our stories. We used as our model (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007; Gallagher, 2011) narrative pieces found in Chicken Soup for the Soul: Teens Talk Middle School (Canfield, J., Hansen, M. V., Clapps, M., & Howlett, V., 2008).

Background to narrative.

In the following autobiographical story, I related the unusual answer to a night's dilemma at the Chicago airport. On this particular trip, I was on my way to spend a couple of weeks with my parents, spurred on by a sense of urgency to spend time with my mom who had recently undergone cancer surgery. My flights took me from Texas to Canada via Chicago, and it was in Chicago that what could have been a dangerous turn of events ended up becoming a story of adventure that ended well. As I walked this particular writing journey with my students, modeling the authoring of my own personal narrative, we focused on writing with a specific purpose and audience in mind.

The teacher's narrative.

Date: January 5th

There under the bright fluorescent lights, hundreds of people milling about, I stood staring at that lit-up advertising board. I stood alone. Oh, there were people all around me, but they weren't with me. I was lost in a sea of nameless faces.

It was Christmas time, and everyone had family and presents on their mind, including me. But there was something else on my mind. It was midnight and I was tired. How many of the people around me felt that way as well? There I was in the Chicago airport, tired and confused.

It was Christmas vacation and I was on my way North. It was important that I spend this break with my parents, especially my mom....

(Excerpt)

A teacher's story on the power of writing and identity – narrative style.

The day dawned, like many others before. Yet, tension surrounded it, at least within my heart. The day before, my sister and I had taken my parents to the airport. This had been a long anticipated trip for my mom. For many years, her health had prevented her from visiting her children. But my dad had promised that when she felt well enough, he would take her to western Canada. The time had come. The cloud of health problems that had plagued her for so long had lifted a little, at least for a bit.

They checked in. We sat down for an early morning bite at Tim Horton's. Mom's inhaler dropped and I rushed off to give it a wash. Then it was time to wheel her to security. We watched as Mom and Dad made their way through the line and to their gate. We chuckled as Mom impatiently maneuvered her wheelchair closer to the counter, eager for departure, willing Dad to hurry up and return from the restroom.

Then, they were off and so were we. For the rest of that day, I prayed. Prayed that Mom would be OK, would travel well, would arrive safely. Thankful, so very thankful, she could make this trip, but nervous, so quietly nervous, about her fragile health.

The next day came, and so did the phone calls. The first, letting me know Mom had had a rough night. The second, letting me know Mom would not be coming back, not to Manitoba, not to her home, not to her daughters. The third, my brother-in-law saying he was so sorry and my dad saying he would never have her to hold again.

The night was long before we boarded. It was hard to fall asleep. The ache wouldn't lift. How could it? We had lost a best friend, our confidante, our mentor. This had not been in my plans for summer holidays. The trip was torture. I buried my head in magazines, willing away the tears, so unwelcome in public. We would bring Dad back and a new life would begin.

We arrived. We organized and packed Mom's things. We got ready to come home, without her. I felt the preciousness of my niece's hug. We tried to sleep. We left for the airport. Dad pointed out the funeral home where Mom's body rested. We walked to the check-in desk, Mom absent. The agent was so kind. She had no idea her common question would be met with a teary reply. Her hug was precious, heartfelt. We made it home. I will never forget walking into Mom and Dad's house together, for the first time, Mom not walking with us.

And I still miss her. Though it's been four years, the tears still come. I miss her smile, the delight on her face when I visited, the chats, the smiles that shared secrets just between us, her strong hands wrapped around mine. I was always amazed how those hands could retain such strength when the rest of her frame was so weakened by disease.

Those hands resembled her inner strength. I learned so much from this beautiful, determined woman. I learned to clean like it was nobody's business. I learned how to organize, how to keep life's environments uncluttered, how to laugh, and how to care. From her, I learned to work hard, to make a home with the simplest of ingredients, to never stop learning and growing, to love reading, to live with purpose.

So much of what my mom taught me came through her actions, her way of living, and she passed those lessons on to me as she allowed me to walk the roads of life *with* her, together. Reflecting on her own mom's impact on her life, my mom said, "My basic years of...[career] training I got from Mother's hand" (T. Barkman, tribute, September, 1995). And I am the recipient of that legacy, for so much of my own teacher training I, too, "got from Mother's hand."

I keep growing in this task of teaching writing. It has to do with something my mother did so well. She modeled, taking my hand, enjoying our friendship, beckoning me to follow. I

am learning to do this as I learn to teach this complex, beautiful task of writing. I have not arrived, but I press on, the prize calling me, the rewards priceless. Gallagher (2011) says, "When teaching students how to write, the most effective strategy is a teacher who writes, and thinks out loud, in front of his or her students. We go first, then they go" (Chapter 1, p. 16). I am learning to "apprentice them" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007, Chapter 4, p. 100), to see myself as an author and invite them, my students, my friends, to follow.

The Letter to Self

  Background to letter to self.

    In this unit, the students and I stepped outside the box; we experimented with style in an effort to explore experiences and emotions and help others relate to these. For some this was hard; others wanted to make their work lighthearted. The topic and depth was theirs to choose, but the task was not. Again, we did not tread this path alone; we looked to models for guidance. These models were two letters, one by Amy and the other by Bonnie, written to their childhood selves (Gravino, 2014; Gray, 2012). As I once again walked this writing process together with my students, we discussed organization and sentence structure and learned more about author's voice, appreciating word choice, style, and the power of experience. Following is the letter I wrote as the students and I journeyed together, a model that allowed them to see writing in progress and to hear my heart.

  The teacher's letter to self.

Date: March 10th

Dear Donna,

   You love laughter, smiles, and vibrant colours. You read a lot these days, mostly biographies. You care about others and what they say. Words mean a lot to you. Your smile

cheers others, but sometimes it also hides what's deep inside the crevices of your heart.

I see what others so often have not during these last couple of years.

I've seen the tears.

I know that your dad remarried a couple of years ago. He waited a year after your mom's home going before he pursued this. At first, you were so happy for him.

You had spent so many hours with him during that year after your mom's death. These were really special times, times of deep sharing and fun doing....

But, you also saw your dad's loneliness. You showed up at his house one day and saw him eating lunch all by himself in front of the computer. The house was so quiet. Your heart ached for him....Your dad has never enjoyed doing things by himself; he has always loved being with people. You've known this since you were a little girl.

That's why, when your dad brought up the topic of remarriage, you simply encouraged him. How could you wish him to stay in his loneliness?

Yet, when he actually remarried, your heart hurt...deeply. On the day of the wedding, seated at the head table, you lowered your head and cried. It just didn't seem right....

Your home was gone forever. Even in your forties, you missed home, your parents' home.

You would never be able to take over your mom's kitchen, chat with her while baking, and enjoy the experience and friendship together.

You would never again walk into their house, feeling totally at home. Now, this house which once was your second home, this house which holds so many special memories, is now the home of an almost-stranger.

Although you go when invited, each invitation begins with a tinge of sadness.

> *Although you are happy your dad is no longer alone, you miss the special times you once shared with him...yes, even in your forties.*
>
> *You will always miss your mom, Donna. That's the way it should be. Someone you have loved much, you will miss much.*
>
> *You may always miss the home she created, that place of security, comfort, and happiness. A place you have loved much, you will miss much. Even in your forties.*
>
> *Your feelings are OK. They make sense. Feel them. Appreciate them....*
>
> *With no emotions, life would be empty.*
>
> *Treasure a chapter that is past. Treasure those chapters that have molded you into the person you are today. Treasure the people and experiences that have shaped your identity. Do not lose those treasures in the inevitable and needful moving on....*
>
> *With all my love and care,*
>
> *Donna*
>
> *(**Partial Letter to Self**)*

A teacher's lessons on writing and identity – a letter to her younger self.

Dear Younger Teacher Self,

You love teaching; there is no other career in which you'd rather be involved. You end each year weary but with eager anticipation for the next. You fall asleep, not counting sheep, but thinking about bulletin boards, new books, and classroom design. You anticipate the new relationships that will be built and the friendships that will be deepened.

Somehow, though you only began this journey at the age of 30, your mom always knew teaching was where you belonged. Wisely, she never pushed, never said a word. But, when you

were ready, she cheered you on. She understood, had always understood, that part of your identity.

Though you know beyond a doubt that the classroom is where you thrive, you've struggled often with a nagging tension. It's a battle fought within, in those hidden secret places.

The older you get, the more you understand the intricacies of your own personality. You are a detailed person who feels deep satisfaction in a job well done. When you were little, and truth be known even older than little, this drove you to bitter frustration. Some jobs could never be done well enough, and your insides wanted to explode. You've come a long way. The road of life has a way of gentling those quirks, sanding away rough edges. But you still are who you are. You've grown but that tension remains. And now, in this calling that you love, you're learning, ever so slowly, to make peace with the struggle.

You feel this tension most when a lesson does not go as planned, there is an unexpected interruption to your day, or you just simply wake up feeling out of sorts. You have ideals...of perfect lessons, perfect reactions, perfect relationships. And when YOU fail, you end the day with a heavy heart. Sometimes, you share tidbits of your heart with colleagues; you feel somewhat comforted by shared struggles. But the heaviness remains, the fog of murky guilt that tries to settle on your heart.

Take courage! I have good news. You will keep growing and learning.

And don't ever stop. Try new things. Do new things. Venture into the unknown. Take risks, knowing some will fizzle. Do this in your personal life. Do this in your career.

For the sake of personal growth.

For the life of your students.

As you move ahead with purpose, never forget...life happens *while* you teach. This thought helps calm that nagging tension. Time marches on, and mixed up in it are both the happy and the sad. In your personal life. In the classroom. Understand that this is inevitable and it is ok. Wisely, with much thought and with careful boundaries, mix it all, be vulnerable. Let your students see your struggles and your joys, your missteps and your growth. Weave this life into your teaching, your writing. Lean into who you were, who you are becoming, who you want to be.

And in this leaning, let your students be who they are. Walk with them in their becoming. Speak into who you imagine them to be. Remember, their life also happens while you teach. Let them bring all of it, all of them, into the writing classroom. Keep working at making the writing classroom a safe place to write, together. Keep working at making it a safe place to live, together. Laugh, cry, dream, hope, listen, work hard, forgive, and be forgiven...together.

Remember, you will never ALWAYS get it right. Relax in that. In your stumbling, keep moving ahead. When the sun shines, enjoy its rays. When the rain falls, soak up the opportunities to grow.

Life is an intricate weaving of people, places, and experiences. Writing is a complex art of words, punctuation, style, and purpose. As you learn to meld the two, invite students into your learning, all the while, enjoying the journey.

Yes, dear detail-driven, goal-oriented teacher, enjoy the journey, for it is on the journey where treasure is found. Don't miss it for the destination.

Cheering you on,

Your Growing Teacher Self

***This I Believe* Essay**

Background to *This I Believe* essay.

Gallagher (2011) argues that "writing well does not begin with teaching students how to write; it begins with teaching students why they should write" (Chapter 1, p. 7). For this writing assignment, the students and I each worked on compiling a list of personal *I believe...* statements. During this time, we also looked at a main character in an autobiography we were reading and together created an *I believe...* list through her eyes. Based on her experiences, we asked ourselves, "How would she have finished the statement *I believe...*?" Based on our experiences, we asked ourselves, "What do we strongly believe and what events support those beliefs?" These discussions and questions guided our thinking and planning. Students watched as I again walked with them on this writing journey. Examples from my personal *I believe...* list included the following:

- I believe anger can be used for good.

- I believe students deserve to be heard.

- I believe in silence.

- I believe in the power of words.

A space was opened in this assignment for students to share heartfelt values, ideals, and opinions, supported by passionate emotion and heartfelt evidence.

Again, we looked at the work of others, authors who had written philosophical essays from personal places of conviction (Allison & Gediman, 2006). These were our models and guides, as we ventured into our own writing. Again, I traveled the road together with my students. As students watched me turn one of my *I believe...* statements into a persuasive essay, they saw and heard me write from the heart, using personal experience and historical detail to

support my opinion and convince the reader. Following is the *This I Believe* (Allison &

Gediman, 2006) essay I wrote and shared with my students.

The teacher's *This I Believe* essay.

Date: June 6th

The Power of Teens

I believe...in teenagers.

I remember sitting by the bonfire listening to Rick speak....about children in Mexico living in a dump, scavenging for food, searching for "treasures" that might be sold for a few cents. Something stirred in my heart....

My mom loved children like she loved a cup of smooth, rich coffee. They were her life. She reveled in taking care of not only her own flesh and blood children but the dorm children as well. She served us all. She cooked. She cleaned. She hugged. She prayed. She loved us well and with her heart.

And so it is no wonder that I eventually ended up in teaching. That same sparkle for fun, laughter, and youth that had always flickered in my mom's eyes reflected now in mine....At the age of 30, I found myself back in school.

Why? Because I believed...in youth.... I still believe....

....There was David on the battlefield, a teen of maybe 17, a teen with a heart full of energy to dream and accomplish....There was Mary at home, a teen of maybe 16....There was Daniel kidnapped to a foreign country, a teen of maybe 15, with a determined confidence to stand for what was right.

As I continue on my journey as a teacher, I become more convinced than ever that teens matter....I realize the energy, creativity, ingenuity, and adventurous spirit with which teens have

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A teacher's perspective on the search for identity in the writing classroom – her *This I Believe* essay.

A Story to Tell - A Reason to Write

I believe that every student has a story to tell, a reason to write.

Not every student walks into the classroom believing this. Others don't want to believe it, because writing is work. Writing is also art. And a quality piece of art always requires effort.

Writing is a work of art I have been growing in since the days of my youth. I always knew it was work. I have not always known it was art.

Big writing projects in high school, like term papers or book reports, were overwhelming to me. In college, when asked to write two, three, or five pages on a topic, I felt stumped. It was not that I disliked language arts. I liked diagramming sentences. I understood that. Punctuation and grammar made sense to me. No gray areas in those skills. But paraphrasing? Adding detail? Rambling on, but with purpose? Those were things I felt I didn't know how to do. I felt like I could state my view in a paragraph. Any more seemed to me a mystery.

Now here I am, writing a thesis. Something I never imagined I would do. Something I never wanted to do. But I am learning that I have a story to tell. Because of that, I now have a reason to write.

I am learning that when there is a purpose to the writing, the art takes on new meaning, and somehow it becomes easier to create. This is true for me and it is true for my students. This

year, when I allowed them to choose the topic for their research essay, the journey was so much easier. Researching was less a chore and more a joy. Writing was less forced and more natural. Students wrote from a place of knowledge and motivation. Mechanics and technique were learned but in a personal space of the students' choosing. Their interests were honoured; their identities valued. The bonus was that I as the teacher learned, as I read about the technicalities of a favourite sport, about sports icons, about countries of personal interest. My world grew because of my students.

I used to think my life was normal, no major stories to tell. Then, perhaps in my 20s, I began to realize that not everyone had grown up as I had. I did have stories to tell, and to others, they just possibly were interesting. I try to emphasize this idea with my students. They have experienced things others have not; they have interests others know little about. The world needs to hear. As authors, each student has a purpose, in making someone laugh, in letting others know they are not alone, in giving others hope, in leading others into new worlds.

