

**JOURNEY TO OZ: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF IDENTITY TRANSITIONS
FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY**

by

Jennifer Watt

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree Master of Education

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Winnipeg, Manitoba
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THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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MASTER OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine the construction and expression of identity in first-year, university teaching and learning. My research is the story of a narrative inquiry study and its effect on my own and my participants' perspectives on the transition to first-year, university. I explore how participants tell about their experiences using geographical and literary metaphors of journeying and I argue that these narrative conventions construct a reality of growth and transformation for the participants.

The data collected through the narrative inquiry method are eight short narratives—six from first-year university students and two from first-year university instructors. I used open-ended, story-structured questions during initial interviews to encourage participants to use narratives in the description of their first-year university experiences. From the transcriptions of each initial interview, I extracted and ordered the words and images of each participant's first-year experiences into a two to four page narrative. In a second, follow-up interview, I completed a member-check with each participant to ensure that s/he was comfortable and confident that I had expressed the story as s/he had told it at the time of the interview. The second interview offered opportunities to discuss the process of telling a first-year university narrative and the impact of participating in an inquiry.

In order to frame the narrative analysis, I reviewed and situated my inquiry in the fields of narrative research, sociocultural theory, and narrative inquiry methodology. Throughout the thesis I used *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900) as a "productive point of reference" (Brockmeir & Harre, 2001, pp. 54-55) to explore the cultural and geographical metaphors found in the participants' narratives about transition to university.

The narrative analysis of the participants' first-year university stories and interviews indicates that teaching and learning during transition is often conceptualized and expressed as a journey or a quest. The autobiographical inquiry into the time of transition is explored as a curricular experience for the inquirers (Conle, 2003) and for the audience who reads or hears their stories.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Engaging in this scholarship has allowed me the opportunity to re-search, re-view, re-tell, re-live, and re-new my identity and my constructed world. When I consider what I thought this thesis might become when I first began graduate studies, I am aware that I have a whole network of support helping me to grow and transform.

I am greatly appreciative of all the support, candid conversations, gentle pushes, and brilliant insights of my classmates, professors, committee members, and supervisor. Thanks to Dr. Debbie Schnitzer and Dr. Stan Straw for their careful and considerate feedback. I am very grateful to Dr. Karen Smith for the time and energy she has devoted to my academic development. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship, which helped me to pursue my studies full-time.

In *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900), a text which has helped inform my thinking and writing, Dorothy proclaims, "There is no place like home" (p. 27). I could not agree more with this statement. I am sincerely and overwhelmingly appreciative to everyone who is part of my home and my family. I thank all the grandparents, aunts, and uncles who, despite living in other provinces or countries, helped with childcare and provided encouragement. Thank you to my incredible husband and editor, David Watt. You have helped me think and articulate more clearly and you have selflessly offered sensitive and constant care of our whole family. Finally, this thesis is written for the two most inspiring people in my life: Else Christine Watt and Sebastien Michael Watt. It is for you I want to be a better person and for you I want to know more.

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PROLOGUE

What it means to re-search, re-view, re-tell, and re-live.

Many researchers have found that telling stories is controversial (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Conle, 1996, 2003; Worth, 2005). Yet, as a student and new researcher I began this research blissfully unaware of the academic debates about the legitimacy of narratives in educational research. When I was confronted with questions and criticisms, I found the controversy surprising. I asked, "Why argue about using narratives if stories are our lives?" On this journey that has become my Masters of Education thesis, I have found that there were many more facets involved in using narratives as a way to research than I first expected.

This thesis and the narratives within this thesis would be entirely different had someone else collected, told, analyzed, or interpreted the narratives. This is due to the complex and complicated nature of narratives. Stories layer upon stories. We tell, hear, and interpret stories through other personal, cultural and literary narrative filters. Narratives are told in tenuous and changing landscapes and concepts of self and community. The same narrative told today in this space will be different told tomorrow in a different setting. Stories, especially stories about one's own identity, are often fraught and emotionally invested and therefore lack objectivity. There is a vulnerability and tentativeness of autobiographical narratives because the teller exposes some version of him or herself, but that self can change even through the telling. When we think about

and interpret stories, we often have laden and loaded lenses, as our own stories infiltrate what we see, hear, understand, and experience.

This journey and this thesis, for me, were about the prefix “re-“, meaning, to do again. Re-search means to explore again, re-view means to look again, re-tell means to articulate again, and re-live means to experience again. It was not enough for me to examine the issues of transition from high school to university in one way, one time, one place, or one voice. I needed to return to the issues again and again. I needed to look at how my personal lenses and experiences affected how I questioned, told, analyzed, and interpreted. I found that narratives, in all their vulnerabilities and tentativeness, enabled my participants and me to engage in the re- processes. Through stories, we re-searched, re-viewed, re-told, and re-lived. I never knew about the controversies, the complexities, or the possibilities of narratives until I started on this journey. So, I invite you the reader to engage your own re- processes—search, view, tell, and live your own stories again as you read my narrative research journey and the narratives of my participants’ experiences of teaching and learning in first-year university.

CHAPTER ONE

Journey to Oz: An Introduction

Lifted by a Cyclone: Landing in an Inquiry

It can be difficult to know what to pack for a journey even in the best of circumstances. More favourable packing conditions include there being enough time and resources to collect all the required items, a clearly mapped destination and planned itinerary, and a weather forecast that has been checked and can be trusted as reliable. However, there are also times when we are launched into a journey with no time for preparations. Imagine poor Dorothy Gale, the heroine from *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900) who ran into her house for shelter from a storm and found herself lifted into an unexpected adventure:

The north and south winds met where the house stood, and made it the exact centre of the cyclone. In the middle of a cyclone the air is generally still, but the great pressure of the wind on every side of the house raise it up higher and higher, until it was at the very top of the cyclone, and there it remained and was carried miles and miles away as easily as you could carry a feather. (p. 4)

Dorothy's house was carried away in a cyclone. She did not have time to pack and plan for a journey but then again, she brought everything in her house with her. She just did not know where she was going, how long she would stay, or how to get home again.

I conceptualized my narrative inquiry exploring the issues of identity growth and transformation during the transition from high school to first-year university as a journey. In the process of my journey, I experienced both carefully planned preparations and cyclones that have carried me away. Much of my Master's of Education thesis was planned, packed, unpacked, and packed again under favourable conditions. I had time and educational resources to develop a research plan. I positioned my work amongst literature from the field of education and mapped how my study was unique. I set, and mostly followed, a timeline for completing different stages of my data gathering and analysis. I gathered trusted advisors who could forecast where I needed to adjust and improve my work.

However, there are elements of the cyclone in my thesis as well. As I will discuss later in this chapter, I came to the issue through my personal experiences of transition from high school to university that often felt like a cyclone lifting me from my familiar home to a strange land of academia. I also experienced moments within the research and writing stages of this inquiry that felt like Baum's description of a cyclone: I was in the middle of the still cyclone, carefully planned and packed for a research project that I believed would follow a certain route, but the great pressure of the literature, theories, participants' narratives, and my own reflections raised my inquiry and carried it into unexpected areas. During these moments of the inquiry, I was not packed but I carried with me everything from my house—my experiences as a high school teacher, my academic background, my identity as a reflective writer. I did not always know where I was going, how long I would stay, or how I would get home again, but I let the inquiry develop and I tried to follow where my data was taking me.

This thesis was based upon a narrative inquiry research project in which I interviewed six first-year university students and two first-year university instructors about their experiences teaching and learning in the transition from high school to university. The first interviews were transformed into short two-to-four page narratives in a process I describe in Chapter Three. During second interviews the participants reflected upon the process of telling their first-year stories. The telling, analyzing, and interpreting of the participants' transition-to-university narratives was structured into a thesis comprised of seven chapters. Chapter Two situates my study in the fields of transition research, sociocultural theory, and narrative inquiry methodology. Chapter Three describes the methods and methodology. Chapter Four shares the participants' narratives. Chapter Five and Six analyze and interpret the narratives and second interview data. Finally, Chapter Seven considers the implications of this study for the field of education.

This chapter introduces the readers to the ideas and issues discussed in the remainder of the thesis. In the next section, I state the purpose and the research questions that guided the inquiry in order to ground the readers in the "what" and the "why" of my study. Next I use Baum's protagonist Dorothy as a focalizer to discuss some of the issues that arise while telling narratives in a section called "Dorothy's Dilemmas." The next three sections are a response to Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr's (2007) suggestion that narrative inquiry researchers justify, or "provide a reason their study is important" by attending to "three kinds of justification: the personal, the practical, and the social" (p. 24). Next, I provide the limitations of my research in a section entitled "Scope of the Study." Finally, I provide a list of definitions to clarify terms used in the remainder of my thesis.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

Purpose of the Study.