I believe that every student has a reason to write, because every student has a story to tell. They must be shown. And I show them best when I value them as individuals first. I show them best when I let the personal get mixed up with the academic.

Chapter 5: Journals and Insights

Journal Entries – The When, What, Where, Why, and How of the Writing Classroom

The following journal pieces span many years. One takes the reader back to my pre-teaching days, another to a time when I was teaching Grade 4, the rest to the more recent landscape of my Grade 8 classroom. Some relate to personal struggles, others to quandaries many teachers face. These pieces are snapshots of my thoughts and experiences. Differentiating between "expressive writing" and "reflective writing," Gallagher (2011) states that "the best writing comes when a student blends the two–when she expresses her thoughts...*and* transitions into what this experience has taught her" (Chapter 2, p. 24). On this research journey, I am the student. My journal entries are "expressive" and reveal my "thoughts, ideas, feelings, and questions" (Gallagher, 2011, Chapter 2, p. 25). They then become "reflective" as I use them to move my teaching forward, seeing them as "a vehicle for exploring and discovering new thoughts" (Gallagher, 2011, Chapter 2, p. 25). The journal excerpts I have included here, and others not included, have become "a way to puzzle out experience" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 103).

Referring to the sensitivities of the research process, Campano, Honeyford, Sanchez, and Vander Zanden (2010) state:

> We believe the intimacy we develop with the individuals we work with does not lead to mere "subjective bias," but rather to a deepening awareness of the full complexity and contradiction of human perspective and effort. This does not easily lend itself to formulaic and often reductive coding. Maybe this is why the ethics of representation are often the most anxiety-producing aspects of our research. (p. 285)

The majority of this research journey has taken place within the classroom, yet it has been affected by people and experiences outside it, both recently and in the distant past. On this journey, I have been the researcher and the teacher participant at the same time. I have been greatly influenced by my students. Without them, this journey would not have taken place; without them, this journey would have no meaning. There can be no denying "the intimacy" (Campano et al., 2010, p. 285) between myself and my research landscape. Like the art of teaching writing and the act of evaluating it, subjectivity is and has been a reality of the process. Yet, intimacy and subjectivity, these seemingly inevitable tensions, speak to the value of this research journey. Because teaching takes place on a relational landscape, the challenge I faced here was to accurately "capture the full intelligence, heart, and soul of the work of teaching" (Campano et al., 2010, p. 285). I propose this can only be done with a sensitivity to and appreciation for actual experience, vulnerable and truthful story.

In an effort to provide a clear, authentic picture, I include here a significant representation of my journal entries and invite the reader to analyze and learn from them, alongside me. Ensuring a manageable number of entries meant I had to pick and choose, incorporating some and leaving others. In making these choices, I sought to include those entries that would provide the reader with the truest picture of my teaching landscape and life. Lytle (2008) states:

> I am reminded of the profound moral dilemmas built into the day-to-day practice of
> teaching, at any level, and the ways that rich, brave stories, analyses, and interpretations
> of these situations by practitioners inform the literature and give powerful insights into
> the ways expectations of teachers as professionals and their own best judgments often
> collide. (p. 376)

The selected journal entries were chosen in an effort to provide a "rich" picture of "the day-to-day practice of teaching" (Lytle, 2008, p. 376) within the specific context in which I work, as these related to identity within the writing classroom. I have sought to include a truthful representation of my learning landscape, with all its characters and influences; yet, I realize that in all the sharing, I am also "keeping so much secret" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 152). However, like Hasebe-Ludt et al. (2009), I take this risk, believing "that writing truthfully invites productive communication...and that writing truthfully opens up possibilities for creative living" (p. 152).

I have loosely divided these journal excerpts between the following headings: Tensions, Our multiple selves, Writing's complexity, Boundaries, and Relationships. I say loosely, because many entries embody more than one idea, a reflection of the complexity of both writing and identity. Each of these five facets live within the mainstream writing classroom; together, they weave themselves into an intricate learning landscape. After each group of journal entries, I uncover what I have learned about writing and identity, two phenomenon that so silently and intricately dance together within the mainstream Grade 8 writing classroom, a landscape of complex diversity of language, country, experience, and personality.

The journal pieces have been kept in their original format, except where dashes replace original ellipsis points. Where ellipsis points are used, they signify omitted material. The entries were not edited for correct spelling, punctuation, grammar or flow. For authenticity's sake, I sought to keep journal entries in their original format. Specific student detail, however, was intentionally omitted, in an effort to protect identity. Sometimes, students were referenced, but never by name. Where this is the case, information was left intact in order to provide context for the journal entry; however, the focus in these situations remains on me, the teacher.

Likewise, years were omitted from journal dates, to further ensure student privacy, though the journal excerpts appear here in chronological order. This choice was made in order to highlight growth in my own teaching journey while deflecting focus away from any one student. Journal entries were written from my personal perspective, and the only identities and stories I seek to unveil are those of my own multiple selves.

Before this unveiling begins, I must acknowledge the work of Gallagher (2011) and Smith and Wilhelm (2007). I owe a great deal to the insights, wisdom, and knowledge of these educators. Attending workshops led by both Gallagher and Wilhelm and reading books they have co/authored has encouraged my own growth as a teacher of writing, a journey that has coincided with my research journey and become one with it. Much of what I share here I learned from them, making it my own in the context where I work and among the students with whom I live. Their principles and lesson ideas have allowed me to grow in my identity as an author and a teacher and, in turn, they are allowing my students to grow in their identities as authors.

The journals tell a story, a multifaceted story. I concur with Freese (2006) who states, "An important reason for telling this story is to invite the reader to see connections to similar experiences and gain deeper insight into the complex nature of learning to teach" (p. 101). The journals build, insights from one section blending organically into the story of the next, illuminating the complexity of the writing classroom.

Tensions – the stories the journals tell.

February 25th. Sometimes I feel closterphobic [*sic*] in the classroom. Students demanding my attention, little fingers tapping on my arm, "Miss" here, "Miss" there, little bodies up out of their chairs. A sense of being overwhelmed.

January 9th. OK, so I'm up against a struggle – a mountain I can't move, that has had me feeling hopeless and discouraged....a stalemate; a ship, just floating. And I want to move! I want to see motivation and growth...

March 22nd. ...it's easy to get discouraged....When she showed me her reading test today, she was using a variety of sentences we've been practicing! Not perfect, but very encouraging. I was able to celebrate with her...

May 13th. As I look outside on a very rainy day, I see the city beginning to turn green. It happens so silently ~ the growth of the leaves, tiny buds to big, vibrant leaves.

Though I go through spells of winter, growth is on the other side. That's my hope for my students, too....

He entered rather sheepishly, yet tried to cover up with an I'm-tough attitude. During our five-minute in-class break later in the morning, a rabble of guys gathered around his desk. They clamoured on to the I'm-tough and We're cool bandwagon, discussing things....I decided a class discussion was in order. Among the wisdom shared was...~ how he handled his emotions ~ was wrong. Emotions are not wrong; they...make life interesting. How we handle them can be wrong....informed us that he had thought about it before doing it, but then decided to...anyway. At least he reflected on his action! At least he trusted me and our classroom environment enough to be honest!

November 20th. I'm doing lots of reading as they follow along. They love it when I read and we're on a mission together. It's a great way to create community!

But week after next, after they've completed the Learning Journey posters and the test, I want to introduce a Character Analysis and have them write about someone they know.

I'm scared. Will our fun, community feeling be lost as we get bogged down in trying to come up with ideas and in the mechanics of writing? Will motivation dwindle? How will I handle conferencing without feeling overwhelmed? How can I train students to work until I have time to meet with them?

Writing scares me. The needs can so easily overwhelm me.

February 22nd. We're still working on writing conferences....made a comment like this, one day: "ELA isn't all that fun anymore now that we're not reading....Writing is boring and hard." Sigh. Yes, getting better at something takes some hard work and perseverance—for both them and me!

May 14th. It's a rainy day, Thursday, and 4:35. I'm home early—on purpose—and feeling exhausted, an exhaustion lately that doesn't want to heal. Physical and mental, perhaps? Since Christmas, it's been somewhat of a mentally tough several months....That bothers me and keeps me always guarded...

July 13th. As I've spent time catching up on my year-end journaling (between yesterday and today), I've been reminded again of journaling's importance. It takes time (the reason I had been procrastinating). And yet, it is exactly that time which allows my thoughts space to gel, ground to grow, cultivation for new sprouts.

September 27th. Brownlie (2005) makes this statement about students sharing journal entries with each other: "As they network their thinking, exchange and share responses, they further capitalize on the social aspects of reading" (p. 36). I love the truth that reading is a social activity, and I feel I am growing as a teacher in learning to appreciate this and adjust my teaching accordingly. Writing, too, is a social activity as we always write for an audience, even if that audience is self.

November 8th. Every year, it seems, I wonder how to teach writing or else wonder if I'm doing it right, on the right track. This year is no different. It's so fun to read with the kids...I wonder if (or feel guilty actually) I'm neglecting writing. But I was thinking the other day that if students can learn to journal well (using mechanics well, demonstrating knowledge of sentence variety, and incorporate creativity), then upcoming and more challenging writing will be easier, both for them and for me. I shall keep this in mind as we progress.

January 24th. I mentioned my personality, not wanting to deprive my own students, and wanting to enjoy the journey. Those last words stuck with me. They've been thirty years in coming! I was looking back this week at letters written to Mom and Dad while in High School. What was I struggling through? A long term paper that I just wanted to be done. Then I think in a journal from...days the same theme came up—feeling overwhelmed with schoolwork. Maybe I'm beginning to write a different story.

January 26th. Tricky business, this grading. They need to know where they stand, yet I don't want them discouraged....

No, my identity cannot rest on their responses. I must remain steady—I must continue to love and value, yet evaluate their writing honestly.

January 27th. Are the grades working to accomplish the goal, which is ownership and improvement of writing?

....If nothing else, these "tension" moments help me grow as a teacher. Stopping to voice the confusion on paper (to write) in some ways helps to bring focus and clarity.

January 28th. Well, whaddayouknow [*sic*]? Today, I told the kiddos I was handing back Journal 2 and...got all excited. When she didn't see a grade, she was disappointed and said, "Oh,

no grades?" It seems I can't win. (smile) But I was happy with her excitement and response. Obviously I haven't yet killed the creativity! Grades haven't left lasting damage.

January 29th. Messy—that's my story for Friday. I couldn't wait for the kids to go home. My nerves were trying to stay bottled up within a simmering pressure cooker....

Interesting that when I saw both girls at last break they waved at me from outside. They're not mad at me, but, man, are they ever trying to push limits.

February 23rd. Teaching writing is just plain 'ole hard sometimes!

February 29th. One thing I'm noticing—letting table groups discuss first and then ensuring that each group has a spokesperson who's willing to share group answers...is very helpful....seems to be a little more tentative during discussions but small group first with speaker group- or teacher-appointed seems to solve this problem. Makes life easier for students and for teacher, less painful, more natural, more conducive to personalities.

March 1st. I've really learned this modelling [*sic*] from Gallagher, but I've had to grow in it.

You gotta [*sic*] be proactive as a teacher—make the effort to keep learning and improving. Give yourself time to grow. Tweek [*sic*], make it yours, be flexible, tailor to yourself as teacher and your unique class. Build on what you know, and have proven, works.

March 19th. Something I've been thinking regarding this Letter to Self—One thing I've always struggled with in teaching writing is focusing (maybe overly much) on the details of grammar more than the content and ideas. A battle for such a detail-oriented one as me.

But, as I choose writing activities that focus on the personal, I feel content gets the spotlight. And style is highlighted. This letter to self—grammar rules were broken (i.e.

Bonnie's letter); but they were broken for style's sake, for emphasis, for highlighting very personal thoughts.

It has been very good to incorporate this activity into our writing program before the more structured research essay, which is coming up next week.

April 4th. Back to buttons pushed—another one is a habit of unfinished homework....

Whether I handled it correctly, I don't know....Recognizing and voicing what pushes my buttons (stopping to think and write) feels like the start of change or hope....It's so easy for me to not take the time to "voice" and, in so doing, to live in a fog of feeling, a haze of regret or undefinable [*sic*] tension....

I guess it centers around the importance of understanding myself, my teacher self. Understanding myself and identifying my feelings and buttons are stepping stones to growth. Just yesterday or this weekend in the article by Freese [2006], I highlighted a quote, something like, "The art of teaching is made up of emotions and attitudes." Understanding my own (emotions and attitudes) helps me become a better teacher. And I think it's good for the kids if they see me voicing and figuring out in front of them. Perhaps together we can learn to deal with our selves.

May 2nd. Interesting—Ideas come as I write....as I just started writing, there was more there than I realized. Truly, sitting down to write opens up a space for learning, for thinking, for uncovering....

Sometimes the ordinary turns into the extraordinary. Sometimes hidden beneath the mundane lie nuggets of gold.

This is all about my growth as a writer, a writing teacher, and a person. About creating those safe places to grow, both for me and my students, as individuals and as authors.

May 8th. As goal-oriented and detailed as I am, it is a life-long journey of mine to learn to enjoy the process.

June 6th. Working on "This I Believe" essays....the thought (from yesterday) hit me today—"the journey is the destination" (Leggo, p. 114) [as cited in Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009]. How true in writing—for students...who find it hard to complete an assignment, for times when we run out of time—Of course, the goal is completion, but what relief to think about the fact that the journey is just as important as the destination, the final project.

Insights on tensions, writing, and identity.

In these journal entries, the tensions I faced came from many directions, sometimes directly related to the task of writing, sometimes not. I struggle here with school climate, student need, student behaviour, personality characteristics, grading feedback, and my own areas of needed growth. In some way, no matter the direction of the tension or its timing, I, the writing teacher, was affected.

Tensions are inevitable in the writing classroom. As the teacher, I bring personal tensions from outside. Likewise, my students bring their own. The tensions we carry are greeted by others that hang around inside the school walls. For students, these include the tensions found in friendships, in trying to negotiate popularity, in dealing with difficult subjects, in being confined to a chair and four walls and endless words from teachers. For the teacher, these tensions include the dream of helping every child learn, the struggle to present material in a way that reaches every individual, the learning to work with other staff with different ideas, perhaps opposing ideals.

Tensions from outside do not disappear at the door; they remain a part of who we are in the context of school and learning and teaching. Tensions at school do not disappear simply

because they are ignored. Only when the writing classroom remains open to tensions, tensions of all shapes and sizes, can life be lived in its fullest richness.

Thus, the writing classroom is a place for wrestling, wrestling with language and with life. It is a place of learning technique and style, language and structure; but it is also a place of understanding self and others, choosing to listen and grow. All writers, both L1 and L2, both teacher and student, need this wrestling. Gallagher (2011), referring to a teacher tension moment, explains, "If I want deeper discussion from students, I need to provide some time to generate thinking via writing before initiating classroom conversation. Writing primes the thinking pump" (Chapter 5, p. 118). Writing exposes, illuminates, and helps define and understand tensions.

Tensions lead to growth, if we give them permission to lead. Freese (2006) discusses the reticence displayed by her student teacher to engage emotionally with his teaching, himself, and his students. Influenced by his scientific background, such engagement seemed inappropriate and unethical. However, we are holistic beings. Therefore, it was only as this student teacher began to understand his teaching and his interactions with students on an emotional level, and as he became ready to face his own feelings and the reasons behind those feelings, that positive change began to take place on the teaching and learning landscape. It takes perseverance to grow. It takes flexibility. Tensions, as we persevere and allow ourselves to be stretched, develop confidence and the art of teaching. Tensions also develop the art of writing.

Tensions, by default, come with emotions. That is not a bad thing. Emotions often get us moving. Emotions are an indicator that something or someone is valued. Kelchtermans (2009) states, "Emotions have to be acknowledged as part of educational practices, driven by moral commitment and care for others for whom one feels responsible" (p. 269). Freese (2006) further

highlights the significance of emotions in teaching, stating that "the art of teaching is influenced by our emotions and attitudes" (p. 106). Teaching is an art that is of necessity and quite naturally performed uniquely by each teacher artist, and because it is an art, emotions and attitudes are the colours infusing it with depth and meaning. It is imperative, then, that I as a teacher understand my emotional self, that I as a teacher artist understand the colours I choose, consciously and subconsciously, with which to paint the teaching and learning landscape. Nias (1996) also argues for the value and importance of emotions in the classroom, pointing out that "without feeling, without the freedom...to be whole persons in the classroom, they [teachers] implode, explode–or walk away" (Telling Stories section, para. 5). Along the same line, Kelchtermans (2005) states that the "condition of vulnerability makes teaching fundamentally 'emotionally non-indifferent'" (p. 1005) but notes that "vulnerability is not only a condition to be endured, but also to be acknowledged, cherished, and *embraced*" (p. 999). Rather than ignore tensions and emotions, these should be accepted and intentionally felt, for when accepted and felt, teaching comes alive. When accepted and felt, writing comes alive.

Tensions result from the mystery of paradox. I can so easily feel weighed down by this thing that I love to do, teaching. The love of doing so readily mixes with the heaviness of being. Like the teachers with whom Ladson-Billings (1995) worked, who functioned within a "culturally relevant pedagogy," my emotions are so often directed towards myself...Why did I react that way? How should I have reacted? Will my response or words have caused hurt? How can I handle the student or the situation differently in the future? Is there a better or a different way to teach this concept or subject? Ladson-Billings explains that rather than lament the state or behaviour of their students, these "teachers talked about their own shortcomings and limitations and ways they needed to change to ensure student success" (p. 479). I'm beginning

to see that the paradox is ok, for the paradox keeps me ever refining the art of teaching. Ladson-Billings explains, "A culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society" (p. 483). The paradox must exist; without it, there would be no problematizing, no questioning, no quest for better.

Writing, sometimes a tension in itself, is also a place to process tensions.

Our multiple selves – the stories the journals tell.

March 17th. In my heart, I have felt like a "wanderer," not loyal to any one place, country, or people. That's OK.

September 16th. I am inspired this year by Gallagher's [2011] thoughts in <u>Write Like This</u> and the students' willingness to share and write about something (object or photo) that represents them. This was a beginning-of-the-year assignment. They wrote willingly. As their teacher, I learned new things about them, many (most actually) whom I'm seeing for a second year in a row. I can now connect with them in new and more personal ways. Who doesn't like to be known on a more personal level? This is the direction I want to go with their writing. And Gr. 8 students want to be known!

October 25th. My own identity as a "good teacher" was once again shaken on Thursday. I see four students...who <u>desperately</u> need help in writing. How do I help them sufficiently without neglecting the others who also need my input but in a less desperate way? I want to help EVERYONE. How do I do it? Thursday I was overwhelmed with the need—and frustrated.

January 19th. It dawned on me last week that journaling...is another way to honour student identity, as students' responses reflect <u>who</u> they know, <u>what</u> they've experienced, and <u>what</u> they know—Text to Self, Text to Text, Text to World.

January 21st. ...ate her lunch in my room the other day, because she was struggling with a boy's friendship and wanted to talk. As she was talking, I remembered back to times when I wanted to tell my mom something and had such a hard time because I felt shy or embarrassed. Even though I sat there listening, feeling like I didn't have a good answer to give her, all she seemed to need was a listening, caring ear. She said when she left that she felt like a weight had been lifted.

January 25th. As I have been reading these journal entries...some topics have been more serious than others....about her experience of being different from others when she moved....about becoming a citizen of Canada....

This journaling is a good opportunity to emphasize the power of their unique, individual thoughts and experiences. I'm hoping that it will be a good segue into the next big writing assignment—"This I Believe."

February 4th. So, I've been thinking about identity this week. Maybe Clandinin (2014) got me started....Then Monday a.m. at an inservice...told the story of a teacher giving to her the identity of having a number block. Similarly, I remember as a student being given the identity of "too quiet—needs to speak up more."

While myself as well as my students have room to grow outside our natural comfort zones, I ask myself, "How am I giving identity to my students?" or "What identities do I ascribe to them?"

The question is a good one and one I need to constantly remember. It is also one which causes me to cringe, for I know there have been times that in frustration I have said hurtful things to students.

The following episodes, which have taken place in the last two days, relate to identity in some fashion, big or small.

*We were watching an episode of....I walked over and stood by his desk. I informed him I could see the screen just fine. In no uncertain terms, he told me....I listened. I knelt down so my view was level with his. I apologized. He was absolutely right. At that angle, the glare made viewing impossible....I am reminded of the value...when I model assignments—journal entries, writing pieces ("My Mom" essay). When I do, two things happen: 1) I can empathize with students b/c I understand what they are dealing with; and 2) they are given a model to guide them.

*This morning...were continuing to talk after correcting a sentence from homework. I wanted the students to quiet down and listen, so we could move on. My first instinct? Tell them to be quiet, ascribing an identity of "you-talk-too-much." This time I asked first, before accusing. Come to find out...explaining...how one gets nieces and nephews. A sibling has to marry. This discussion was prompted b/c our grammar sentence used the words brother-in-law, which required students to insert the dashes. Again, I was reminded how quickly I ascribe a "too loud" or "misbehaving" identity, instead of inquiring or listening first....The same sort of thing happened the other day....Again, we were going over homework and laughter erupted. My first instinct? Ascribe a "you're-too-loud-you're-not-focused" identity. Again, what did I find out? The laughter and chatter had resulted from a "bet" having to do with who had the correct answer on a certain sentence in our homework.

*This morning as we discussed David's [character in novel] feelings of not belonging...hidden immigrant stories were shared—

....In other words, he looks the part, but is still left out because he doesn't speak the part.

....Again...looked the part, but customs and language were so different.

February 8ᵗʰ. ....journal spoke of...hidden immigrant feelings upon moving back to Canada....wrote about feeling out of place once back in...home country, wanting to just blend into the crowd to stay unnoticed and feel less awkward.

March 9ᵗʰ. Speaking of identity, I was able to honour identity Friday after school by...watching the guys play basketball. I always love seeing their energy and skill on the court!....

Also Monday morning, the kids came in talking about a movie. Finally...gave me the details. It was a Filipino movie about family and forgiveness. She obviously had really enjoyed it, and said she had learned a lesson through it.

Amid this chatter of the early morning, before the ring of the second bell, I thought to myself, "Honouring identity must be a lifestyle." It must be the comfort zone in which I live as a teacher.

March 17ᵗʰ. Identity takes time—time to listen. Identity takes attitude—an attitude of being aware.

March 19ᵗʰ. I'm hoping this Imitate! Practice! revision practice will really help. As happens so often, conferencing has nibbled at me with feelings of overwhelming fear—How will I help each in the way I should? Without it taking forever?

The Imitate! Practice! PPT really encouraged me today. It was fun for the kids, and it modeled well, I felt. Then, I also decided today that rather than looking at the whole essay when

I conference, I'll have students choose one paragraph they want me to look at with them together....

I am hoping the modeling and practice will lighten the load, and in turn preserve identity. If I'm not frustrated, and students have seen and practiced what they should be doing, then I'm thinking I protect myself and the students from feeling defeated. Also, focusing on only one paragraph each, will help conferencing keep moving and not drag on.

July 13th. Also for next year, I think I want to have students actually write a "This I Believe" essay....It's a neat type of essay and allows for individuality and expression of identity....

As I sat and listened, I could hold the tears back no longer....I was thankful for my sunglasses....I think he felt empowered knowing I was on his side.

October 15th. I handed out the list of Character Traits last week and had the kids read over the list, identifying adjectives unfamiliar to them. Someone asked about the word "superstitious." ...shared an example from India, which...had witnessed when...family visited....hybrid identity was so evident as...talked....

...journaling is a way for me to honour their identity as they share thoughts, opinions, and experiences. I value them thru my time and feedback.

October 18th. Then Friday afternoon, one of the items I worked on after the kids left was another journal entry to use as a model....As I was wrapping it up, I heard myself say, "I love writing." Wow! Here my life has ended up with me teaching writing, but I've never really felt like I enjoyed it. Have always gotten good grades, but not necessarily ever felt like those people who say they just love writing. For me, it's more of a hidden treasure which I have very slowly been called on to shovel by shovel dig out.

December 11th. I was just thinking about "Voice" in writing. Recognizing "voice" is recognizing identity, as my Grade 9 teacher did with me. I think I am still finding my "voice" in writing. It shines best when I am writing about something dear to me, important, of value. The same will happen to my students; the same applies to them. And passion and purpose go hand in hand. Together with my students, I am learning the importance of purpose, having a specific purpose for writing a piece....

If students...have choice in their writing and are directed to seeing purpose in their writing, their opinions and talents and interests are honoured. As their identities are honoured in this way, their writing identities are also honoured, respected, and given purpose....

Purpose—We all need it. Without it, our identities crumble, our writing identities wither.

I need to grow in this and I need to mentor my students in this, cultivate the ground and watch purposeful writing grow.

Too often in my own journey as a student and in the stories of my students, we write simply b/c we have to, b/c it's an assignment.

January 4th. I was not feeling in the writing mood myself, when...walked in first thing in the morning and asked if we could ease back in slowly....Then...said he didn't feel like writing. What I ended up choosing to do was not even planned much ahead of time. Last year in Grade 7 social studies, we read the book A Long Walk to Water. Today, I showed the kids a TedTalk by the author Linda Sue Park, and had them discuss in their table groups and then each write down on a 3x5 card an answer to the following: Why is it important to write down your own or another's story?....my desire is to tie what Linda said together with the purpose each of the students wrote/identified for their own narratives. I reminded the students that they all have

unique stories to tell. I am wanting to encourage the students with the importance of telling

stories, their stories. I want them to feel an importance and purpose in their writing.

....about my different selves. I've thought before that my family would not recognize me

in the classroom—a self they haven't seen. Although my mom always recognized the teacher in

me.

January 5th. Today, I modeled for the students—had them help me identify places I

needed to add more detail or information....Then, I had them choose a partner they felt

comfortable with, someone with whom they didn't mind sharing their story (always an issue in

Grade 8), and had them get feedback from their partner/revisor [*sic*]. Tonight for homework

they are working on their second draft, and tomorrow I want to begin conferencing. I had to

remind students...that the purpose was to <u>revise</u>—rethink ideas—not edit for punctuation errors.

January 7th. I think that phrase is somewhat new to me this year—"think like an author."

At least, I feel I'm more purposefully using it this year. And as I use it, I'm beginning to realize

how it is helping build identities, perhaps even beginning to build a classroom culture. In

referring to the students as authors the other day...piped up and started questioning....I explained

that just because we need more practice, it doesn't mean we are not. I like the idea of our room

being one full of authors. What a purposeful place from which to start....

Then, at lunchtime...wanted to stay in 'cuz she had the sniffles. I began to ask her a bit

about...relatives, language, and coming to Canada mingled into our conversation. Definitely a

hybrid identity....Yet, though she understands it perfectly, she feels more comfortable speaking

English. I told her mine was a similar situation with German.

Then, I must smile as I see two gentlemen emerging....was so kind the other day to notice

a stool by my desk and be quick to put it away for me. Then, when I could not put a heavy box

of books above the lockers...did it for me with ease....So important that I notice and cheer.

Teaching—so full of identity making moments!

January 14th. I am on a journey—realizing how important it is to understand and grow in my own identity and to pay attention to how I influence and understand student identity.

Identity is about who we are, who we have been, who we are becoming.

January 24th. I think my second journal entry is pretty cool, too....Maybe I'm having more fun writing these journal entries than the kids are. I'm sure I am! It's about Mom telling me that it was the smile on the face that counted....

A funny note about my identity. For the first time that I can remember, students this year have caught me on the way I say automatically. Apparently I saw [*sic*] [say] it with a Spanish "auto." I never realized it until they brought it up. They like to take note and lovingly laugh at me.

January 26th. ...as we continued reading...the subject of treatment of tourists took off. Students totally understood, their hybrid identity totally in gear. Those from...relayed how prices automatically get hiked when merchants suspect a tourist.

February 2nd. On a different note—I noticed...brought a bag of plantain chips for snack this morning. I pointed it out, saying I grew up eating those. Apparently, they are common in....The meeting of our hybrid identities.

February 15th. I feel so strongly that it's time for me to be the "leader" rather than the "follower."

Follower is my default—by personality and by birth order. I'm the youngest; naturally, my older siblings have always taken the lead. This is my sibling "self." And I see how this has carried over into my workplace. I default....When I'm afraid I may have done something wrong,

when I question myself and my reactions or actions, when I'm feeling unconfident, I tend to default....

I need to wear those years, and all the experiences woven into them, with confidence...

February 21st. Continuing with the theme of confidence....

I shared honestly....

I did not defer...that would not have been right. I was confident, secure in my relationship...and how I was handling the situation....

Interesting that as I'm working on my thesis, identity has been my theme. But it's been coming at me from many directions....Heart Craving Questions....

Belonging is one that I've been thinking about since Friday. As we work on our third journal entry, mine focuses right here...on the area of belonging in my childhood. (And I suppose it has carried on into my adult life and could be tied to confidence, as well.)

March 5th. The story of my Teacher Identity within the Grade 8 Writing Classroom—

Competency, a significant component. And because life is life, I don't feel competent every single day, or even week.

March 7th. As I was about to show students my in-progress letter, a fun language conversation erupted....asked if he could "close the lights"....the Tagalog way....piped up with other Tagalog grammar structures which differ from English, and...talked about the way her Grandpa words a phrase in English due to his first language. I also mentioned...German translation of "When did you get up/wake up this morning?" which turned into "When did you stand up this morning?"....

And the kids are really getting into the model. I showed them how I used Bonnie's letter to guide me...asked if I had a hard copy of Bonnie's letter that she could use....went down to pick up the copies, and when she returned they flew like hotcakes....

So this writing assignment is also making my heart smile—

Living Life Together

In the Trenches Together

Modeling my Own Progress

Providing Tools and Resources

—all work together to bolster my own positive, secure teacher identity.