Narrative inquiry is a research method that demands the telling of one's own story, participants' stories, and the story of the inquiry itself. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write: "People live stories, and in the telling of stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others" (p. xxvi). It is through re-telling and re-living that we begin to make sense of our experiences and to position them in a wider personal and social context. The articulation of words in story form often illuminates what we truly think, believe, and assume about our communities and our identities. The reason my study followed the path of narrative inquiry is because I attempted to create spaces for participants to re-search, re-live, and re-construct their experiences by telling their stories of transitions to new communities and new identities. The transition from high school to first-year university has the potential of becoming a "turning point" (Bruner, 2001) or a place of growth and transformation. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that growth and transformation are central to narrative inquiry:

Following Dewey, our principal interest in experience is the growth and transformation in the life story that we as researchers and our participants author. Therefore, difficult as it may be to tell a story, the more difficult but important task is the retelling of stories that allow for growth and change. (p.71)

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to examine what instructors and students told about their experiences in first-year university and to interrogate what part telling plays in the growth and transformation of identities.

Statement of Research Questions.

The following questions directed the search for the stories of growth and transformation that may be occurring during the transition from high school to first-year university:

1. What do personal narratives reveal about students' and academic instructors' perspectives of first-year university experiences?
2. What similarities and differences exist between the narratives told by academic instructors and first-year university students?
3. What do personal narratives reveal about the individuals' identities and narratives as a way of knowing and understanding the transition from high school to university?

These questions are integrated into the thesis, and are explicitly addressed in the final chapter.

Dorothy's Dilemmas

The Wizard of Oz is perhaps most widely known in today's culture through the 1939 MGM film. Although the images and soundtrack of this film informed my

discussion in this thesis, I referred to Baum's (1900) novel unless explicitly written otherwise. *The Wizard of Oz* is written from the point of view of a third-person omniscient narrator. Dorothy is not telling or writing her autobiography. Baum's choices of character development, plot incidents, setting, conflict, internal responses, and resolution are literary. So why discuss Dorothy in this thesis then? Brockmeir and Harre (2001) state:

For most themes and problems raised in the new style of narrative integration, the world of literary texts and the language of fiction and poetry will certainly remain a productive point of reference. . . . When we enter a fictional world evoked by a story and imagine ourselves wandering the streets of a city or the hills of a country in which the action of the narrative is located, we behave in this world as if it were the real one; we do so even if we know that it is only a narrative model of it. (pp. 54 – 55)

Dorothy is not a real person, but she is a productive point of reference because her dilemmas as a storyteller matter to each of us as we tell the stories of our journeys, experiences, and lives in a post-modern world. Worth, (2005) states: "Life is never presented straightforwardly but always through the lens of a speaker (whose lens(es)) may be or are likely to be different from ours" (p.12).

As a *productive point of reference* or a *lens of a speaker*, I am going to imagine the scene that would take place when Dorothy has just clicked her heels and returned home to her farm in Kansas. Her worried Aunt Em and Uncle Henry are staring at her and say, "Dorothy, child, what has happened to you? Where have you been?" Now I imagine the dilemmas that Dorothy faces: She must tell the story of her journey to the

strange land of Oz and back in a way that will make sense, give order, offer meaningful interpretation, entertain, and provide room for personal reflection and identity construction for both her as a teller and for her listeners.

Dorothy knows, at the least, the immediate outcomes of her story. She is not reporting the events as they are happening, but rather she is weaving a narrative that will explain how she moved from there to here. She knows what incidents have greater impact on her growth and transformation in the story. She knows what characters became important to her own development. She can ignore many of the details of the long journey, even things that may have seemed important at the time they were occurring. When Dorothy tells her Aunt and Uncle about first meeting the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion, she already knows that later this unlikely crew of travellers help save her life and fulfill her quest. When she builds suspense about the Wicked Witch (a constructed name using alliteration, powerful adjectival word choice, and dependence on a cultural understanding of mythology), Dorothy knows that this terrifying villain will simply melt away when Dorothy throws a bucket of water on her. And when she describes walking into the throne room and meeting the mysterious Wizard of Oz, Dorothy knows that behind the screen is a little man who got lost in a hot air balloon.

Dorothy can draw upon what she knows of cultural myths and literary imagery to create metaphors that may add depth and meaning to her tale. Was the road really constructed of yellow bricks; or do these elements of colour and material have cultural or literary significance? And of course, there are the thorny issues of whether or not Dorothy is reliable: is she remembering all the details correctly? Is she, indeed, telling the truth (whatever that may be)? Is Dorothy even aware of these dilemmas as she opens her

mouth to tell her story? Through Dorothy, as a productive point of reference, I began to imagine the complexities and the potential of using narratives to discuss personal experiences, a theme which is continually explored in the remainder of the thesis.

Please allow me, for a moment, to indulge in answering the questions my readers might eventually come to ask, “Jennifer, child, what has happened to you? Where have you been?” I know, I know. This is problematic to begin with. I am asking you to make a lot of allowances when you might not trust me or my tale yet. I am assuming you might be at all interested in my narrative. I am putting words into your mouth that you are unlikely ever to utter. Hang in there. Give me a moment. You might not care yet (or at all) what has happened to me or where I have been. I hope to change that (even just a little) during my story. For this is the story of what happened to me and where I have been as inspired by my interest in the issues of the transition from high school to first-year university, my approach to writing a thesis about these issues through narrative inquiry, my encounters with eight fascinating participants, and my desire to explore the connections between narratives and identities. Bruner (1986) writes:

Story must construct two landscapes simultaneously. One is the landscape of action, where the constituents are the arguments for action: agent, intention or goal, situation, instrument, something corresponding to ‘story grammar’. The other landscape is the landscape of consciousness: what those involved in the action know, think, or feel, or do not know, think, or feel. (p. 14)

I invite you to join me, my participants, and the characters from Oz (Baum, 1900) as we explored the landscapes of our stories and wandered the streets and hills of our narratives,

exploring the personal, practical, and social significance of telling and knowing first-year university narratives.

Personal Significance: Becoming Visible with My Own Lived and Told Story

When I began my Master of Education coursework, I felt reluctant to use the word researcher to describe myself. I felt the word needed quotation marks as it was not really me yet: I was a “researcher,” but only as a pretend role and not an authentic identity. I felt like a fraud when I had to complete literature reviews as part of assignments: who was I to question, critique, or determine the most appropriate studies to exemplify the issues of transition from high school to university? The people writing the studies were “real” researchers and I, a mere student, felt I should only say thank you. Thank you for doing your study. Thank you for presenting another aspect of the complex and complicated issue. Thank you for showing me how research in this area could be done.

It was not until partway through my coursework year that I was introduced to the idea of being a re (note the important hyphen) - searcher: finally, I could identify with the process of searching again and again, looking for links between lived experiences and theories, and reflecting upon what impact that might have on individuals and social communities. I became more comfortable situating myself amongst other researchers and theorists with a belief that my place exists in the balance of theory and practice, negotiated through my own and others’ stories. I could re-search the issues of transitions to first-year university by re-viewing, or looking again with new perspective, at the

current literature in my field. By re-searching and re-viewing, I hoped to uncover my own assumptions about the issues and discover the contextual and theoretical background of my study.

My personal experiences motivated me to learn more about the issues of transition from high school to university. When I was in high school, I had desperately wanted to be in university. However, when I arrived at university, parts of my first year were frustrating and shocking. When I became a teacher and a graduate student, I wanted to find a way to stop others from having to go through similar anxieties. My experiences, understood through my stories, were what I knew, what mattered to me, and what fuelled my passion. I started with my experience, but I assumed in order to conduct meaningful and acceptable research I would have to use the discourse of quantitative studies. I assumed stories would inspire me as I conducted the research, but I thought narratives alone would be too “fluffy” or too “unsubstantial” to stand up to the rigour required of thesis-level work.

Reading Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded me of the importance of my own stories: “As narrative inquirers we work within the space not only with our participants but also with ourselves. Working in this space means that we become visible with our own lived and told stories” (p. 62). I began to understand that my first-year stories were, indeed, substantial and solid background to my study. I focused on writing a short narrative that would represent a “turning point” (Bruner, 1986) moment from my first-year and exemplify why I had felt compelled to study the issues of transitioning to university. The following narrative is one of the stories that emerged from my recollections:

It took will power not to stand on top of my chair and shout to the 219 other first year journalism students, the eight or so Teaching Assistants and the prof I had gradually come to despise, "I don't belong here! This is not me!" Instead I silently fumed through the soul-wrenching discussion of ethics and knew that this would be the very last journalism lecture I would ever attend. I restrained myself from public humiliation by focusing on the image of a piece of paper sitting ready next to my phone.

Back in my dorm room, I had neatly copied out the codes for dropping my journalism course through the telephone registration system after the first few lectures and seminars when I began to suspect that this really was not the place for me—that this really was not who I was. I made myself wait for a while, thinking that I should not rush this decision. I knew I was homesick. I knew I was adjusting to life across the country. I knew I was only 17 and pretty young to be making such a huge decision. So I had looked at my course outline and decided that I would make my decision after the lecture on ethics. And I knew by just a few minutes into that lecture that this was over for me.

I took the telephone off the wall, grabbed the piece of paper, picked up the receiver and had all intentions to begin dialing. I thought I was calm and ready and even a little thrilled. But when I looked down to see my hands shaking so violently that I was not sure I would be able to dial, I hung up the phone and began weeping instead.

I didn't drop classes. That was not who I was. I was a good student, a finisher, a success. I always had a goal, a focus, a life plan. I was not only going to

be a journalist, but a world-famous journalist. Hadn't I boasted about that in my yearbook? Hadn't I been telling everyone since Gr. 2 that I was going to be a journalist when I grew up? Hadn't I worked so hard so I could get a scholarship to one of the best universities for journalism in the country?

If I made that call, it would all be over. I would never be the same. I would have to figure out who I was all over again. (Researcher's Note, Feb. 5, 2007)

This is, as Summerfield (2005) would say, a "mediated memory": a recollection that has been tempered by time, perspective, and other tellings. If you caught me in that dorm room while I was trying to dial the phone, I probably would not have told you this version of the story. Yet, what is important now is that this story still holds meaning for me. I have carried some version of this story about a moment when I felt at crisis in my first year of university into every classroom I have ever taught, every dinner table where I have discussed reading, writing and learning at university, and every lecture and seminar I have attended as a graduate student. The moment where I had a crisis of identity and chose to change my educational path is what eventually inspired me to apply to graduate school, write scholarship proposals, and articulate my desire to learn more about the issues of transition from high school to university. By allowing myself to remember and retell this story, I have transformed myself from a first-year survivor to a first-year re-searcher. However, as I stated earlier, I believe my place as a re-searcher exists in the balance between the theoretical and the practical. I wanted my study to contribute to more than just my own personal understanding, but also to offer practical significance to educators working with students in the transition to first-year university.

Practical Significance: The Curricular Experience of Narratives

For an educational narrative inquiry to have practical significance, it needs to *matter to educators*. I found it helpful to consider how Genishi & Dyson (1994) concluded the need for story in educational settings:

In short, then, why do we need stories? Stories help us construct our *selves*, who used to be one way and are now another; stories help to make sense of, evaluate, and integrate the tensions inherent in experience: the past with the present, the fictional with the 'real', the official with the unofficial, the personal with the professional, the canonical with the different or unexpected. Stories help us transform the present and shape the future for our students and ourselves so that it will be richer and better than the past. (pp. 242-243)

Stories invite reflection and encourage change when integrated as a curricular experience for teachers and learners.

In the next chapter I further discuss Conle's (2003) article "An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula" in which she articulates the connection between narrative practices and curricular outcomes. Conle (2003) states, "Curricular complexity and meaningfulness result from connections to life and quest-like inquiry experiences" (p. 13). She argues that narratives can provide several opportunities for curricular engagement. One type of opportunity is the use of narratives as case studies, which are meant to "prompt engagement during follow-up discussions or reflections" (p. 6). A second opportunity for engagement is when "the curricular function is tied to the act of telling the story" (p. 7). This type of engagement is often found in narrative activities with "autobiographical

learner inquiry as its key component” in which “the object of the inquiry is the learner himself or herself” (p. 4). Conle offers five outcomes of narrative curricula (described in greater detail in Chapter Two): (1) Advances in understanding; (2) increased interpretive competence; (3) richer practical repertoires; (4) changes in life; (5) visions gained. I will return to how this inquiry met these outcomes in the final chapter.

Social Significance: Humanizing Transition-to-University Research

I believe Freeman’s (2001) description of the power and potential of narrative inquiry is an apt starting point for discussion about why my study has social significance:

The great potential of narrative inquiry, especially in relation to the issue of identity, [is] to humanize and deepen work in the various social sciences, [and] to bring it into closer contact with human beings, seeking to give form and meaning to experience. (pp. 283-284)

Telling stories implies human contact. We tell either directly, or through writing, to another. Most often we know our audience so we shape and tell our stories differently depending on which we are talking (or writing) to. This conceptualization of telling another to give form and meaning to our own experiences is social constructivist in nature. (See Chapter Two for further discussion.) Relying heavily on the work of Lev Vygotsky, social constructivists believe learning involves purpose, specific contexts, and social interactions. Vygotsky (1978) argues: “Every function in cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first between people, and then inside. . . . all higher functions originate as actual relationships between

individuals” (p. 46). This study occurred on the social level, as I interacted with eight participants during two interview situations, but also at an individual level, as participants reflected upon what the telling meant to them and how it has changed the way they see themselves or their transition stories.

Bruner (1994) argues that narratives shape our ways of knowing the past, living the present, and directing the future:

I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present, but for directing it into the future. . . . Life as led is inseparable from a life told—or more bluntly a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold. (Bruner, 1994, p. 36)

For students entering first-year university and for the instructors who teach those students when they first arrive in university, the issues of transition to new academic and social realities are entwined in their current lived experiences. Through my participants’ stories, I offered the opportunities of interpreting and reinterpreting some of the issues of transition to first-year university, humanizing and deepening the understanding of how students and teachers perceive their changes and transformations.

Scope of the Study

As will be discussed in the next chapter, Bakhtin’s theories remind us that “there is always, potentially, a next and different story to tell, as there occur different situations

in which to tell it. . . . As consequence, life narratives, like most literary texts, can be treated as open, without end” (Brockmeir & Carbaugh, 2001, p. 7). A thesis could also, potentially, be a next and different story, depending upon how the scope of the study is situated. However, it is the job of the researcher to set the parameters for the study so that the ideas may remain open to interrogation and reflection, but the text itself has an end. The journey must come to a destination or at the very least a resting stop, so that the researcher and readers may reflect upon where they have been and what they have seen so far.

There are several limitations of methods and analysis that structure and define this study. Due to the in-depth nature of one-on-one interviews and co-authoring narratives, the number of participants in the study was limited to eight volunteers: two instructors and six students. The concerns with generalizability or representative sampling, which are important to quantitative studies, are not applicable to narrative inquiry, so do not become part of the discourse I used to describe my participants or their stories. Instead, this study concerned itself with the providing a fair, detailed, and lifelike representation of the perspectives of the individuals involved in the research.

The participants shared a situated discourse community of a first-year English 1200 Representative Literary Works course. I chose to limit my recruitment of volunteers from this community for a variety of reasons. The first reason was personal: I taught high school English and this is the subject area that held my greatest interest, passion, and motivation. By starting with a content area that closely aligned with my personal learning and teaching experiences, I was far more likely to be self-reflective throughout the process. The second reason was pragmatic: many first-year students at the

University of Manitoba take an English course to fill a writing requirement that is expected to be filled before graduation. English 1200 is a particularly popular choice of course for first-year students as it is also a required course for the application to many faculties when students progress through their degrees. The third reason was potential: the participants shared one common current educational experience. The situated discourse community of this course at this time linked very different individuals through a shared experience, providing an avenue for comparing and contrasting the data that emerged.

The narratives I collected for this study focus on a very specific time frame in the participants' lives. Although I believe there is rich potential in pursuing a life history methodology with these participants in a longer-term study, this study focused on the very specific experiences surrounding the transition from high school to university. Therefore, the first interview questions were focused on experiences in the end of high school and experiences in first-year university for the student participants, and experiences as a student in first-year university and experiences teaching first-year students for the instructor participants. The questions were structured around story grammar elements to help develop the narratives from the interview data.

The purpose of this study was to allow participants to tell the stories of what mattered to them in their first-year experiences, therefore another limitation for this study was to focus on the narratives of the first-year student and instructor participants. This limited the study to the stories as told rather than the response of the university's institutional support for first-year students. I do not attempt to describe in any detail the first-year transition programmes at the University of Manitoba or situate these

programmes with what other Canadian universities have developed to ease transition. The purpose of this study was not to critique or provide alternatives for institutional support of first-year students and teachers.

The data that I worked with in this study were two sets of transcriptions and one narrative for each participant. I still struggled with letting go of some of the “research discourse” that permeates our academic culture, much of which is associated with quantitative studies. The word and concept of validity is especially powerful to me and is something I really struggled with when adopting narrative inquiry as a method. How would I know what my participants said would be valid, true, remembered correctly, able to be checked or confirmed? When I was writing and talking about my data and sharing my interpretations how would I be confident that my participants had represented themselves honestly? Bruner (1986) writes:

If we are to appreciate and understand an imaginative story... we must “suspend disbelief”, accept what we hear for the time being as putatively real, as stipulative. With science, we ask finally for some verification (or some proof against falsification). In the domain of narrative and explication of human action, we ask instead that, upon reflection, the account corresponds to some perspective we can imagine or “feel” as right. The one, science, is oriented outward to an external world; the other, inward toward a perspective and point of view toward the world. (pp. 51-52)

I limited my discussion of the data with the discourse of narrative inquiry, looking for the inward perspectives of my participants, rather than outward verification. Bruner (1986) is clear that “arguments convince one their truth, stories of the lifelikeness” (p. 11). He

terms the quality of lifelikeness “verisimilitude,” (Bruner, 1986, p. 11) which becomes important to my analysis of the co-authored narratives. The issues of memory and “truth” are discussed in Chapter Two and woven throughout this thesis as they become important to understanding how telling stories affects identity, and how identity affects telling stories.