....Life can't be compartmentalized—One area affects another. How I enjoy what they enjoy, how I handle impromptu conversations, the resources I provide—each facet shines on the other, providing a rich landscape of learning and teaching.

March 16th. One thing I did...the other day worked fabulously. I wanted to just keep motoring with conferences, so to begin our long writing/reading workshop, I told students they knew...when they needed a break. So they could choose when...the guidelines were simply that they could take only one....Again, honouring their age identity—more choice, more independence, more self-responsibility.

May 19th. The year is winding down. I'm happy, love what I do, but tired. I have one more writing project I've been wanting to complete before year end, but I've been leary [*sic*] about starting it, fearing a lack of motivation on the part of the kids.

But I introduced it today and was so very pleasantly surprised. I started off by reading...from my <u>This I Believe</u> book. Then I opened it up...for ideas. A few...shared a belief they have and personal experience to back it up. Their ideas were really good.

I wanted to introduce the project today and let it start ruminating in their minds a week or two before we actually get down to writing. Their reaction was encouraging. Again, I see motivation stemming from being able to write about what's important to them, a space to share their own thoughts and experiences.

June 4th-5th. I'm learning—learning that it's OK to not agree on the spot—learning that it's OK to give myself and them some space—learning to be confident in who I am—as...a teacher, a coworker.

June 16th. And the exams—I'm so pleased with how the writing turned out. Having the students choose a quote and write a reflective journal entry seems to have been a perfect culminating writing activity—led up to perfectly by journal entries, "This I Believe" essay, and Letter to Self.

Plus, it was again something they could relate to their own lives. Their thoughts and experiences were again valued. And I am sure enjoying reading through them.

Insights on multiple selves, writing, and identity.

In these journal entries, many selves emerge – sibling self, coworker self, teacher self, friend self, Grade 8 self, hybrid self, author self, daughter self, student self. Each self contributes to identity, making the classroom context a complex, vibrant landscape.

I walk into the classroom with multiple identities, multiple selves. These different selves are each an integral part of who I am and cannot be separated from each other. Just like me, my students walk into the classroom with their multiple identities, their multiple selves. Johnson (2011) states "that people are multifaceted, with diverse influences based on multiple roles in life—multiple selves" (p. 216). Some of our multiple selves are shaped within the classroom, some without. As teachers, "we are all multifaceted, and our various selves impact our beliefs

about teaching" (Johnson, 2011, p. 217). In the same manner, my students' "various selves" (Johnson, 2011, p. 217) influence their attitudes about learning and writing. Each of us as individuals "are...affected by time—our past, present, and future selves" (Johnson, 2011, p. 220). My research, as well as my writing and teaching, grows out of these selves. Like Brubaker (2012), I find that my identity, with its many facets, informs my actions, reactions, decisions, and growth within the classroom. My identity consists of "a complex tapestry of interwoven layers of self that inform my evolving pedagogy" (Brubaker, 2012, p. 11). My students are no different; their learning and writing flow from their multiple, unique selves.

We are holistic beings. One self affects another; one experience influences another. When I share my writing with students, writing that includes my personal thoughts, life experiences, and life lessons, "I model the integration of my selves" (Johnson, 2011, p. 220). Damico, Honeyford, and Panos (2016) state that "for any [learning] tool to work, it needs to fit with the text, fit with the learners, and fit with the school or community context" (p. 28). Damico et al. emphasize that sustainable learning means learning that has value "*to students*" (p. 26). It is when our writing is given permission to flow from our multiple selves and from the contexts in which we work, learn, and play that learning becomes sustainable. Carroll (1996) adds another dimension to the importance of connecting with one's learning, stating, "Writing about what one knows best helps reduce the cognitive overload that interferes with new L2 writers' ability to express themselves in a non-native language" (p. 27). Carroll suggests that language arts teachers of L2 students "must consider carefully topics we assign, offer ESL students opportunities to select their own topics, and be open-minded when we respond to the content and form of their writing" (p. 28). When we as teachers "consider carefully" with a sensitivity to remaining "open-minded," we foster learning and plant seeds of motivation.

Sustainable learning also involves "topics, texts, and tools that matter to students and make a difference in society" (Damico et al., 2016, p. 30). Lau (2012) encourages educators to engage all students, both L1 and L2 learners, in such critical literacy, describing a project with Grades 7 and 8 L2 students that involved "topics...relevant to students' concerns and interests" (p. 326). One of these topics included the issue of bullying and another the story of Cinderella told from both the Korean and the American perspectives. Lau notes that through the project students "grew in confidence that their opinions mattered and that they could contribute to generating insight about issues that were of concern to them" (p. 329). During the process, both "linguistic skills" and personal "voice" (Lau, 2012, p. 329) were developed.

Such sustainable learning necessitates that teachers get to know their students and allow their students to have a say in their own learning. One focus question must be, "What resources (cultural, linguistic, community) do my students bring into the classroom?" (Damico et al., 2016, p. 28). I encouraged this sustainable, personally driven learning when I allowed students to choose their own topics for their research essays, topics they were interested in, of which they already had background knowledge. Likewise, my goal in assigning journal entries was to have students look at their own lives and the lives of characters in books with a more critical eye. Brownlie (2005) describes this as "personal meaning-making" (Chapter 4, p. 25) and Park (2015) as "practice at life" (2:03). The assigned *This I Believe* essays also invited student opinion into the learning landscape, allowing students to share beliefs important to them as individuals. Inviting this "integration" (Johnson, 2011, p. 220) into the classroom, inviting my own selves and all the selves of each individual student into the writing classroom, leads to a fuller learning experience, a place where we impact each other at a deeper life level.

One of our selves in the writing classroom is our author self. I am an author; I must intentionally claim this as part of my identity. For me, the realization of this identity, the truth of it, has been a journey, not a given. This forming of an author identity is also a journey for my students. Gallagher (2011) states that "students who are taught how to write without being taught the real-world purposes behind authentic writing are much more likely to end up seeing writing as nothing more than a school activity" (Chapter 1, p. 7). We must all see ourselves as authors so that our writing, and our journey to writing better, has purpose. For me, the teacher, that purpose for writing will always include experience, some part of my identity. Worthman (2004) argues "that regardless of the content or goal of the site of learning, participants need to position themselves alongside that content and those goals and speak personally to them, including the processes through which the content and goals are presented" (p. 373). The writing classroom becomes a place of purpose when our identities, mine and my students, are given spaces through which to shine.

Sometimes we write for ourselves, to process our thoughts on paper (Gallagher, 2011, Chapter 5, p. 118). Other times, we write for our readers. Christianson (2007) states, "Reading helps me remain open to fully living: being present and available to new experiences, emotions, and information .[*sic*]The practice of reading gives me hope and helps me maintain a life of curiosity" (p. 65). As readers, we open a book to enter a different world, to vicariously live new experiences. Likewise, as authors, we write to invite readers into our worlds, to encourage because we have walked the road ahead, to bring laughter and cheer. We write to validate our multiple selves and, in so doing, we open up a space to validate the selves of others, for when we respect our selves, we then have the capacity to respect the selves of others.

We dismiss easily what is not relevant. Worthman (2004) states that "school practices need to position students as explorers of who they are and what they think as entry into a curriculum and content that can be relevant, meaningful, and lasting" (p. 373). When students are invited to write from a platform of personal interest, the journey becomes less arduous for me because it becomes less arduous for my students. Gallagher (2011) states, "If I want my students to work toward becoming real-world writers, I need to shift the focus of my writing instruction toward real-world writing purposes" (Chapter 1, p. 9). Teaching in this way, with this perspective, I am able to value my own identities and the identities of my students, bringing meaning and purpose into our teaching and learning space.

Writing is a place to learn respect, for ourselves and for others. Writing is a space to develop purpose within the spheres of our individual identities and our multiple selves.

Writing's complexity – the stories the journals tell.

September 16th. How do I teach comprehension skills, grammar rules, and writing techniques in a way that incorporates the students' interests and experiences? How do I combine the above requirements into a package that keeps students interested and awake? Today, I felt overwhelmed....I want students writing about experiences and interests that are important to them. Yet, how do I teach comprehension skills AND/or along with incorporating their experiences and interests? Teaching it all sometimes feels overwhelming. Not too slow, or I feed boredom. Not too fast, or I lose some. Not too detailed, or the storyline is lost. Detailed enough, or concepts and author techniques are not grasped.

September 26th. One activity today was our Imitate! Practice! (adopted from Gallagher)....Once we had discussed each word, table groups were ready to imitate. They were given time to create sentences and allotted table points according to correct use....I love watching

them work in groups; I love the learning "noise" as they work together; I love to see the enthusiasm.

October 10th. This year, I have begun incorporating the "Imitate! Practice!" activity suggested by Gallagher. After learning/reviewing a punctuation concept and allowing space to practice it, we then move on to "imitate" it. In the imitating stage, table teams are given the opportunity to compete and earn points. Our last session involved three opportunities, which I displayed one by one on the TV screen:

1) Tricky words – their, there, and they're. Use correctly in two related sentences.

2) Use of opener and closer with proper punctuation, within three related sentences.

3) Proper pronoun usage – ___and me / ___and I – within two sentences....

I love this activity because–

*I see all students getting involved (all are responsible to write answers and I check random team member papers).

*Discussion and talking is a must (space for this is created by nature of activity).

*All students can be successful as teamwork is a privilege and a must.

*I see areas of weakness when teams are unsuccessful, opening my eyes to areas I need to review or reteach.

*There is no "grade" penalty during this practice process.

Also, with my reminders, students began referring to and using the "Sentence Variety" bulletin board, which displays a list of "Opener" words. Great tool.

I'm finding that another great tool is displaying a punctuation skills list and keeping it updated as new skills are reviewed and/or taught. It's a great visual both for me and the students.

It also allows me to use these as criteria in their weekly or biweekly paragraphs, spiralling [*sic*]

skills. (Another suggestion from Gallagher.)

October 21st. Two days — one day last week and one day this week — we have

participated in the Imitate! Practice! activity....

Both I and the students enjoy this activity! There's energy and excitement in the room.

When a team gets full points, cheers erupt. Again, bulletin boards keep both students and me on

track.

December 11th. Then, this writing project has not been near as overwhelming as I feared.

It's been encouraging, actually....

I've also noticed with this assignment that writing in front of my students—modelling

[*sic*] —has been huge! ...I was able to write a piece about my mom. Some of this was done as

they watched me, some of it as we each just quietly worked on our own. I have read to each

class my complete rough draft. Is it just the year? Or is it the modelling [*sic*] and me doing the

assignment <u>with</u> them together? Hardly a complaint—hardly a I-don't-know-who/what-to-write-

about. Everyone just got right to work. Wow!

....I'm not sure what he was thinking, but as I think about it, that is exactly how my mom

taught me so many things–she modelled [*sic*]. And that is exactly how I want to teach my

students. As they see me and my writing in action, they will pick up good habits (and the writing

of great authors). Me modelling [*sic*], along with a focus on other good authors, will do so much

more than me just telling them to "do this" or "do that." I guess it comes back to the phrase I've

introduced to them in the last two weeks—SHOW, don't tell.

I thought of this even as I was reading my rough draft to my students. I wanted to

introduce to them the idea of transitioning smoothly from one paragraph to the next. As I was

reading my piece aloud and pointing out what I had done, I realized I was showing students a good technique rather than just telling them....

I'm noticing so much with this piece how the kids are willing to write if I write!

Another area that impressed me this week is the whole foundation of relationships. If that's not solid, it's hard for any of the bricks to stick and stay....asking me if I remember who she likes....telling me he was sad because...showing me pictures of her pets....wanting me to try one of his bacon crackers. If the foundation is weak, the walls will crumble!

December 16th. I conferenced [*sic*] with both...during lunch break, as they both were quite private, not wanting others to hear us conferencing about their topics. I reminded them that writing is simply talking but on paper. Therefore, there is no need to try to make it sound "complicated." I reminded them that when we imitate, that's when our writing can become more sophisticated....seemed to connect with this....struggles with clarity...so I'm hoping these thoughts will help her.

January 31st. I am journalling [*sic*] also, as a model for students.

Speaking of journaling—Friday I left my Chapter 5 journaling out on the table, if students wanted to read it. Not all did; some were eager to dive right into their own reading and journaling. Others, however, took advantage of opportunity. The system worked well. I was especially pleased that...payed [*sic*] attention to it. Though...understands the mechanics of writing, and can write well, it's a bit of a struggle to...write pieces of quality and depth....until recently, has just been slow to get any assignments completed. My heart warmed...even had a compliment for me, mentioning how...liked the way I had journaled so that they would know how to do it.

A reminder of the importance of modeling! (Plus, it's so good for me to complete the same assignments I'm asking my students to complete. It helps me to understand the assignment better and what my students are facing when they attempt the task.)

February 17th. I decided to have my reflective essay in front of me, ready to look at together when needed. And another big thing I decided to do was have students write their own corrections and notes as we discussed and conferenced [*sic*] together. What a great idea that ended up being! I noticed...writing notes and reminders on their essays, in their own words. For example...when...discussing how...needed to include more detail, wrote "Show, don't tell," a phrase we've used earlier in the year but which I haven't used with the students for a while. In a way, besides pushing them to become more independent in their writing (taking their own notes, making their own corrections, writing their own reminders), having each author pick up pen or pencil and make their own markings was honoring their identities as teens, as well as growing authors.

When I conferenced [*sic*]...I noticed he looked over at our "Beginning, Middle, End" poster when he and I were discussing his need for an intro and a conclusion. Again, I was reminded of the importance of visuals. I was so glad he did that, b/c it prompted me to then draw attention to the same poster as I conferenced [*sic*] with others.

May 14th. ELA—for the past weeks, the kids have been working on research articles. I'm so glad that's about done! It's a hard one to plow through—putting into own words, bibliography, conferencing. This assignment again I chose to conference with students, focusing on one paragraph only. I'm not sure if I should change the whole project for next year or not. Putting into own words is tough. If I changed the presentation format—say into a kid's book? Would that help the paraphrasing?

The research project reminded me once again how editing (focusing on punctuation) tends to be students' default when I say "Revise"....I imagine this has been drilled into them from years past, and, I must admit, has been my default, too. Such a balance is needed between editing (punctuation) and revision (ideas). I feel like this year I've given revision a fairer chance, stressed it more—something I need to keep up. What I've had students do for the last two essays is get someone to edit at the end, when essays have been typed out and before I've printed them. Have had to and continue to refine this but think something I'll continue.

A little over a week ago I was having some rough days—not even enjoying teaching and feeling bad about that. Then I was given a gift. A large handful of girls were hanging around my desk after lunch....I had a fun, girly chat with them....My regrets and unease over my own mood were eased. Again, I was reminded that it all comes back to relationship. It's how we are created.