Finally, I am aware that just as the telling of stories can be open and without end, so too could the interpretation of the stories. Within critical reading of the stories, I could apply feminist, multicultural or post-colonial, Marxist, or many other forms of analysis to the participants’ narratives. In this thesis, I do not align with any of these readings specifically or exclusively. Instead, I try to consider what the teller of the tale is representing about themselves. Maxine Greene (1994) provides an important reminder:

There are impacts of class, colour, gender, the marriage condition of parents, the setting—urban and high rising, or rural and under a big sky. It is, as many have found, not only the events, the modes of action that must be recaptured; it is the landscape—perceived and felt and imagined—against which the activities take place.” (p. 14)

Again, we are returned to the importance of geography, the landscape of stories, the journey of the teller through a constructed world and identity. It is within this landscape of the stories that were shared by my participants that I find the scope of my study.

Definitions

The following list of terms will help clarify some of the concepts and ideas that are used in this thesis. Some are specific to the context of the study, others are words used specifically in the theories and analysis that frame this work.

Definitions List.

Academic varieties of language (Academic discourse): Refers to a specialized form of language used within a school context. Gee (2004) describes academic discourse as, “varieties of language connected to learning and using information from academic or school-based content areas.” (p. 17)

Accrued Narratives: The term accrual is used by Bruner (1991) in his description of ten features of narratives that construct realities. The term accrual is most commonly used in financial language and means to “grow by addition.” Bruner (1991) explains what he believes to be the extra value of adding narratives to personal autobiographies or cultural canons: “Yet narratives do accrue, and, as anthropologists insist, the accruals eventually create something variously called a ‘culture’ or a ‘history’ or, more loosely, a ‘tradition’” (p. 18).

Autobiography: Bruner (2001) often refers to self-told life narratives and autobiography interchangeably: “In autobiography, we set forth a view of what we call our Self and its doings, reflections, thoughts, and place in the world.” (p. 25)

Discourse: As Street (1995) explains, discourse is traditionally defined by linguists as “simply chunks of language larger than the sentence.” (p. 165) He argues that recently there has been a move to a more “ideological” understanding of discourse as “the

complex of conceptions, classifications, and language that characterizes a specific sub-set of an ideological formation.” (Street, 1995, p. 165) For this study, I will refer to Gee’s (1991) definition of discourse: “A socially accepted association among ways of using language, or thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’.” (p. 3)

English 1200 Representative Literary Works: I recruited all the participants from two sections of this first-year English course at the University of Manitoba. The following is a description of the course from the 2006-2007 University of Manitoba calendar:

ENGL 1200: (Formerly 004.120) An introduction to the study of literature, with emphasis on the development of reading and writing skills. Poetry, prose and drama from various historical periods. Texts for each section will be announced.
6.000 Credit Hours (University of Manitoba, 2007).

Identity: The characteristics of identity have been described as “multiple, historically situated, negotiable, and changing over the lifespan.” (Ivanic, 1998, p. 19) Castell (2004) further explains, “For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there maybe a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action.”(p. 6)

Narrative inquiry: Chase (2005) defines narrative inquiry as follows:

Contemporary narrative inquiry can be characterized as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them (p. 651)

Narrative inquiry is the data gathering methodology for this thesis.

Narratives: In this study, the term narratives is often used interchangeably with stories. I use a fairly standard definition in this thesis: “A *narrative* recounts a story, a series of events in a temporal sequence. Narratives require close study because stories structure the meanings by which our culture lives.” (Cohan & Shires, 1993, p. 1) Bruner (1991) also defines narrative as “a conventional form transmitted culturally,” (p. 4) but continues that “the central concern is not how narrative as text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality.” (pp. 5-6) I focus on narratives as “instruments of mind” in this thesis.

“New Literacy Studies” or NLS: Researchers and theorists examining literacy from a sociocultural point of view. Gee (2000) explains, “The NLS are based on the view that reading and writing can only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural (and we can add historical, political, and economic) practices of which they are apart.” (p. 180)

Social Constructivist Theory: A theory of learning and knowing that challenges the belief that knowledge is “a set of external, scientifically, verifiable set of truths.” (Beech, 1993, p. 105) Based largely on the work of Vygotsky (1978), social and constructivists believe learning involves purpose, specific contexts, and social interactions.

Turning points: Bruner (2001) argues that Western cultures have distinct moments where “turning points” are more likely to take place. He defines turning points as “episodes in which, as if to underline the power of the agent’s intentional states, the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist’s story to a belief, a conviction, a thought.” (p. 31)

Two modes of thought: Bruner (1986) argues that “there are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality.” (p. 11) The two modes are logical arguments and narratives: “Arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness.” (Bruner, 1986, p.11)

University 1: First-year students at the University of Manitoba enter University 1, a programme of study, “designed to give entering students the opportunity to adjust to university life and its academic demands, explore options, and gain experience before they make definitive decisions on their academic and career goals.” (University of Manitoba, 2005-2006, p. 53) Students must complete 30-credit hours within the University 1 programme before they are permitted to apply to specific faculties for further study.

Vernacular varieties of language: Vernacular language “is used for face-to-face conversation and for ‘everyday’ purposes” and is “closely connected to [a person’s] initial sense of self and belonging in life.” (Gee, 2004, pp. 16-17)

Verisimilitude: Bruner’s (1986) notion of the lifelikeness that narratives should produce. The concept of verisimilitude is used because stories, unlike arguments, are not meant to convince of truth, but rather of lifelikeness.

Writing intensive sections (English 1200): Two sections of English 1200 (see above definition) are designated as writing intensive sections. These writing intensive sections have extra funding from Central Administration which allows the English Department to set a cap of 35 students and provides each section with a Teaching Assistant (TA). The instructors of the writing intensive sections are required to assign and assess drafts, as

well as final copies, of three written assignments. The instructors are also highly encouraged to use writing workshops as part of the drafting process.

CHAPTER TWO

The Narrative of My Inquiry: A Storied Review of the Literature

Joining Conversations of Teaching and Learning

Three questions emerged from my personal and scholarly experiences with the issues of transition from high school to university. I wanted to know how students and instructors would tell about their experiences learning and teaching in first-year university, in what ways the stories of instructors and students would be the same or different, and what these stories might reveal about first-year students' and instructors' identities and ways of knowing. Forming questions and searching in literature was an interactive process. Reading led me to new questions and new questions led me to new reading. I knew I had an important job in my thesis to position my study in the literature in the field of education. However, I acknowledge a bias I have held until recently against writing the review of the literature for my thesis. While I wrote this chapter in many drafts over the two years of my Master's studies, I sweated, ranted, and cried. I knew the importance of a review of literature for providing context for my current study and becoming the background upon which I could position or foreground my own study, but I could not get the tone, style, or academic rigour right while writing. I conceptualized the process as me against the literature in a one-sided battle, which I sadly was losing. However, it is only through my latest returns to re-writing, re-searching, and re-viewing

the literature that I have come to a more authentic belief that this chapter will help articulate and justify the significance of my study.

Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) propose a “list of elements”, or criteria, “to consider in designing a narrative inquiry” (p. 24). This list of eight elements continually returns to the need for the researcher to define what is unique and necessary about the inquiry by positioning it amongst the literature: 1. Justify the inquiry personally, practically, and socially; 2. Name the phenomenon; 3. Consider and describe the methods; 4. Describe the analysis and interpretation process; 5. Position studies in relation to other research; 6. Offer a sense of the uniqueness of the study; 7. Be vigilant of ethical considerations; 8. Consider the process of representation from the outset of the inquiry (Adapted from Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr, 2007, pp. 23 – 33). Numbers five and six may appear to be the most obvious links to positioning the inquiry amongst scholarly literature: Number five explicitly states that narrative inquiry studies should be positioned to other research and number six asks for the uniqueness of the study to be discussed which is only possible by showing how it differs from other research.

Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) provide a metaphor of “joining a conversation” to explain how they understand how to position their own studies in relation to other research on a particular phenomenon: “The answer to which literature we position our work in relation to is given by noting what conversations we most want to join within the larger conversation of teaching and teacher education” (p.30). I recognized this metaphor from Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*:

We use a metaphor of conversation as we think of positioning our work socially and theoretically. We ask ourselves which conversations we want to participate in. . . . This, of necessity, asks us to position our inquiries beside other inquiries. . . . This positioning of our inquiries is necessary if narrative inquiries are to contribute to questions of social significance. (p. 136)

I have been described, most fondly, as talkative, so this metaphor of conversation makes sense to me. It has helped me resolve my personal struggle with writing this chapter. I do not have to think of this review of literature as a defense, critique, or battle, but rather as explicit participation in selected conversations. I can now conceptualize the review of the literature as a dialogical, socially constructive process. I bring to the conversation my assumptions about the issues and methodologies of other research studies; my beliefs about my own inquiry's study personal, practical, and social significance; and my desire to better understand the phenomenon of transition from high school to university, sociocultural theories and the methodology of narrative inquiry. I gain from the conversations a better understanding of the historical and contemporary contributions to the fields I am exploring and a strengthened justification for my inquiry.

This chapter has become structured around three select conversations in the larger discussions of teaching and learning. The first conversation is about the education phenomenon of the transition from high school to university. The second conversation is about the sociocultural theories, especially in the literature of academic literacies, which shape and define my inquiry. The final conversation is about my chosen research methodology of narrative inquiry. I link the three conversations through a narrative of

positioning my inquiry in the transition, sociocultural theories, and narrative inquiry fields of literature.

Conversation One: The Field of Transition Issues

How I Came to the Transition Conversation and What I Brought With Me.

Informal conversations shape everyday actions. Engaging in a conversation implies there is someone to talk to and something to talk about. Conversations are socially constructed and culturally negotiated. Often conversations result in an idea of coming to know. As a matter of personal example, in the first chapter of this thesis I shared a narrative from my first-year of university and an explanation of why I became interested in the phenomenon of the transition from high school to university. My transition to first-year university had moments of academic and social tensions, so I wanted to contribute to understanding why this may have happened to me and to provide concrete suggestions to improve transitions to university in the future. I came to the scholarly conversation because of my personal experiences and I brought with me a host of assumptions about the issues.

As with much of the growth I have experienced in my life, I feel both proud and slightly embarrassed when I re-view what I thought at an earlier stage in my inquiry. Splashed across early applications to graduate school and statements for academic awards are assumptions I held about transition issues -- some of which I was aware of and others I was only able to recognize through reading and candid conversations with classmates,

instructors, and my advisor during my Master's coursework. An example of some of my earlier thinking came from a statement of proposed academic research that I prepared for an application to a 2006 University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship: "In the past five years, the University of Manitoba has reported a loss of approximately one third of students enrolled in first-year studies after only one academic year, indicating transition from high school to university is not successful for a significant portion of the population" (Watt, 2006). The word choices of "loss" and "not successful" are loaded with the assumptions I held about transition issues. The phrase "significant portion of the population" is fairly indicative of the assumptions I held about what constituted meaningful research discourse. First, I assumed that all students should *desire* further study in higher education. Second, I assumed they should all *be able to succeed* in higher education. Third, I assumed that there was something we as members of the institutions of high schools and universities *could and should do* to help ease the transitions so that success would be universal. And finally, I assumed that higher education was *interested in retaining* all the students who came to first-year university.

As I began my search of transition literature, I became acutely aware that the issue of transition to university was far more complicated than I originally thought. The first complication: I was not the only researcher who had thought to study the difficulties of students and instructors in first year, so I would have to situate my thinking amongst established work. I suppose before I began graduate school I knew that there was likely an existing body of research about the transition from high school to first-year university. Yet, in my personal experience as a high-school English teacher, I had not been exposed to any training or resource materials about how to prepare students for the academic and

social transitions to university. My husband and his colleagues who taught first-year university students also shared with me that they had not read much, if any, literature regarding how to make transitions easier for students. The research may have existed, but as teachers, we did not have easy access to the studies. Nor did we actively seek this information as a foundation for our informed teaching.

I dreamed about coming into graduate studies, pioneering this field of research, and then bringing my “brilliant insights” to the people. However, when I actually started to search the issue, I was overwhelmed by the number of articles, books, studies, dissertations, and theses available on a wide variety of topics associated with the transition from high school to university. I had not come across the research simply because I had not looked for it before.

The second complication of my understanding of the issues of transition to first-year university arose as I began reading some of the many studies available: the underlying assumptions that other researchers thought and wrote with did not always match my own. Or, even more uncomfortably, there were also times that the authors’ assumptions mirrored my unconscious way of thinking, but I did not like looking at what I saw reflected. I was left with many questions. Did drop-out or a pause in study mean *failure* in transition to first year studies? Was it important to isolate the factors of success and failure? Could knowing these factors help fix the problem? Why fix the problem? Was the fix needed for students to achieve successful further education or was the fix needed for institution to keep consumers who would continue to pay tuition fees?

Multiple Voices in the Transition Conversation.

In an August 2007 search of the ERIC database using the terms “transition and high school and college” I encountered 742 published items: 217 journal articles, 127 conferences, 88 peer-reviewed journals, 65 books, but zero associated websites. To select a more focused conversation about transition, I chose to narrow my review to the 88 peer-reviewed journal articles because the refereed publication process offered a certain check on the quality of the material. The range of the foci for the journals provided a wide-view of the transition issue within the education field. Even within the scope of peer-reviewed journals I limited my discussion to the historical starting point of the articles from the search results and the articles reflecting the major focus areas of this research during the past four years. This limitation allows for a closer interrogation of the voices contributing to the most current research conversation and would allow me to reflect upon what my own study may contribute to this discussion. I do not intend to engage in conversation with each of these areas of research within the field of transition literature in the same way: Some articles provide a background for my understanding of the issue, while others provide a more detailed description of the contextual complexities of the issue. The purpose of this section in the literature review is to alert the reader to the multiple voices that are contributing to the transition conversation.

The earliest article included in the search results was a 1990 *Journal of Learning Disabilities* article by Dowdy, Carter and Smith surveying the differences in transition needs of 80 students with learning disabilities and 80 students without learning disabilities. As I will discuss in greater detail shortly, I am not claiming that this is the

first article that examined the issue of transition from high school to university. However, it becomes an interesting starting point to consider that the earliest reported search result had a specific focus in disabilities studies, a trend that continues in contemporary articles (Eckes, 2005; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). Two other important trends can be understood through this 1990 article: the first is that the current research focus on transition issues has heightened in the past twenty years and the second is that within the field of transition issues there are many diverse disciplinary and methodological approaches to the research.

Another early entry from my review of the literature was a 1994 *Research in Higher Education* article by Terenzini et al. entitled "The Transition to College: Diverse Students, Diverse Stories." I will engage more with the content of this article in the next section, but for now I want only to draw attention to the author. Terenzini, especially in his partnership with Pascarella, is one of the leading researchers in transition to college research. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have provided a detailed historical account of transition research in *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research* reinforcing that transition to college research has roots deeper than the early 1990s.

Following in the tradition of Pascarella and Terenzini, one of the focus areas for many current transition researchers is the determination and prediction of factors affecting achievement and retainment of first-year college and university students. Many current researchers explore what may account for successful transitions first-year studies (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Brady & Allingham, 2005; Haynes, Ruthin, Perry, Stupinsky & Hall, 2006; Larose, Bernier & Tarabulsy, 2005; Perry, Hladky, Pekrun, Clifton & Chipperfield, 2005; Smith, 2006). As an example of a narrow focus of these types of

studies, two recent articles focused closely on the factors that may predict students' use of alcohol during the transition from high school to university (Hersh & Hussong, 2006; Rhodes & Maggs, 2006). Other researchers focus more specifically on the policy implications of the transitions to higher educations (Hunt & Carroll, 2006; Lincove & Painter, 2006; Welsh, Petrosko & Taylor, 2007). These types of studies examine the impact of educational initiatives and policies at school, state or province, or national levels.

A particularly active area of research within the current field of literature focuses on the transition of minority or under-represented students to college or university (Becket, 2005; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; McAtee & Benshoff, 2006; McHatton, Zabquett & Cranson-Gingras, 2006; Saunders & Serna, 2004; Zurita, 2004). Major findings in these studies point to a need for intervention programs and sensitive accommodations in support services and curricular delivery from early years through to college levels of education to aid under-represented students. Yet another active research area explores high school to university bridging programs, often finding illustration and evidence in specific transition initiatives designed and implemented in post-secondary institutions (Cellini, 2006; Marks & Jones, 2004; McIntosh & White, 2006; Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger & Alisat, 2004; Sears, 2004; Thornburg, Uline & Wilson, 2006).