July 13th. One thing I changed this year was how I handled modeling. Instead of having the students model their writing sentence by sentence, I had them focus more on the whole. I found this to be liberating, and the modeling was no less helpful. Along this line, I remember more than once being asked by...to put my writing on the screen as a model for her to follow. I also found myself with more opportunities this year to focus on students' thots [*sic*] in their writing without getting hung up on grammar/punctuation. I am so encouraged to grow in this area as well. For example, having students journal during reading....Reading these journals for content only—to hear their heartbeats—and writing notes accordingly. Then, choosing (having students choose) one entry to edit and revise, and looking at that one specifically for organization, spelling, punctuation, etc. A note I made on sticky note one day was "I am learning how to focus on less and enjoy more."

September 17ᵗʰ. As far as writing goes, I feel I am being more organized with teaching sentence fluency. It's been hard for me to know how basic to go and to not get so basic that I'm wasting time....As I've been assigning simple sentences for homework, we've been reviewing subjects and predicates, noting use of compound subjects and predicates as well. Tomorrow, I will have teams create these types of sentences during Imitate! Practice! I feel like I'm building a better foundation this way w/out getting bogged down with grammar details they should already know, like What is a noun? or What is a verb?

September 27ᵗʰ. About Imitate! Practice!—I am loving how I started this year with a foundation of sentences—subject/predicate and creating (how to create) different types. Then, I'm focusing Imitate! Practice! on this homework practice. It allows students to go back to their hmwk [*sic*] and use as model. As I watch teams work, it looks like good sentence construction is becoming habit. I am so hoping this will translate into their own personal writing!

What's popping out at me as I think and journal about these topics is solid foundation, firm structure, to house creativity and freedom.

October 3ʳᵈ. Again, as we do Imitate! Practice! I see the importance of visuals on the bulletin board—a place where I can direct students' attention and a place they can take each other to as they work together.

Right now, Fridays are our Imitate! Practice! days. I am noticing how a foundation, or rather building a foundation, of good sentences is so important, at the start of the year. What this is also doing is teaching students about proper comma usage too.

The next big hurdle will be to see how all this "head knowledge" translates to their own writing. I want to use journal writing as a place for them to go deeper in their thinking but also to put into practice what we're learning about good sentences.

October 15th. Modeling and quick activities still allow for learning, but save my frustration and that of the kids....

It is my hope that this focus on Word Choice will become part of the foundation of our writing along with Sentence Variety.

October 28th. Tomorrow, we are going to start revising/editing journal entry of choice. Speaking of which, I was happy with the number of students who specifically looked at the model I had written, as they were writing their own....even asked for their own hard copy. Besides these two, eight others who intentionally checked mine out (between the two classes).

This last entry focused on figurative language, with students choosing a specific example from the novel and expounding. It's all about building—noticing Author's use of, modeling use of my own figurative language as I write my journal entry, and then watching students do the same in theirs.

Again, I get next to no resistance when it comes to journal writing. So much nicer than having to "pull teeth." Perhaps its [*sic*] Grade 8 appropriate?

November 24th. I'm impressed with journal entries—

    *few complaints. I think this is b/c they are relevant, geared to age group, and applicable to students' lives. I even left journal entries as assignment to be completed day I was absent, and I was impressed with depth of thought and improvements...

    *improvement in revised entries. I have really made sentence combining/variety a beginning focus this year. Then, as I specifically require different types of sentences in revisions, I'm able to identity weak areas and also students are required to put strategy into practice. Then, as I read thru...revisions on Friday, I was encouraged. I saw the benefit of— concentrating on sentence variety from Day 1 of school year and writing my own journal entries

and modeling these for the students. I keep thinking that incorporating writing skills and modeling into journal writing has been such a painless way this year of learning writing and teaching writing. A more fluid process, with less anxiety and stress.

Something else that has struck me as we've been reading...is how in past years I would get so detailed about vocab for example, stopping to explain, trying to get kids to understand context, and thus interrupting the flow of the story....I feel I am learning, albeit slowly, to combine reading and writing and to teach more age appropriately. Just enjoy reading for the joy of a good book! And learn good writing from modeling and relevant writing assignments!

December 9th. Something I've been weak in stressing throughout the years is the whole idea of Audience and Purpose (Gallagher). I included both in the 4-Column chart, and noticed that the idea of having a purpose beyond this just being an ELA assignment was a bit difficult for some. With prompting, they got it. This is something I want to keep stressing throughout the year. And, of course, with a definite purpose, writing has more meaning....

The Chicken Soup stories help with this whole idea of purpose, and I'm curious to see how, as we use our two models..., purpose will shine through the students' narratives.

December 11th. Something I reminded students of last week was the power of gestures and facial expressions. These add so much meaning to our words when we are speaking. Yet, when we are writing, we must accomplish this with our written words. Another illustration I used was how colours produce mood in a painting. This mood and feeling must be created by our words when we write.

January 7th. One thing that I was reminded of once again was the importance of teaching sentence variety. I'm so glad I began the year with that skill. Now, in the writing of this narrative, I see students incorporating different sentence types. And it's such a help when

focusing students' attention on the model and the writing creativity of the author. I did this when conferencing with...and was able to show him how the author's use of an interrupter/explainer really helped "set the stage" and bring the reader into the setting.

January 27th. ...the Imitate! Practice! using "real-life" examples from students' writing is seeming to work—students engaged, lessons being learned, true revising (such as rewording to create openers or interrupters/explainers) taking place. Plus, it's one way for students to actually see their own errors or relate to errors being made by others. It's time-wise impossible for me to sit down with each student and revise an entire piece. But through Imitate! Practice! all are engaged and all are "seeing."

January 29th. I don't know that I've ever done this project before....It fits quite well with our novel....It continues our emphasis on figurative language in the sense that students are coming up with symbols to represent aspects of David's life—fears, hopes, values, beliefs, character, growth, past and present worlds. I am also hoping that it's a stepping stone or a building block for writing letters to selves in a couple of weeks....Also a new assignment this year. My ideas are being birthed out of Linda Sue Park's phrase "practice at life," which feeds so much into critical thinking, something that so much needs to be encouraged. These projects are also combining writing with reading and critical thinking.

March 3rd. I wouldn't have done this two years ago but I'm learning. I wasn't even so set on doing it today. But as...began settling down and writing, I started on the same assignment myself. It's so good to do that! Then I'm feeling the same pain they are. I am using Bonnie's Letter as my model/guide and want to show both classes what I've written so far, the next time we sit down to write. My first draft is rough....I find models so helpful, so want to demonstrate this for students when I show them my own letter. Models get me started.

April 10th. Here's a bit of a recap of how the research-essay journey is going. I should preface it by saying that is hasn't been on my favourites list recently or in the past.

However, with a few changes, I'm encouraged.

1) The whole idea of allowing the kids to pick their own research topic so far has been working great. After all, the big-picture issue is learning "how" to write, not necessarilly [*sic*] the "what of the topic." I love this aspect b/c students are owning it more, not just seeing it as something "I have to do."....

When my students are motivated, I am happy! Then I feel like I am doing something right and that sustainable learning is taking place.

2) Then, on Friday, I showed students a simple outline...asking that they then take their own research and create an outline for their essay (a map to guide their rough draft writing). We talked a bit about keeping the reader in mind and organizing essay in a way that would be most interesting to the reader....I think coming up earlier with those five major questions for their topic was a real help as well.

The added step-by-step structure which I have incorporated this year has proven to be very helpful. More freedom with topic, more structure with process.

Oh right, I forgot to add....I would never have known who he was except thru...research....So, I'm learning thru what the kids are doing, and I love that. I think my being able to tell them that is also a good thing; it allows me to place value on what they are doing.

April 16th. Along with choice I believe the planning we put into this research essay has also played a role in the students writing efficiently....

It's the fact that the kids not only are interested in their topic but also that they know so much about it b/c of that interest. It creates a good cycle of research and motivation.

May 2nd. It just makes me so happy that I have not broken her writing spirit. Earlier in the year I had been worried, as she does struggle with punctuation and spelling, and I do have to work on that. Not too long ago, I wrote her a note...encouraging her that she had great ideas/thoughts/content. That skill, I said, was so important, as editors could always fix the punctuation/spelling errors. I'm just so happy to see her encouraged with writing and not giving up or resigning! I take that as I'm doing something right. If I see motivation, I'm encouraged. I think I'm learning to get more of a balance between ideas/content and punctuation. Learning not to sacrifice one for the other.

Insights on writing's complexity and identity.

These journal pieces capture the highs and lows of the writing classroom, the joys and pains of growing. In these journals, I struggle with getting it right, learning to balance the structure of language with the voice of creativity. My teacher self is in the process of being re-storied as I grow in my knowledge of writing and the teaching of it.

Writing, I have found, like life, needs a solid foundation. Without a solid foundation, any structure, no matter the outward appeal, eventually crumbles. For me, at the Grade 8 level, in the specific context in which I work with L1 and L2 students, this foundation has included sentence variety and word choice. Smith and Wilhelm (2007) state that "sentence combining is one of the few ways of improving students' stylistic sophistication and correctness" (Chapter 2, p. 37). I think back to the not-so-distant past and realize that my frustration in teaching writing often grew out of seeing a great need and owning a dream-like vision but lacking a solid structure on which to build this dream and meet this need. Too many pieces needed to fit together in order to see students write well, but these pieces had no place to solidify, meld, and grow. Thus, they tumbled and so, often, did the teacher. I am learning from personal experience what Smith and

Wilhelm (2007) state, that "if teachers can focus their instruction and attention on a small and discrete set of mechanical issues, they'll be better able to attend to the content and style of their students' writing in addition to its correctness" (Chapter 3, p. 71). Structure, with purpose, protects identity.

Writing, I have discovered, is about building, together. Here lay another of my frustrations, telling students to work, but not working with them together. Like Gallagher (2011), "I was more of an assigner than a teacher" (Chapter 7, p. 200). Identities are fragile; they must be treated with dignity. Smith and Wilhelm (2007) state that "the risk is that students who do not see themselves as developing competence in a particular activity are almost certain to reject it because it makes them feel inferior and threatens their identity" (Chapter 4, p. 98). For me, avoiding this risk has had much to do with modeling (Gallagher, 2011, Chapter 1, pp. 15-21; Smith & Wilhelm, 2007, Chapter 4, pp. 112-115).

Modeling begins with showing. Referring to opportunities to teach driving, basketball, and classroom management, Gallagher (2011) states, "I did not simply tell the learners how to become better; I *showed* them how to become better. I modeled" (Chapter 1, p. 15). Gallagher approaches the teaching of writing in the same way, stating, "I don't tell them how to draft their papers; I show them how I draft my papers" (Chapter 1, p. 15). This is the same principle we ask students to use in their writing when we ask them "to 'show and not tell'" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2007, Chapter 2, p. 23). I, too, am learning to do this.

Herb (2016) followed this modeling principle in a beginning-of-the-year poem writing activity. Herb states, "I wanted to know more about their lives, but to build a safe environment where they felt comfortable sharing, I also needed to make myself open to the students with stories from my life" (p. 46). Further into the process, Herb prompted the students to begin their

own writing. When she noticed idle pencils and papers, she realized "they needed an entryway into the drafting process" (p. 47). Together, they returned to analyzing the model poem, pulling out phrases that could be adopted by the students. In this I am growing, learning to become that "entryway" (Herb, 2016, p. 47) for students and learning to lead students to those entryways through which they can walk on their way to becoming better authors, those entryways which make learning so much more natural and enjoyable.

In failing to lead students to these doors of possibility, I am afraid I have frustrated, de-motivated, and discouraged both them and myself with seemingly insurmountable tasks. Rubinstein-Ávila (2003b) explains that for Miguel, a previously apathetic and struggling learner, realizing that the act of writing was not an automatic process for his classmates and, even more importantly, neither for his teacher, was a relief and inspiration. Modeling and showing, walking the writing process together with students, means identifying with them. Identifying with students protects identity, mine and theirs.

Writing, I am coming to understand, must respect age; the writing classroom must work with age, not against it. I am learning that frustration and lethargy are diminished, for both teacher and student, when age is respected. The life of the classroom must be kept interesting and alive. Smith and Wilhelm (2007) state, "We have found that using examples from our students' own writing is highly effective....The more gamelike and social the atmosphere, the more risks students will take and the more they will engage" (Chapter 2, p. 37). Enjoying students and valuing their work enough to work with it protects identity and moves writing forward.

Writing, I am seeing, is all about balance. It must emphasize both conventions and creativity. Both contribute to clear communication. Always there must exist a balance. Rubinstein-Ávila (2003a) states:

> Being sensitive to English language learners' needs does not entail feeling sorry for them, lowering expectations, or 'watering-down' one's language or the curriculum. Quite the contrary, it is best reflected by conveying to students that we have high expectations for all learners. (p. 129)

Along this line, Carroll (1996) acknowledges that "for many of us there is a fear that by marking errors on ESL students' papers, we will discourage them and perhaps even cause them to retreat from their efforts to take risks as writers of English" (p. 30). As noted, however, by the educators with whom Carroll worked, accountability and high expectations are both needed and appreciated. At the same time, however, these teachers were also cognizant of the sensitivity and balance needed when evaluating students' written work. Drawing attention to the work of one of these ESL teachers, Carroll notes that "she is careful to make comments about the quality of expression of ideas as well as about form" (p. 31). Structure and individuality must respect one another. One without the other diminishes the success of the writing classroom.

Successful writing necessitates both correct use of conventions and creative voice; in the same way, the life of the writing classroom flows smoothly when structure and choice dance together. Part of the tightrope of teaching involves building sufficient structure into the learning environment to foster a space where creativity and individuality can grow. The goal is to "cultivate relations of democratic authority" (Brubaker, 2012, p. 5) and to work towards "a 'win-win' scenario, made possible through working side-by-side to attack the problems being negotiated rather than the people negotiating" (Brubaker, 2012, p. 4). Without structure, chaos

ensues, whether in the art of writing or in the life of the classroom. Brubaker (2012) found that "cultivating classroom democracy" (p. 5) involves "a delicate balance" (p. 16). Thoughtful structure builds identity.

Writing, I am coming to understand, with relief, is about the process. The words of Campano et al. (2010) resonate with my own experiences, though our research settings differ. Campano et al. state, "We have all been humbled by the challenges of creating meaningful partnerships, where success is not a final destination, but an ongoing and delicate aspiration that often exposes human fallibility" (p. 277). Each year, I, too, form "meaningful partnerships" (Campano et al., 2010, p. 277) with my students, in an effort to help them grow as authors. Success in this endeavour of teaching the skill of writing and learning the art of prose "is not a final destination" (Campano et al., 2010, p. 277) to which I or my students arrive but rather "an ongoing and delicate" (Campano et al., 2010, p. 277) journey where I am often made aware of my own "human fallibility" (Campano et al., 2010, p. 277). Accepting my own humanness is and has been a process. In reality, it is a relief to realize that inadequacy and frustration are ok, that days of feeling like a terrible teacher are par for the course. In fact, just like grief, sometimes I simply need to sit there, to feel it. It is on the journey that both my students and I grow, where we learn to value the art of writing, the experiences about which we write, who we are as individuals, how we relate to others, and who we are becoming as authors. To focus only on the final destination, the successful production of a quality piece of writing, is, for me, to become frustrated and overwhelmed; it is to miss the most valuable pieces of the journey – the friendships, the experiences, the knowledge about ourselves, the joy of becoming. Enjoying the journey honours identity.