Other research voices contribute from beyond the context of refereed journals to the on-going conversation about the transition from high school to university. One example is a forum for considering the multiple approaches and concerns with the transition to college literature found at the Social Science Research Council's educational website. An October 2004 SSRC report entitled "Transitions to College: From Theory to

Practice” outlines the website’s multiple contributing disciplines and available literature reviews. Another group of studies on transition, a book edited by Foster and Russell (2002) focuses much of their cross-national discussion on the implications for examinations. However, they also devote separate chapters to identity, authority, and intertextuality as important considerations for learning about how transitions can be more smoothly executed. There are also other large-scale national research studies that report upon national trends and issues for transition from high school. I will examine two of these reports, one American and one Canadian, in the next section.

Conversations to Contextualize the Transition Phenomenon.

Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr’s (2007) suggestion to position an inquiry by “noting what conversations we most want to join” (p. 30) is a helpful starting point in a literature review. However, I believe I need to do more than note the conversations. Instead, I need to acknowledge how I want to join the conversations. Not all research is read or reviewed for the same purposes. Most of the studies mentioned in the former section provide an example of the breadth of the field and indicate an awareness of the diverse existing coverage of the field. The studies in this section have been selected for a more in-depth conversation to contextualize the phenomenon of transition. Two studies are quantitative and provide evidence for the scale of the issue facing Canadian and American high schools and post-secondary institutions. The other two studies are qualitative and provide a context for how researchers have described why transition is such a pervasive issue and implemented curriculum changes at an institutional level.

You need to explain that there are individuals that take up the research and there are institutions that implement it as part of their policy. Maybe this does not pass the test of a conversation.

Cohort Studies: Evidence of the Scale of the Transition Phenomenon.

In the past two years, government statistics agencies from the United States and Canada have each published large-scale and long-term studies that have focused on influences of successful entrance to or completion of post-secondary education (Adelman, 2006; Frenette, 2007). These studies fill important needs in the educational context: They give the big picture of the issues, provide evidence of the realities facing students who have reached the age of post-secondary studies, and supply needed data for important decisions in funding, resource development, and policy making. These studies represent years of data collection, analysis, and publication processes. The American study (2006) is worth consideration as Canadian educational policies and institutions are often influenced by the rhetoric and research of our neighbours. However, the Canadian study (2007) is a more fitting contextual piece for my study, since it discusses the statistics for our nation's educational system.

"The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion From High School Through College" (Adelman, 2006) is a replicated study of an earlier longitudinal study published by the U.S. Department of Education. The replicated study was conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics and followed a national grade-cohort known as NELS: 88/2000. The sample of 12,000 students from across the country represented a

weighted 2.9 million grade 8 students (pp.26-27). The cohort was followed through to December 2000 through regular interviews and collection of high school and college transcripts. From the original sample, 83% participated in post-secondary education by age 26 with 68% of the population participating in a four-year college at some time.

The study's purpose was to assess what factors may affect the completion of academic credentials. Within the structure of the study, students were allowed 8.5 years to earn degrees from four-year colleges. Results from the study showed that 33% of "traditional-age students who started in a four-year college earned a bachelor's degree from the same school in a 'traditional' four-year period" (p. 5). By 8.5 years, 70% of the students who started in a four-year college had completed a degree. Several factors were discussed as influencing degree completion. Adelman states: "The academic intensity of the student's high school curriculum still counts more than anything else in precollegiate history in providing momentum toward completing a bachelor's degree" (p. 2). Other statistically significant factors for degree completion included the following: beginning college with no delay after high school; full-time, continuous enrolment; enrolment in summer classes; and socioeconomic status.

In February 2007, Statistics Canada published Marc Frenette's study "Why Are Youth From Lower-income Families Less Likely to Attend University? Evidence from Academic Abilities, Parental Influences, and Financial Constraints." Frenette uses data "drawn from the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS), Cohort A, which was collected in conjunction with the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a project of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)" (p.10). The target population was students who were 15-years-old on December 31, 1999 and were

enrolled in a Canadian educational institution. A two-stage survey design was constructed which stratified a sample of schools to “ensure adequate coverage in all 10 Canadian provinces” (p. 10) and then randomly sampled the 15-year-old students from the selected schools. The final sample size was approximately 14,700 students.

Data were collected when students were administered measures of academic abilities, non-cognitive abilities, and other information in April or May 2000. Students were also interviewed at this time and then “re-interviewed in [sic] February to May 2002 and February to June 2004” (Frenette, p. 10). The first three measurements of academic abilities were taken from PISA. The entire sample completed a standardized test in reading (administered in either English or French), half the sample was assessed in mathematics, and the other half were assessed in science. The fourth and final measurement of academic ability was an overall, school-awarded, grade 10 grade point average. The two non-cognitive abilities were assessed using a set of standard questions by which a scalar measure was constructed: feeling of control or mastery over one’s life and self-esteem.

Frenette explained that there is a great public concern “that economically disadvantaged students in Canada are less likely to pursue a university education than students than well-to-do families,” which “has negative implications for the intergenerational transmission of earnings” (p. 23). Frenette’s analysis of the data collected in the YITS can be used to understand further the gap and to “link university attendance of 19-year-old youth to a plethora of information on these youth when they were aged 15” (p. 23). He concludes the following:

96% of the total gap in university attendance between youth from the top and bottom income quartiles can be accounted for by observable characteristics. Differences in long-term factors such as standardized test scores in reading obtained at 15, school marks reported at age 15, parental influences, and high-school quality account for 84% of the gap. In contrast, only 12% of the gap is related to financial constraints. (p. 23)

However, he continues his discussion by exploring the impact of finances on the other factors contributing to university attendance:

Families with more financial resources may spend more money on books for children, take their children to museums, spend more on daycare in the early years, locate in neighbourhoods with better schools, etc. These actions may result in higher performance on standardized and scholastic test, and thus, in a higher probability of attending university in the future. (p. 23)

Earlier in the study, Frenette uses his analysis to show, "Youth with at least one university-educated parent enjoy a large advantage in university participation over youth with no postsecondary-educated parent, roughly in the range of 15-20 percentage points" (p. 20). Also, there is a 12 -16% advantage for the students whose parents expect them to complete university. Both Adelman and Frenette provide overviews of the issues affecting the transitions from high school to university and establish a need to continue to the search to understand what motivates students to attend and complete their post-secondary education. Both studies have the potential to be used extensively by Canadian and American policy makers at post-secondary institutions when making decisions about support, curriculum, and staffing for first-year transition programming.

Qualitative Studies: Context of the Description of the Transition Phenomenon.

Terenzini et al. (1994) and Sears (2004) qualitative articles because both provide an overview of the transition to post-secondary phenomenon while exemplifying different approaches in purpose and methodology. Terenzini et al. wrote their article a decade before Sears and resonances of their findings were pivotal to Sears' work. While Terenzini et al. used focus-group interviews as a research method to collect data that could be used to describe the transition issue from the point of view of first-year college students, Sears used personal reflections to explain why he as a university instructor is involved in implementing a bridging initiative to help transitions for first-year students at his university.

Terenzini et al.'s (1994) article "The Transition to College: Diverse Students, Diverse Stories" analyzes data from a series of focus-group interviews with 132 diverse new students in four educational settings: a community college, liberal arts college, urban, commuter university and a large research university. The students were selected by contact people at the educational settings to be characteristic of the entering student population at each institution. The limitations of this design are discussed in the article. The interviews were described as purposefully open-ended and broadly structured. Terenzini et al. stated the purpose for this investigation: "While much is known about the role of student involvement in various dimension of student change and development, considerably less is known about *how* students become involved as they make the transition from work or high school to college" (p. 57). Eight major findings from the

focus-group interviews were discussed and then seven implications for this study were outlined.

The first finding showed that students in the large research university and their parents “have assumed all along that going to college is what one does after completion of high school. College was simply the next, logical, expected, and desired stage in the passage toward personal and occupational achievement” (Terenzini et al., p. 62). A second finding was that for this particular group of students social concerns were often more frequently expressed than academic concerns: “Making new friends dominated their conversation. For them, the most threatening disjunction was interpersonal, not academic” (p.62). A third finding was from students who were the first-generation to attend college. Terenzini et al. discuss how this group of students were “*breaking*, not continuing, family tradition. For these students, college attendance often involved multiple transitions—academic, social, and cultural” (p. 63). The first three findings reinforce how the issues, challenges, and pressures of transition are not the same for all students.

The fourth and fifth findings centre on the relationships that provide support during the transition to post-secondary education. The fourth finding showed that high school friends had an instrumental role in transition to college for all students. Students with high school friends with them at their post-secondary institution described their pre-college friends functioning “during the early weeks or months of college as a bridge from one academic and interpersonal environment to the next” (p. 64). In contrast, “High school friends who did *not* go on to college may have served to complicate or hinder the transition” (p. 65). A fifth finding discussed the important, but complicated, roles of

students' families "in providing encouragement to attend college and to persist and succeed while there" (p. 65). However, "Some parents may well have recognized that their college-going children—as proud of them as they were—might, metaphorically, never return home" (p. 66). The complexities of culture and discourse communities are explored to some extent in the article, and Terenzini et al. reference other researchers who engage more closely in this argument.

Non-traditional community college and urban state students were often found to experience self-doubt and required validation to support their transition. Terenzini et al. (1994) explain:

Validation is empowering, confirming, and supportive. It is a series of in- and out-of-class experiences with family, peers, faculty members, and staff through which students come to feel accepted in their new community, receiving confirming signals that they can be successful in college and are worthy of a place there, have their previous work and life experiences recognized as legitimate forms of knowledge and learning, have their contributions in class recognized as valuable, and so on. (p. 66)

This finding is in many ways linked to the seventh finding about how students defined the "real learning" that they believed they had experienced in college: "For a substantial number [of students] 'real learning' meant learning about oneself, discovering abilities or personal sources of strength, developing pride in one's ability to survive, and becoming more independent and self-reliant" (p. 68). The eighth and final finding discussed was that learning required co-operation: "The cooperative character of the process meant

helping one another meet and make new friends, establish one's social network, and become established in those of others" (p. 69).

From these findings Terenzini et al. (1994) outline seven implications of this study for creating more successful transitions to post-secondary education:

1. "Promote awareness of the varying character of the transition process for different kinds of students." (p. 69)
2. "Early validation appears to be a central element in students' successful transition to college." (p. 70)
3. "Involve faculty members in new student orientation programs." (p. 71)
4. "Orient parents as well as students." (p. 71)
5. "The transition to college involves both in- and out-of-class experiences." (p. 71)
6. "Institutional accommodations are required." (p. 72)
7. "Somebody has to care." (p. 72)

I found this article insightful into how students perceive their transitions to university, exemplifying how "the transition from high school or work to college is an exceedingly complex phenomenon" (p. 61). The implications from the study provide educators with a practical set of recommendations for designing and implementing policy and curriculum that would address transition issues.

In the second qualitative study, Alan Sears (2004), a professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Windsor, shares his experiences developing interdisciplinary courses designed to facilitate the transition of students from high school to university. His article, "Mind the Gap: Prospects for Easing the Transition

From High School to University” (2004) acknowledges the role of high schools, institutional funding, and traditional university course constructions play during transitions and suggests how to implement interdisciplinary courses to address students’ diverse needs.

At the beginning of the article, Sears (2004) constructs a metaphor about students negotiating the gap between high school and first-year university but throughout the rest of the article deconstructs and challenges the metaphor:

Every year, first-year university students perform an astonishing act of daring and skill as they leap across the great chasm that separates high school from university. Some do not make it, plunging into the depths of the canyon we dispassionately refer to as “attrition.” Those of us who teach at universities barely notice this amazing high-risk feat, except to express our displeasure that the students who arrive in our classes are not better prepared and more motivated. (p. 166)

Throughout the remaining article, Sears discusses how and why it is difficult for students to make the “leap” and how and why instructors could build more bridges to make the journey safer for students. I return to the above narrative in Chapter Six when I look at the issues of transition through the literary example of *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900). “Great chasm,” “plunging,” and “depths of the canyon” (p. 166) all evoke images of a dangerous break in the ground—a dramatically-marked change in environment from one side (high school) to the other (university). It also implies that once over the great division, which is the first year of university, the students will arrive on the other side and

be on higher ground once again. Since students are required to “leap,” Sears implies that there are no bridges in place for students to use to make it to the more even ground.

Sears (2004) attempts in his article to “notice” (p. 166) what challenges students face as they transition from high school and to examine how universities often do little to help. Sears states, “Universities are basically designed to teach self-starters” (p. 167), a method that may have worked 50 years ago “when universities were far more elitist as institutions and admitted only the tiny proportion of the populations deemed best suited for the environment” (p. 167). He argues that although universities have traditionally adopted a model of assumed student self-reliance taught by professors who are self-starters themselves, this might not be the *best* way to teach undergraduates. He suggests that the assumption that students will be able to grasp successfully the skills and attitudes required at university if they work hard enough may be false and worth investigating.

Sears questions the pedagogical sense of bombarding first-year students with courses structured as “a survey of the discipline that gives some sort of overview” (p. 168) of the field or faculty. He claims, “The skills students require to complete this kind of survey often align neither with those they develop in high school nor with those they will need for academic success in subsequent years” (p. 168). Instead, he argues that universities should be working in closer contact with high school teachers and in greater co-operation within their departments to design a continuum of content and skill development. He cautions university instructors against playing “the party game of pin the blame on the high school, which absolves us of responsibility for systematic skill development” (p. 168). Instead, Sears argues that universities need to move beyond

surveying the content of the discipline in the first year to teaching the explicit skills required for academic success. This work seems to need more publicity.

Sears is aware of the challenges for academics to teach specific skills, stating, "University faculty members are experts who are long past the initial experience of learning the difficult skills we now use everyday" (p.168). Writing is a clear example of a skill academics are likely to have grasped through trial and error as students themselves but may not feel comfortable teaching others how to accomplish the required style, structure, and discourse: "It can be difficult to explain even a rudimentary skill like tying a shoelace or driving to a rank beginner if you have mastered it to the extent that you do it without thinking" (p. 169). Sears suggests that in order to move towards teaching skills to students, universities will "require a break with individualistic teaching strategies that tend to dominate" (p. 169). Sears argues that universities require a shift to an "innovative research-based teaching culture" (p. 169) and points towards learner-centred learning and interdisciplinary teaching as possible vehicles for this movement.

Sears argues that in order for students to transition successfully to university we must, "begin with the learner rather than the discipline" (p. 169). Sears claims that "the most valuable skills our students learn are trans-disciplinary, that is, they cross the lines of many or all disciplines" (p. 170). This assertion is questionable, as others might argue that skills are specific to disciplines due to the situated literacy context of the field. However, the interdisciplinary approaches to teaching are currently being piloted at the University of Windsor in a new course "designed to expose first-year students to the breadth of ways of knowing across the arts and the social sciences by showing how different disciplinary perspectives can come together to cast a light on a particular

problem” (p. 171). The programme is still in its initial stages, so Sears’ article is meant to be an exploratory piece that reflects on the challenges of transitions and proposes a new way of considering how to approach solving some of the difficulties both students and instructors face.

Surveying the Field of Transition Literature: Conclusions from the Conversation.

There is a great diversity in the purposes, methodologies, and foci for the researchers who have contributed to the field of literature that examines the issues of transitions from high school or work to college or university. Adelman’s (2006) and Frenette’s (2007) studies provide quantitative descriptions of the current transition trends in the United States and Canada. Studies such as these help me to “name the phenomenon” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007) that I explore in my inquiry. Terenzini et al.’s (1994) qualitative study describes the issues of transition from the perspectives of the 132 students who participated in the study. Sears’ (2004) article offers the perspective of an instructor who is part of the transition context and is working to implement curricular changes at an institutional level. By surveying the field of literature, or metaphorically joining the conversation of transitional issues, I am able to better define the “what” of my inquiry. However, in order to describe and contextualize the “how” of the approach to my inquiry, both theoretically and methodologically, I need to extend review to the fields of sociocultural theory and narrative inquiry.

Conversation Two: The Field of Sociocultural Theory and Academic Literacies

How I Came to the Theoretical Conversation and What I Brought With Me.

If I continue with the metaphor of positioning my inquiry as a conversation, then this part of the review of literature is the shortest conversation. I believe the theoretical focus of a study, whether explicit or implicit, is often the most revealing and explanatory aspect of the research. Researchers most often base their decisions about methodology, analysis, and implications of research from a theoretical standpoint. This section of the literature review is my attempt to explore the sociocultural theories that drive my approach to my inquiry. However, the section is briefer because it is in many ways the overlap area between the field of transition literature and the field of narrative inquiry literature. One can imagine the middle section of a Venn diagram. The overlap section provides a link between the two circles, but it is smaller than the parts of the circle that stand alone. Sociocultural theories can be found in approaches to transition narratives, especially in the work of researchers examining academic literacies. Sociocultural theories also often frame narrative inquiry studies. As I began to explore the research of sociocultural theorists, I began to read more studies with a narrative approach to research.

I was initially attracted to Sears' (2004) article because of the title "Mind the Gap." During my early applications to SHHRC scholarships and to graduate schools I had proposed a similar title for my future research. I was living and teaching in England, and during frequent trips to London, I would stare at the signs on the Underground warning passengers to mind the gap. I would begin to think about how dangerous the gap

between high school and university could be for many students. Just as the signs provided warning to passengers to be aware of the potentially hazardous gap between the train and the platform, I wanted my research and writing to provide warning to first-year students and instructors of the potential hazards of moving between two vastly different learning environments. Sears is looking for ways to fix some of the hazards of first-year university. He believes that approaching teaching and learning from a skills-based, interdisciplinary approach may provide the gap-filling bridge for students to move safely between high school and university. At the point when I was most attracted to Sears' article, I too was looking for a fix for students. My personal experiences led me to hypothesize that the bridge needed to fill the gap could be constructed through improved and specific writing instruction at both the high school and university level. Although this hypothesis is no longer central to my study, there are still fossils from this thinking that remain in my methods design and in the theoretical reading that has informed my thinking about situated literacy practices.