Writing, I am coming to see, is best understood "from a sociocultural practice perspective" (Honeyford & Serebrin, 2015, pp. 61-62). It is not solely about the rules (as much as they matter); it is not only about accountability (as much as there is a proper place for it). It is about my ideas written down for others; it is about my students' ideas written down for others. It is about valuing what we each have to say, about hearing each others' stories and perspectives so we can appreciate more, grow more. It is about learning to see ourselves – my students and me – as authors with valuable things to say, not just grammarians who know the rules. I am learning to balance punctuation with ideas, learning to walk joyfully and creatively within the big picture of communication. It is a journey I am on; I have not yet reached the final destination.

Writing and the writing classroom find their power in equilibrium, an equilibrium which is ever in process.

Boundaries – the stories the journals tell.

September 24th. Yesterday I had a very serious one-on-one....works or I send...to the office, because I care...

February 22nd. Speaking of patience—I ran out....When it comes to hard work...opts out....Finally I told him, "We're in this classroom to learn. If you choose not to work, I'm giving no warnings. You will automatically be sent to the office." Well, I changed that to hall, but, in any case, he got the message. He even returned at 3:30 to sign out the novel, in order to catch up on journalling [*sic*], which will in turn help him on his reflective essay, an essay which I told him was completed in an unacceptable manner.

Yes, when students have potential and they don't use it or develop it, <u>THAT</u> is one of my pushing points. The same thing took place with....I've been seeing it in her work lately....Thus, when I conferenced [*sic*] with her about her reflective essay, I brought to her attention the fact

that she could be handing in 80s or 90s work. I did not even help her with her essay, but just sent her back to her seat with that thought to mull over. I wonder, "Was that the right thing to do?".....

Anyway, I left for the weekend wondering if I had failed...

Both incidents have made me think of identity once again. As I deal with students, what kind of identity am I imposing on them? Can I learn to "be tough" but at the same time do it in a way that builds up identity....Will she return Monday with a renewed motivation, encouraged that I know she <u>CAN</u> do it so she had better fulfill this identity?

March 1st. ...a couple of items from this past week and then looking forward....

*Last week I was concerned about my responses....Well...greeted me Monday with a cheerful "Hi"...cared enough about her second draft to ask if her reworked conclusion flowed with the rest of her essay...seemed freer to ask for something...and then talkative during our conferencing to identify paragraph where he could add more detail. What is it about getting after kids and them turning around and being the better for it?! It's almost like they're relieved I've finally gotten after them! I suppose they still have to know, underneath it all, that I care. The relationship has to be established <u>first</u>. I'm thinking, establishing relationship honours their identity. It tells them they're worth getting to know.

*Identity—honouring it by treating students as individuals and situations as individual, unique events....

*Identity—allowing students to get to know mine....

March 9th. I was so happy with the beginnings of my model essay Monday morning. And then I ended up getting annoyed with both classes! ....Finally, I stopped the class and said I was losing patience. I let the kids take an in-classroom break. That's when...came up to me and

asked if I was OK....said I looked like I was ready to blow. They assured me it was OK if I needed to. I told them and then the whole class later that sometimes they needed me to blow up but that today it was my problem not theirs.

Then this morning (Tuesday) I did really get on to a couple of them....

It just came to me right now as I'm writing this that a good reprimand is sometimes needed. What I need to keep in mind, though, is what I'm attacking—the person or the action. Like chemo or an antibiotic, am I targeting the right thing? Am I defeating personal identity or throwing a well-deserved blow at an innappropriate [*sic*] action? If the latter, then I am actually working towards building up identity, maturing it.

July 13th. He then went on to imitate the way in which I wait for their attention before starting class. It was fun to see me in action, and we laughed as he mimicked how I begin a sentence, stop when interrupted, and then start all over again, as many times as needed. "But it worked," I said....Besides the laughter, I think...was also saying he appreciated the control, the structure. Kids always do....and someone else said, "You were easy to talk to." Interesting that structure and best friend can walk hand in hand.

September 30th. Honouring identity—responding with consequences rather than reacting spontaneously. Sometimes I fail.

January 6th. Well, I started conferencing today with both classes. I guess you could say I told a new story today—restoried [*sic*] an old one. Conferencing can be overwhelming to me. So this time I've calculated how many minutes I can work with each student in order to see all by Friday's end—8 minutes. Then, I'm using an on-line stopwatch. I love it! It gives me a boundary and relief. For those students who need much more practice, whose papers can be

overwhelming to review, I know I have a limit. Thus, I must choose one or two things to work on only.

...a good example. I met with him today, with a bit of trepidation, and as I read his intro, was not sure where to begin. I breathed a prayer and then remembered something I'd read by Smith and Wilhelm (2007)—students often make mistakes because they're not thinking like authors. I used this...and as we began to read through his intro anew, with me prompting him to hear mistakes and encouraging him to think like an author, PRESTO. He began identifying his own mistakes, errors like missing words or word endings, errors which distract.

...then used the same phrase on me! As he was packing up to go home, he returned to the subject of his narrative, informing me again that he was switching things up a bit, reordering ideas for smoother and interesting flow, as well as adding more creative detail. I'm not sure what I said to him, but he remarked with, "Well, it says on the board to think like an author." My encouragement must be getting through! The modeling, the promptings reminding them that their stories matter, the realizations from a real author (Linda Sue Park—TedTalk) that writing has real purpose....

Tomorrow, conferencing will continue. And tomorrow I will continue reminding myself and the students to think like an author—to remind ourselves that our unique stories and perspectives matter and can make a difference, inspire and encourage.

And as the realization sinks in, that their stories matter and come with unique purposes and possible impacts, it seems motivation increases. Everyone has been writing, both before Christmas and now after. And I believe, too, that the modeling helps. They've watched my narrative develop; they've read other well-written narratives; they know what to aim for; they

have a guide. Frustration—mine and student—is being restoried [*sic*]. I am learning....From despair to hope. From drudgery to purpose.

"Another common cause of error is that students often don't behave like experienced writers. One significant way that students' behavior differs from that of experienced writers is that they often don't reread what they have written." (Smith and Wilhelm, 2007, p. 95)

Middle school students, all students, need to know that they matter, that their work matters, their stories matter. They need to be shown, guided, and released. In the words of Smith and Wilhelm, "We apprentice them toward independent revision of their own work." (p. 100) Apprentices are <u>shown</u> how it's done; they are given time and space to watch, practice, and grow.

As I read and listen, I realize there are many ways to teach writing. But what must undergird and frame any method or lesson is purpose and a model and an author (teacher) who walks beside, a coach who gets on the field with the players, pushing them to the next level, growing together with them.

January 11th. I remember my mom saying to never shame kids....she knew from experience how this felt.

I know I have shamed kids in front of their peers....

Today I wrote a different story. I told the kids I thot [*sic*] it important to celebrate our growth as authors and for other staff to see how we are growing in our writing, so I wanted to display the first page of their narratives on the bulletin board in the hall. But, I wanted their permission first. So while they were working in the lab this morning, typing out their final drafts, I walked around and got a "yes" or "no" from each one. I think my mom would have been pleased.

January 13th. The girls were very repentant and it didn't take a big lecture. It took me caring about them. Months of caring about and respecting them as individuals....

I spoke to the class as a whole first, then later in the day to...girls alone....When I approached them alone, they apologized. Then, at the end of break, they actually came up to me again, apologized once more as they gave me a group hug....They wanted my forgiveness and love.

Days before I had spoken with one of these gals about....She'd been reminded often....

Finally, I addressed this with her quietly, ensuring her that the choice was hers. She could continue...and then <u>I'd</u> take the responsibility....<u>Or</u> she could make responsible choices....It hasn't been a problem since. She's taken ownership of the responsibility....

Key Word—<u>Choice</u>.

January 24th. I have decided this is how this chronic problem will be solved....The choice is hers—receive a grade for...or receive a higher grade by....

Yes! I will place the power....What she chooses to do, is up to her....she determines the outcome of the game.

June 4th-5th. Claustrophobic—how I've felt many times with words—
...words,...words,...words. Must be how students so often feel.

Boundaries—I've put boundaries around all these words. For survival.

 Insights on boundaries, writing, and identity.

In these entries, I am wrestling with boundaries – boundaries in relationships, boundaries with behaviour, boundaries in teaching, boundaries in classroom management, boundaries for learning. Some of these wrestlings are directly tied to the teaching and learning of writing, others to the shaping of character.

These journal entries speak to the need for boundaries, because boundaries have to do with respect, for ourselves and others. We all need them. Boundaries are needed for the healthy life of the classroom, the joy of teaching, and the gift of learning. Boundaries provide guidance and clarity and find their making and meaning in choices. Schwartz (2012) explains that she once thought "the essence of setting boundaries was in the moments *with* students" (p. 99), those on-the-spot decisions every educator faces throughout the day. However, Schwartz now understands "that while the moments with students are clearly important, the metacognitive journey before we even get to the student interaction is just as, if not more, important" (p. 99). Boundaries must be created with intentionality because boundaries preserve identity.

Boundaries mean I position (Harré & Langenhove, 1991) myself and others in ways that honour identity. Harré and Langenhove (1991) state:

> Positioning is a discursive practice....Within a conversation each of the participants always positions the other while simultaneously positioning him or herself. Whenever somebody positions him/herself, this discursive act always implies a positioning of the one who is addressed. And similarly, when somebody positions somebody else, that always implies a positioning of the person him/herself. In any discursive practice, positioning constitutes the Self and the others in certain ways and at the same time it is a resource through which all persons involved can negotiate new positions. (p. 398)

Thus, as we interact with each other, we are always involved in the act of "positioning." I position myself, my colleagues, and my students both consciously and subconsciously. In this positioning, I may legitimize my own identity and the identity of others, or do the opposite. In this act, I am also, consciously or subconsciously, constructing identity, my own and that of others. Schwartz (2012) contends "that the interplay between power and boundaries is complex.

To act responsibly vis-à-vis boundaries and our positionality, we must fine-tune our awareness of the power dynamics in our teaching relationships" (p. 100). Positioning is part of boundary making. I am learning the importance and fragility of positioning, for in the act of positioning, I either protect or damage.

Boundaries mean I position myself and my students as authors. I see myself as an author and view each student as an author, no matter the place we each inhabit on the writing and language spectrums. Intentionally, we work within the boundaries of authors. We create an environment of success, knowing that will include perseverance and hard work. Smith and Wilhelm (2007) state, "If you think that you just can't speak or write correctly (and being told that you can't promotes this attitude), you'll be much less likely to invest the effort it takes to gain competence than if you believe that you can learn" (Chapter 3, p. 53).

Authors behave intentionally; therefore, we behave intentionally in the writing classroom, the author's landscape. Smith and Wilhelm (2007) explain, "One significant way that students' behavior differs from that of experienced writers is that they often don't reread what they have written" (Chapter 4, p. 95). Carroll (1996) also draws attention to this dilemma when she writes of the practices of three successful ESL educators, noting that one encouraged students to read their written work aloud during the editing process. Messer, with whom Carroll worked, states, "'Verbalizing and hearing the error brings it to the attention of the student; thus, reading aloud, because it involves the additional modality (listening), enables the student to read his/her work more carefully'" (p. 29). Creating these types of boundaries where students are intentionally positioned as grown-up authors challenges students to improve, in a way that builds up. This is demonstrated in the account of Miguel with whom Rubinstein-Ávila (2003b) worked. Miguel was an L2 Grade 8 student whose first language was Spanish. Schooling, for Miguel, had been

inconsistent in his home country. Arriving in the United States, he had applied himself in the elementary years but in middle school had lost motivation due to life both inside and outside school. Miguel "found school boring and too hard" (Rubinstein-Ávila, 2003b, p. 296) and sensed an apathy from teachers. However, Grade 8 was different due to two teachers whose "caring pressure" (Rubinstein-Ávila, 2003b, p. 296) would not let his potential stalemate. Boundaries lead to a sense of accomplishment, because boundaries create and uphold high expectations.

Boundaries mean I position myself and my students as capable choice makers. I understand that choices level the playing field. Tobias and Acuña (2014), referring to "power struggles" (p. 39), advise, "If you can step out of a hands-on management role and into more of an advising role, those battles may be fewer and far less heated" (Chapter 4, pp. 39-40). Choices, created when boundaries are put in place, help circumvent power struggles in the writing classroom, whether related to writing assignments or simply to the daily rhythms of classroom life. Rubinstein-Ávila (2003b) notes the significance of choice for Miguel, a once struggling, disengaged student, who "enjoyed the authority he was given" (p. 298) when invited "to write about anything he wanted" (p. 298). Similarly, Lens (2004), addressing social workers, states that "the better approach, and a way of separating the person from the problem, is...to assume a partnership in search of a solution, rather than an adversarial relationship" (p. 508). Choices allow for "partnership" (Lens, 2004, p. 508). They allow for ownership. Boundaries create choices and choices ensure voices are heard.

Boundaries mean I am deliberate about decisions, but in being deliberate, I am at peace with making myself vulnerable, for "being a teacher implies that one's actions and decisions can always be questioned" (Kelchtermans, 2005, p. 999). I question, and others may question.

Kelchtermans (2009) states "that teaching – because of its relational and ethical nature – is also and importantly characterised by *passivity*, by being exposed to others and thus being vulnerable" (p. 265). Within this sphere often governed by others, moves the teacher, who, while being affected by others, seeks herself to be the one who affects. Kelchtermans states:

> Professional teachers then incarnate the paradox of on the one hand taking a stance,
> speaking out for normative ideas and values and in line with that designing educational
> conditions that must help students to learn and to develop their individual capacities and
> identities as much as possible, while at the same time knowing that their purposeful
> action doesn't fully capture, direct or predict what will happen. (p. 267)

Boundaries may open a space of conflict, conflict within and conflict with others. Weddington (2008) highlights this tension, stating that "to choose to engage another in conflict is to open oneself up to being affected by the judgment of this other" (p. 111). Conflict is not a comfortable space but it is often a worthwhile space.

The writing classroom is a place of positioning, where boundaries, caringly placed, have potential to create freedoms – the freedom to improve, to accept ourselves, to value ourselves, to respect each other, to succeed, to grow. Schwartz (2012) states that "the point of examining reflexive boundaries is not always to alter them but to ensure that we are acting with clarity and intention" (p. 100). The writing classroom must be a place of boundaries, boundaries created with purpose and for a purpose.

Relationships – the stories the journals tell.

September 25th. Today was a day of apology and forgiveness....I was so thankful for her honesty. I apologized....I did share with the the the [*sic*] whole group that I love hearing from them

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and there were times I needed to apologize...for quick things said. I am always so glad for their forgiveness!

September 26th. I was busy teaching, thinking he would just quietly slip out of the room after gathering up his things. Then I hear behind me a gentle "Bye, Miss Barkman" and turn around to a big hug. Life is all about relationship. Wow! Talk about warmth to the soul.

October 21st. At this age, identities are forming and they are so sensitive. No matter the student, EAL or IEP or English dominant, identity is important. Identities can be fragile at this age; they must be honoured.

November 20th. I saw him out of the corner of my eye, quietly begin to giggle when I fumbled "humdrum" into "hum dum." His giggling made me giggle! ....Memories. Community.

November 27th. I felt like I put him down, and that is wrong! Will I ever learn? I get overwhelmed with the need, but I need to learn how to encourage and challenge w/out putting down. They need to be pushed...but not put down.

December 18th. Today she called me over to her desk to show me something....how she was writing in her journal and how it was helping her....Oh, how important to create a safe haven for these kids, where their lives are honoured.

January 28th. We're watching segments of the movie...as we read, and I had been mistaken about a scene....I misjudged their wondering as, "Well, didn't you read chapter 4?"—as if they should have known. I jumped to an answer and conclusion before watching the whole section, and thus misjudged my students. They were fine, but it never hurts for the kids to hear me say, "I was wrong."

....Teaching is so much more than books and pencils!

April 7th. Yesterday was the first day back. Started out pretty good, but then came fire drill....lined up with a couple of the boys goofing off. Yelled at them for that and gave the whole class a talking to about safety issues when we got back inside. Felt bad also about an incident outside where one of the boys was singing a phrase and wanted me to think it was funny too. Well, I didn't and told him something like I'd heard it one too many times. Then, felt irritated with a couple of my Grade 7 students being silly with putting spirals away—so walked over and put them away myself! Needless to say, I felt like a rotten teacher when I got home. But today those exact two classes loved me back to cheer! Grade 7 class was delighted I was accompanying them to soccer and had a great heart-to-heart talk with the Gr. 8 class...which prompted two of them to pipe up about their own heart thoughts and experiences. Such is the joy of building relationships and the resiliency of those relationships when built upon a foundation of vulnerability, care, and trust.

...was absent yesterday, so today when he came in, as I often do, I asked him what had been up yesterday. It sounded like...he must have been up late Sunday evening, eating supper. But he went on to explain that in...culture, Easter is finished up the day after....I thought that was pretty cool.

My identity—my vulnerability—their vulnerability—their identity.

November 24th. I also am often reminded that teaching is so much more than content; it is an attitude—

> *listening to student ideas and incorporating them if doable.

> *being open to student needs (....on the spot during our conversation, I suggested....And he, in the course of conversation, suggested....I "jumped" on that, and that's what he's doing! It's a natural, and he's pumped.)

Then there's....boy does he connect events/characters in novel with movies he's seen. So I've complimented him on this and I listen. He's engaged and his thoughts are taken seriously in the process.

And....came to me with journal entry....I felt instantly irritated inside, but outwardly asked, "Well, what are you thinking?" He proceeded to explain....I'm so glad he came to ask! And I'm so glad I listened! Now his quandary made sense and I could assure him...

December 31st. This fits in with how I feel I grew up with Mom. She was always Mom, but within that, she was also my friend. I have not always known how to explain that to people, especially those who say teachers/adults shouldn't be friends with kids. I've never agreed with that.

January 18th. Yesterday...talking about a couple of incidents with my students, and I said something like, "You have to reach the heart first." I went on, thinking aloud....

I'm thinking of....His "harsh" comments didn't unsettle me, b/c he had already reached my heart. I knew where these comments came from—I knew he believed in me and thus was pushing me.

January 28th. A listening ear—that's what I want to be, though I know I'm not always there. But I was so pleased today....just hung around my desk today when they came up from lunch. I asked if they had a question or were just hanging around. The latter they said. So we just had a relaxing chat while I ate my lunch....I'm sure they were happy not to go outside, probably part of what they were after. But I love it when the girls feel comfortable enough to just chat! Seems lunch times lend themselves to that....

So—I carry on with writing, reminded anew to not yield to pressure, keep expectations high, yet be sensitive to believe in each author all the while.

And—to allow the goofiness (there's a time) and cherish the relationships.

February 4th. Sometimes the thundercloud above my head shuts me in, wrapping me round with the question, "Did I do the right thing?" What I ended up doing was simply reminding the kids of a major point I had brought up in the morning and sending them off for the day with these words, "Build Trust."

These words resonate with me, too, applying to me just as much as to the kids, not only in my relationships with them but also with my coworkers....The phrase has now taken residence in my brain, which is good! A motto by which I consciously need to live.

What I had brought forward with my students in the morning is that relationships are built on trust. When they do not do as asked or complete assignments as directed, trust erodes and relationships are broken.

....I'm left questioning myself....I also know a healthy fear is good; it engenders respect....How am I using my position as teacher, my power? How am I positioning myself?

Build trust! Use my power to build trust....

Do I position myself as a learner? Someone who can be confronted? Someone who uses authority well?

How have I seen positions of power played out in my own life? As a child? In my places of work? At the...school...? Trust is huge in that whole area!

My mind is whirring as I think about this issue—there is a place for power. Martin Luther King, Jr.; Harriet Tubman; Rosa Parks. Standing for what's right in a determined, respectful way. People follow such power; it engenders respect; it inspires motivation....True power raises people to their potential rather than diminishes with fear.

And building trust requires consistancy [*sic*]—being dependable, following thru, showing up, routines.

February 14ᵗʰ. A follow-up on the Build Trust! topic. Something stuck because it's been brought up twice. The first time was...reminding the class, "Guys, we're breaking trust." The second....looked at me with his grin and said, "Building trust?" Yes, it warmed my heart.

No, it's not just about—writing. It's about life lessons, about growth—for the kids and for me. Teaching is about the whole person; it can't be corrodoned [*sic*] off from the rest of life. No, life happens <u>while</u> teaching.

February 16ᵗʰ. ...the group speaking...touched on technology as they discussed engaging kids....It's hard to stay up with the latest in technology....I'm probably the worst at staying current....

And if the kids can teach me, there's another relationship builder!

March 9ᵗʰ. ...I began both classes today with an acknowledgement that sometimes writing is hard, sometimes the ideas don't come easily....Finally, I explained to students that I was going to read my "Dear Self" letter to them, making myself very vulnerable in doing so b/c the letter was coming from a very emotional place inside me....

A change I made in the process of our writing—no more focus on David [character in novel]....asked if she needed to think from his perspective, and I said no; said I hadn't put that into practice in my own letter either. I wouldn't have realized the necessity to make this change had I not completed this assignment <u>TOGETHER</u> with the kids....how important it is that I not just assign but that I do life alongside—so I understand what it is I'm asking of them. I think also just for vulnerability's sake. So the kids can see beyond the teacher-me to the struggling-me, the imperfect-me, the daughter-me. I suppose it's one way of letting them inside my world,

showing them one way to live life, allowing them to "practice life" with me together. Modelling [*sic*].

March 12th. ...epiphany....creating spaces (the how and why) where language can grow and identities be honoured (both mine and students), because language will not grow if identity is not honoured.

Some ways I see myself honouring identity, both my own and my students'—

—going to watch the Grade 7/8 girls championship Basketball game Saturday afternoon.

—acknowledging to myself that we haven't used the RADR to revise a whole lot this year. That means we simply need more practice. So, it's OK if it takes longer than I'd like. Also acknowledging that I'm a detail person and we don't have to belabour every point....I always need to remember that it's the big picture I need to look at, to keep in mind....

—realizing and admitting that some battles are not worth fighting. I've picked battles before. That's terrible but true. Not just dropping behaviour that irritated me...

May 19th. One thing I took time for today was discussion....I listened to their suggestions about how I could make...more interesting...as well as a couple of changes a couple of them thought would be more beneficial to engagement and learning. Then we moved on to their reflections on "This I Believe" statements. Sometimes, it's just good to give them space to talk, too.

...A few days ago...piped up and asked if they'd get time to meet in their project groups to discuss quotes they'd already gathered for their chosen themes. I thought, "What a great idea!" This hadn't even occurred to me, so I was thankful for the suggestion!

As I'm writing these thoughts, the word that's weaving thru the strands is "listen." Sometimes, they have great ideas...that I shouldn't take the position of assuming they don't know. Rather, I should ask first to find out. And then even today at lunch...hanging around and started talking about...relationships and the newest happenings in that regard. ....

All these threads, woven together throughout the day, lead to relationship building. So vital to learning!

June 16th. It's about so much more than writing. It's about life, value, dignity, respect.

Insights on relationships, writing, and identity.

In these journals, the warmth of relationship, the strength of relationship, and the tension of relationship filter through my thoughts. Our need for relationship is evident. I speak of memories of significant relationships, current relationships with my students, and relationship's price and value.

Relationships are the glue that holds the writing classroom together. Referring to his teacher self and the engagement of this teacher self with students, Weddington (2008) explains, "He makes meaning through the reciprocal connections he forges with his students. Affirming their significance provides a necessity and significance for him as well" (p. 112). One's value is wrapped up in the valuing of another. Weddington explains the weightiness of this interaction, stating that "this selfless attention [to students] also pays dividends for his own identity" (p. 112). Relationships nurture identities while at the same time find their uniqueness within those identities. Relationships are what allow boundaries to be successful and tensions to become something positive. At the same time, relationships are themselves in need of boundaries and inherently come with tensions. Relationships are the foundation for the successful mixing of

writing and identity. Without relationship, tensions, boundaries, our multiple selves, and the gift of writing lose value.

Relationship is where learning begins. Relationship is about building spaces where individuals and language can grow. Herb (2016) states that "creating a place where students feel safe to share ideas and take risks happens throughout the year; it happens while we build literacy skills and develop a community of writers" (p. 49). Though this research journey was launched on the premise that writing and identity are intertwined, both lose their focus and meaning outside of relationship. Understanding the teaching and the learning of "writing from a sociocultural practice perspective re-centers the focus of writing pedagogy around students and their identities as writers" (Honeyford & Serebrin, 2015, pp. 61-62). The relationships I build with my students are not on the periphery of teaching and learning, afterthoughts or necessary must-do's, but rather the foundational structures upon which learning is built and is able to grow.

Relationship must be the heart of the writing classroom. Campano et al. (2010) state that "valuing relationships among participants as ends in themselves is a methodological issue that potentially informs every aspect of the collaborative research process" (p. 278). Translated onto the teaching and learning landscape where my students and I live, the landscape of this research journey, my relationship with my students is a pedagogical "issue that potentially informs every aspect of" (Campano et al. 2010, p. 278) my teaching and the students' learning. I know this from my own experience as a young piano student. Because I knew a teacher cared, I listened to his barking. I was not hurt by it; rather, I knew he valued who I was and my potential to grow. How did I know this? Obviously, a relationship had already been established. Without relationship, sustainable growth is stunted, for our desire to learn and our motivation to persevere increase when we are valued.

Relationships create spaces where language can grow, where writing can become a life-long skill. Relationship means I judiciously invite students into my world and intentionally walk into theirs. Relationship means I learn to better understand myself, so I can better understand the ones to whom I relate. Relationship creates a "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Pedagogy relevant to students and the worlds in which they live means a pedagogy that understands that the student is of more value than the curriculum. Ladson-Billings (1992) describes "culturally relevant teaching" as "not simply *what* and *how* successful teachers...achieve success but also *why* they do it" (p. 318). The two teachers to whom Ladson-Billings refers approached curriculum very differently; one relied on whole language and the other on a basal text. Yet, it was not the tools used that made the greatest difference in the lives of the students but rather the motivation behind the teaching, the attitude of the teachers, the beliefs about students and education, the value placed on literacy, the sensitivity to culture, and the student-teacher rapport that was fostered (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1995). "These teachers...read between the lines and beyond the pages of both discourse in the field and the apparent experiences and stories of their students" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 313). For these teachers, the students and their narratives, in all their past, present and future complexities (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), were the real issue, the essence of their teaching.

Yoon's (2008) findings also suggest that language learning benefits when teachers view students, teaching and learning from a holistic perspective. Yoon concludes that L2 students' ownership of and participation in learning is directly correlated to the value teachers place on students' "cultural and social needs" (p. 515). In like manner, Fisher et al. (2011) point to the importance of context and student in the following statement:

While quality teaching can be characterized by an agreed upon set of core behaviors, success of performance can only become concretized when educational outcomes also include the incremental differences that occur emotionally and cognitively for students due to the relationships they have with their teachers. (p. 8)

To teach writing effectively, the individual, then, must triumph over the method.

Relationship positions students in spaces where they can learn. Yoon's (2008) study "focused on the dynamics of classrooms in which the teachers interact with ELLs, with a special focus on how teachers offer or limit opportunities for the students' participation in classroom activities" (p. 496). The study is a clear example of the power and effects of positioning within the classroom. Yoon observed that opposing student behaviours, for example talkative in one class and quiet in another, depended on teaching style, teacher attitude, and teacher-created classroom environment. In each example, the teacher played the major role in second-language learning and student motivation. The study further highlights the importance of teacher positioning, demonstrating the link between positioning by the teacher and the subsequent self-positioning by the student. When teachers behave in ways that place students in "powerless and invisible" (Yoon, 2008, p. 517) positions, students are prone to act out these characteristics in the learning environment. As seen in the study, the classroom atmosphere created by the teacher and the attitudes of the teacher pre-empt "specific methods" (Yoon, 2008, p. 517) of teaching. Teachers can use proven techniques, yet implemented in the absence of relationship, language learning is impeded. Yoon states, "Teachers who have knowledge of language methods that support ELLs must also possess and utilize teaching approaches that invite—rather than distance—the students" (p. 517). Rubinstein-Ávila (2003a) also argues for a pedagogy that involves both language teaching technique as well as heart. According to Rubinstein-Ávila,

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"creating a community of learners" necessitates both "a repertoire of strategies for effective teaching of ELLs" as well as "a strong dose of empathy, *cariño*, and greater understanding of the daily challenges these students face, beyond those they experience in school" (p. 128).

A pedagogy that works has in the background a teacher that sees individuals as just that, individuals, unique and distinct. Cautiously noting similarities between tensions faced on both the medical and teaching landscapes, Lytle (2008) speaks of her family doctor, describing him in the following way:

> ...a sensitive and knowledgeable doctor who intently looks at and listens to me, who continually considers and orchestrates the resources he has to offer me, acting on the assumption that together we will negotiate an approach to my *getting better*. He does not perform the role of expert, fixing me, but rather takes the stance of a learner, instructed by his attention to the data and to the specific parameters and contours of my situation.
> (p. 374)

In a similar manner, my students are not projects needing my "fixing." In fact, to conceive of students in such a manner conforms to "individualistic and instrumentalist ontologies that suggest that students (and teachers) need to be fixed, that there is a program for that, and that any problems that arise can and should be solved on our own" (Honeyford & Serebrin, 2015, p. 78). Rather, my attitude must be that of Lytle's (2008) doctor who "grounds his practice in the local, the critical contexts created by the particulars of his patients' lives" (p. 374). Like this doctor's patients, each of my students is a unique person, a unique learner, living in and working with circumstances unique to them. Rubinstein-Ávila (2003a) cautions that "middle school teachers, even those with the best of intentions, may tend to view ELL students as members of particular cultural groups rather than as complex individuals" (p. 128). Carroll (1996) also acknowledges

"that every student, regardless of his or her cultural affiliation, is unique and has idiosyncrasies; no student should be viewed as merely a representative of those with whom he or she shares a cultural identity" (p. 26). Instead, appreciating our multiple identities, we must work together at "*getting better*" (Lytle, 2008, p. 374) at this task of writing, doing so within the context of relationship.

Not only does relationship position my students in spaces where they can grow but relationship also positions me, the teacher, in spaces where I can grow. Rubinstein-Ávila (2003a) emphasizes that "teachers who are open to learning from their students, do" (p. 129). Referring to specific examples, Rubinstein-Ávila notes that "teachers who believed they could learn from their students, listened-and did" (p. 129). Like Lytle's (2008) doctor, relationship allows me the teacher to be "a learner" (p. 374) alongside my students.

Power in the teacher-student relationship is a given. Campano et al. (2010) state that "there are no human relationships free from instrumental value or power" (p. 285). Therefore, who teachers *are* as they live with this power identity matters, and who teachers *are* depends on the teacher power identity they choose to put on. Identity *matters* because "teachers are the most important factor in promoting students' opportunities to learn" (Yoon, 2008, p. 517). Relationships are the direct result of the power identity a teacher intentionally chooses.

The writing classroom thrives on relationship. Carroll (1996) notes that the educators with whom she worked "agree that the teacher needs to be seen as the person who is in charge, but that conversation and playful laughter need to provide a balance for the academic foci of the English/language arts classroom" (p. 33). Perhaps it is not so much that life happens while we teach, but rather, that teaching happens while we do life, together.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

Reeves (2009) suggests that "by inviting teachers to interrogate the forces, both internal and external, that shape their identity options, identity construction is made explicit and can itself become an object of study" (p. 40). This is what I have attempted to do, to "interrogate the forces" that have and continue to mould my multiple identities as they relate to my students and my teaching within the writing classroom; I have sought to make tangible what so easily is left hanging around the fringes of our thoughts.

As I reflect on my journey as a writer and a teacher of writing, I see how "the neophyte's stumble becomes the scholar's window" (Shulman, 1987, p. 4). Sometimes the journeys of my teaching career and the research process recorded here have been hard, frustrating, messy, but those emotions and experiences were often necessary. As these helped me grow, they made the journey and the process worthwhile. The road travelled has been "an ongoing and effortful process of constructing, maintaining and performing" (Watson, 2006, p. 512) my "professional identity" (Watson, 2006, p. 510). Character has been tested and matured; wisdom and knowledge have been gained. Lytle (2008) argues that "teacher researchers aim not primarily to 'do research,' but, rather, to *teach better*" (p. 373). In like manner, Lather (1986) suggests that "for researchers with emancipatory aspirations, doing empirical research offers a powerful opportunity for praxis to the extent that the research process enables people to change by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular situations" (p. 263). If I become a better teacher through my research, I am satisfied. If others can learn through my ponderings and moments of wrestling, I will be humbly grateful.

Shulman (1987) argues for the conscious, deliberate building "of a history of practice" (p. 12), noting that "one of the frustrations of teaching as an occupation and profession is its exten-

sive individual and collective amnesia, the consistency with which the best creations of its practitioners are lost to both contemporary and future peers" (p. 11). Along a similar line, Lytle (2008) gives credence to teacher research when she refers to "the power of data that teachers collect to illuminate the subtleties of classroom interaction" (p. 377). Likewise, Lather (1986) points out:

> For praxis to be possible, not only must theory illuminate the lived experience of progressive social groups; it must also be illuminated by their struggles. Theory adequate to the task of changing the world must be open-ended, nondogmatic, informing, and grounded in the circumstances of everyday life. (p. 262)

This research journey of my professional identity, traveled in complex relationship with all my other selves, lived within the writing classroom filled with both L1 and L2 learners, is an effort to add one more authentic, powerful brick to the construction of the "history of practice" (Shulman, 1987, p. 12) so needed on the teaching landscape.

My work on writing and identity has been interpreted through my teacher and personal lenses. The work is very personal and the discoveries, assertions, interpretations, and explanations cannot be projected on others, though I invite readers to accept, sift through, reject, and choose when and where appropriate to their own lives and teaching journeys. I also acknowledge the personal nature of this journey, as it relates to my students. As Watson (2006) and Reeves (2009) highlight in their studies, the interpretations of the teacher may be very different from the interpretations of the student. My "identity positions are self-narrations of who the teacher [myself] is in relation to teacher-positioned others [my students]" (Reeves, 2009, p. 36). In the stories I have told, "the pupil is passive" (Watson, 2006, p. 519). The same must be acknowledged regarding friends, family members, and coworkers with whom I have lived and

worked and who have inevitably influenced my multiple identities as well as the learning on this research journey. This is not their voice but mine. With respect, I acknowledge that I speak for myself alone, as teacher, daughter, sister, and coworker. This has been and continues to be a personal journey of one teacher's discovery, growth, and freedom into her worlds of multiple identities, who she is, who she wants to continue to become, and how she hopes these discoveries will make her a better teacher in the future.

During this research journey, a quest to understand the dynamics between writing and identity, "a complex tapestry of interwoven layers of self that inform my evolving pedagogy" (Brubaker, 2012, p. 11) has been unearthed. This "complex tapestry" (Brubaker, 2012, p. 11) has "historical, social and cultural roots and contexts" (Nias, 1996, Introduction section, para. 5). As a writing teacher, my growth has involved an "on-going process of conflict and compromise between who I was, who I had become, and who I aspired to be" (Brubaker, 2012, p. 12). This process of growth continues, always informed by my multiple selves with their past experiences, living in their present circumstances, looking ahead to an unknown future. I have attempted here to tell the story of my teacher life, one very deeply informed by my personal life. I could see no other way than to combine the two, for to strip one away would be to mortally wound the other. The two walk into the classroom together. I am the teacher I am because of the experiences of my many selves.

Driven by a social constructionist framework, the research journey was lived and is here presented within the space of an autoethnography, a place where autobiography finds purpose and freedom. Kelchtermans (2009) states:

Perhaps the most fundamental contribution of the narrative and biographical

perspective...lies in the fact that it provides a different language that allows for the non-

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technical dimensions of teaching and being a teacher to be conceptualised, talked about,

shared and critically challenged. Moral dilemmas, emotional experiences and political

struggles can find a place there and thus be acknowledged as fundamental to the

experience of teaching and to the scholarship of teaching. (p. 270)

The stories told were not an attempt to highlight good teaching techniques, but rather, to uncover

a story of growth, a story of finding my equilibrium in the writing classroom, a place where I live

and work not only with my own multiple selves but also with the many and differing selves of

my students. It is a story that has no end, for the learning and growing continues.

The research artifacts, journals, and experiences that I chose to include were selected

based on their "focus on practices of teaching that provide[d] insights into the processes involved

in the construction of professional identity" (Watson, 2006, p. 513); they were also chosen based

on their ability to illuminate the world of multiple teacher and student identities lived out in the

writing classroom. As Watson (2006) notes, "The resources available for...identity construction

include professional knowledge, personal experience, the 'micro-politics' of the setting and

wider socio-cultural contexts" (p. 512). As with the teacher participant with whom Watson

(2006) worked, my living of and thus "understanding of events privileges the interpretation given

to them by" (p. 519) myself, as both participant teacher and resident researcher. Thus, "these

narratives of practice cannot...be thought of as representing some 'reality' in the sense that they

necessarily tell what 'really happened'" (Watson, 2006, p. 513). Instead, the memories, artifacts,

stories, and journal pieces were purposefully chosen because they illuminate "the *meaning*"

embedded within (Bailey & Tilley, 2002; see also McIlveen, 2008); they act as a voice for the

nuances, complexities, and importance of identity.

In some respects, this is an eye-opening story of the obvious. Søreide (2006) states that "the description and illumination of everyday assumptions, beliefs and images has an enlightening and empowering force because it makes us aware of what we consider common sense and, thereby, also normal, right, good and valuable" (pp. 543-544). In the making explicit of those things taken for granted, space is created for change, soil made ready for new growth (Søreide, 2006). This "taken-for-grantedness is never exhausted and...mystery is always just behind the latest taken-for-granted sense making" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78). This research journey has been one of uncovering and dusting off mysteries of common sense.

Research Puzzle Conclusions

Research question one – our multiple identities.

How do I, as the teacher in a mainstream Grade 8 language arts classroom, position both myself and my L1 and L2 students within the writing environment, in a way that recognizes and honours our multiple identities?

I honour our multiple identities by positioning myself and my students as authors with valuable things to say. I create a writing classroom where our ideas and experiences are given space for expression. I invite all my selves into the writing classroom and, in like manner, all my students' selves. I seek to create an environment where our identities, in all their intertwined complexities, have purpose and find meaning.

I honour and recognize our multiple identities by creating boundaries that ensure safety and growth. Within those safe boundaries, voices are acknowledged and valued, the students' and mine. Our hybrid identities and multiple selves are given places of dignity.

I honour and recognize those identities by understanding that the individual is more important than the subject or the task, by being more concerned about the student than about what I am asking that student to learn.

Research question two – the teaching of writing.

How can I, as writing teacher within a mainstream Grade 8 language arts classroom composed of both L1 and L2 students, recognize and honour student identity in a way that enhances the teaching of writing in all its complexity?

I honour our multiple identities by positioning myself as a learner alongside my students. I recognize the possibility that my students' weaknesses may stem from my own. Thus, I intentionally keep trying to understand and grow.

I honour our multiple identities by positioning myself as a resource. This means I walk ahead of students, inviting them to follow. This means I walk alongside, identifying with them in their highs and lows of writing and life. I intentionally share the burden, because life is always easier when a burden is shared.

I honour and recognize our multiple identities by creating boundaries of high expectation, understanding all the while that the priceless lessons and growth are found on the journey and not only at the end. Therefore, I learn to treasure the journey as much as the destination. I understand that honouring identities in this way may be risky, might temporarily bring pain to both the students and myself. I accept the tensions. I create the structure and aim high because I believe every individual is worthy of those ideals.

Research question three – teacher and author identity.

In what ways do I, as writing teacher within a mainstream Grade 8 language arts classroom composed of both L1 and L2 students, honour my own identity as a teacher and a writer?

I honour my identity as a teacher and as a writer by embracing tensions, viewing them not as a curse but as a blessing, knowing they often lead to growth. I honour my identity as an author by recognizing the importance of writing, the ways it can move me forward as I use it to process and reflect. I honour my identity as an author by recognizing that, like my students, I have important things to say, experiences and thoughts others need to hear. I honour my identity as a teacher and author by learning to relax in the process and enjoy the growth along the way, not simply the prize waiting at the end.

I honour my identity as a teacher and author by giving myself space to question and to feel. I give myself this space because I understand that it is here where growth begins. I honour my identity by remembering that true relationship is resilient; forgiveness restores. I honour my identity by listening, to myself and my students.

I honour my identity as teacher and author by valuing my multiple selves, my hybrid identity along with my daughter, friend, sister, and coworker selves. I learn to not run from the tensions that sometimes exist between these selves, these identities, but to cherish the nuances, live peacefully with their richness, and allow them to create spaces of empathy for others, especially my students. It is in honouring the whole of me that I then find freedom to honour the whole of my students.

Implications

For me, this research journey began when I was a little girl, though I was quite unaware. My life as a young girl and teen was happily lived within multicultural contexts. As an adult,

that pattern has continued, both in my personal as well as my professional life. This may not be the case for others, for our journeys are each unique. Yet, no matter the places we have or have not travelled, we are all wise to live intentionally in an ever increasing multicultural world. This means choosing a teacher identity willing to learn from and engage with not only our students at school but also our neighbours at home.

Walls are broken down and lives enhanced as we learn to know others from diverse cultural backgrounds. We learn that it is the individual that counts, people that are important, and differences that enrich. Raible and Irizarry (2007) suggest that "cross-cultural relationship building" (p. 195) should characterize teachers' personal lives, suggesting that educators "must dare to take risks and extend themselves dialogically with others who are racially and culturally different" (p. 178). I would agree with Raible and Irizarry who contend that an attitude of superiority need not define white teachers in multicultural classrooms. Rather, "transracialized identities" (Raible & Irizarry, 2007, p. 180) can begin to emerge when "an individual's cumulative pattern of interactions within interracial and intercultural contexts" (Raible & Irizarry, 2007, p.191) is guided by mutual respect. These are friendships of "mutual caring between members of culturally diverse communities" (Raible & Irizarry, 2007, p. 192). Howard (1993) argues that "one of the greatest contributions white Americans can make to cultural understanding is simply to learn the power of respect" (pp. 39-40). Any culture is capable of acting superior; within each of us as individuals there lies the potential to devalue another. "The power of respect" (Howard, 1993, pp. 39-40) is an attitude which must be purposefully worn by the self outside the classroom in order for it to be worn by the teacher self within the classroom. This attitude must become part of the nature of all the identities that make up all our intertwined selves.

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How will I wear my multiple identities within the multicultural classroom? This is the question facing me, and all of us as educators. I must consider: 1) Am I sensitive to my own hybrid identity, so that, in turn, I can be sensitive to the hybrid identities of my students? 2) Do I acknowledge the tensions I face in the worlds of my different selves—daughter, friend, coworker, teacher—so that I am then sensitive to listen to the tensions that my students face in the worlds of their multiple selves? These are questions of empathy, an act of "active going out of energy between human beings" where "both must give and receive a part of themselves in order to complete the fusion of transmutation that occurs when we allow an 'other' to affect our selfhood" (Weddington, 2008, p. 112). These are questions of emotional investment, an act of "professional necessity" because teachers "cannot teach well if any part of them is disengaged for long" (Nias, 1996, Telling Stories section, para. 5).

To honour and recognize hybrid identity within the mainstream multicultural classroom, we as educators must find our equilibrium, recognizing that every individual and culture has value and is worthy of a listening stance. Fisher et al. (2011) state:

> Quality teachers....know there cannot be one instructional plan that meets the needs of all of their students, and they realize that to find the right way(s), connection(s), and content that result in learning for each student, they too must keep on learning, studying their discipline(s), and reflecting and redesigning their instruction by maintaining a gauge of each student's avenue of interests, as well as their assessed performance. This means that they take every opportunity to listen closely to their students, even those who seem noncompliant. (p. 8)

We must intentionally live as learners, intentionally value every student, and intentionally value every moment. We must stop and listen to our uniqueness as individuals, to our heart as

teachers, and to our students as co-learners and integral *co-workers* on the learning and teaching landscape. "The future calls each of us to become partners in the dance of diversity, a dance in which everyone shares the lead" (Howard, 1993, p. 41).

The journey of identity is, in many ways, a personal one; yet for teacher and student it is lived out within the public context of the classroom. Because of the delicate and precarious imbalance of power within this setting, Reeves (2009) argues for the importance of studying "identity construction" stating, "Considering the potential consequences for teachers' identity construction and for student [*sic*] in whose identities teachers invest, there is a pressing need for educational researchers and teacher educators to better understand the nature of teacher identity construction" (p. 40). Indeed, understanding one's multiple identities and how these contribute to the life of the classroom is, for every educator in every context, a worthwhile journey on which to embark.

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