I had always believed I was a writer; therefore, writing mattered to me because it was part of who I thought I was. When I first launched into graduate studies, I hypothesized that if students could learn to write at a level matching university expectations before they arrived at university, then their transitions to the learning and thinking culture would be more successful. As part of my coursework, I began to work on two pilot projects (Watt, 2005, 2006) that focused largely upon the impact of writing preparation on students' and instructors' perceptions of transition to first-year university. I was supported in my hunch that both students and instructors did not feel first-year students were prepared for the writing demands of first-year English courses, but I was

surprised by how often the stories about writing were not the stories the participants really wanted to tell. All sorts of other issues and concerns flowed from the participants. I realized that those stories, both what was being told and the fact that there existed such a strong desire and need for the telling, was what really intrigued and fascinated me. I learned I needed to approach understanding teaching, learning, and writing through a sociocultural focus.

New Literacy Studies: Situated Discourses, Situated Selves.

By reading the work of many, but especially Vygotsky, Street, and Gee, I began to understand that how we speak, think, believe, dream, envision, and articulate are markers of our social construction. We define ourselves and our world through our experiences with others. Through my newly-adopted sociocultural lens, I began to look at studies that used ethnography or grounded theory methods to explore transition from the position of situated literacies, academic literacies, discourse communities, and identity formation.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, literacy and language research has adopted a more “discourse-based, situated, and sociocultural view” (Gee, 2000a, p. 204). Gee explains that this view “demands that we see reading (and writing and speaking) as not one thing, but many different socioculturally situated reading (writing and speaking) practices. It demands that we see meaning in the world and in texts as situated in learners’ experiences” (p. 204). Hamilton and Barton (2001) urge researchers working within a sociocultural approach to “look beyond texts themselves to what people do with

literacy, with whom, where, and how” (p. 217). The sociocultural approach challenges “autonomous” (Street, 1999) views of literacy. Instead, Street claims that literacies are best understood through “ideological models” that will “explore the associations between cultural conventions, literacy practices, notions of self, person and identity, and struggles over power” (p. 135).

Gee (1991a) warns that there are complications in assuming a sociocultural view of literacy:

If you opt for seeing literacy as a matter of discourse systems, you have opened a Pandora’s box of social and political concerns. You are dealing with the root of people’s identities, since discourse systems are ultimately about the ways in which people situate themselves in the world. (p. 135)

Gee (1991b) defines discourse as “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, or thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (p. 3). He compares discourse to an “‘identity kit’ . . . complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act and talk as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (1991b, p. 3). Despite, or perhaps due to, the complications of linking discourse, literacy, and notions of identity, research using this theoretical model has become common for investigating how and why language is used in situated literacy experiences. Many of the researchers of these studies consider their work as part of a movement known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS), which is “based on the view that reading and writing can only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural (and we can add historical, political, and economic) practices of which they are a part” (Gee, 2000b, p.180).

I began my research into the transition from high school to university with a hypothesis that more academic and discipline-specific writing instruction would help build a needed bridge between high school and university. After reading some of the above NLS theorists, I narrowed my hypothesis further: I believed that a more successful transition to university could be attributed to individuals' exposure to and identity with the academic discourses of a specific discipline. Some students' past experiences would help them feel a sense of belonging to an academic community's ways of thinking, acting, and expressing themselves. Specific to my research at this time, I believed that if students had experienced reading, writing, and speaking in the discourse of the specific disciplines in the university prior to entering first year, either in the home or the high school, they would be more likely to be successful during the transition. I began to look at the work of NLS researchers who were considering the impact of the sociocultural contexts on writing in postsecondary education.

Lea and Street (1998) produced a model of student writing in higher education showing how different approaches to teaching writing are more or less likely to include consideration of issues of discourse and identity. The first level of instruction in the model is called "study skills" and is based on a "student deficit" model. Jones, Turner and Street (1999) describe this level of the model as assuming "that literacy is a set of atomized skills which students have to learn and which are then transferable to other contexts" (p. xxi). The next level is "academic socialization" (Lea & Street, 1998) and in this approach "the task of the tutor/advisor is to inculcate students into a new 'culture,' that of the academy" (Jones, Turner & Street, 1999, p. xxi). The third level of the model, which Lea and Street (1998) propose is the most appropriate of writing instruction to

emulate, is the “academic literacies” level. In this level students are meant to negotiate conflicting literacy practices with an awareness of the power structures that exist within the discourse system. Lea and Street position New Literacy Studies approaches to writing instruction as belonging to this third level of academic literacies.

Ivanic (1998) focuses her research on identity as it is created, changed, and transformed through the writing process. Lea and Street (1998) would position her work on the “academic literacies” level of their model. Ivanic argues that writing is a strong measure of identity because it becomes the final, tangible, and assessed product of many university disciplines: “Writing is an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped possibilities for self-hood, playing their part in reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses and the values, beliefs, and interests which they embody” (1998, p. 32). She discusses the impact of transition to university in creating a sense of crisis for individuals: “If people entering higher education experience an ‘identity crisis,’ it is not because of any inadequacy in themselves, but because of a mismatch between the social contexts which have constructed their identities in the past and the new social context which they are entering” (p. 12). Ivanic is arguing that individuals create a sense of themselves or an identity specific to the situation. Therefore, when a new situation or “social context” is introduced, the individuals will potentially have to construct, or at least grow and transform into a new self to fit the new context, or reject the new situation to retain their past identities.

Conversation Three: The Field of Narrative Inquiry

How I Came to the Narrative Conversation and What I Brought With Me.

When I read Ivanic's work for the first time, I was impressed with her explicit connection between writing and identity. She was working from a similar premise as my own hypothesis. As I read her arguments I engaged in a conversation which helped me articulate and position my own argument: Certain individuals who identified more strongly to their academic community would sooner and more successfully transition into the written discourse expected by that community. However, while engaged in the dialogical process I found I still believed in this premise, but I began to question whether writing might not be the only, or best, means for expressing identity or building bridges between past and present experiences. Ivanic focuses on writing and I will hazard a guess that she does so because there are elements of her own life story that makes writing and writing instruction one of her most important stories. I speculate that like me, Ivanic's experiences as a student or as a teacher may make writing seem an even stronger "act of identity" (p. 32) than it may seem to others. How could I resolve, acknowledge, and respect the differences between *my* important stories and *my participants'* important stories? I needed to join the conversations in the educational and interdisciplinary research community that were discussing narratives in relationship to identity and narratives as a methodological approach to inquiry.

I will briefly introduce the conversation about narrative inquiry before I explore its multiple voices or further examine the contexts of the conversation. Chase (2005) defines narrative inquiry as follows:

Contemporary narrative inquiry can be characterized as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them. (p. 651)

I was attracted to the interdisciplinary analytical lenses that would allow the phenomenon of transition to be told by the students and professors who were living through the educational experience.

Chase suggests there are five analytic lenses that “suggest the distinctiveness of narrative inquiry” (2005, p. 656):

1. *Oral and written narratives are treated as distinct forms of discourse.* She describes narratives as “a way of understanding one’s own and other’s actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (Chase, p. 656).
2. *Narratives are verbal actions that do or accomplish something.* Chase argues, “When someone tells a story, he or she shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience, and reality” (p. 657).
3. *Social resources and circumstance are viewed as both enabling and constraining narratives.* Chase explains:

While acknowledging that every instance of narrative is particular, researchers use this lens to attend to similarities and differences across

narratives. For example, they emphasize patterns in the storied selves, subjectivities, and realities that narrators create during particular times and in particular places. (p. 657)

4. *Narratives are socially situated, interactive, and performative: They are produced in a particular setting, for a particular audience, for particular purposes.* This lens requires researcher to emphasize that a narrative is “flexible, variable, and shaped in part by interaction with the audience. In other words, a narrative is a joint production of narrator and listener” (p. 657).
5. *Researchers view themselves as narrators while interpreting, presenting and publishing their ideas about the narratives they studied.* Chase claims that this means that “the four lenses just described make as much sense when applied to the researcher as the researched” (p. 657).

Chase’s (2005) definition and five analytic lenses provides a framework for the diverse conversations occurring in the narrative inquiry field.

Multiple Voices in the Narrative Inquiry Conversation.

In an August 2007 search of the database ERIC using the term narrative inquiry I encountered 363 published items. In a process similar to what I described for selecting criteria to narrow the focus for narrative studies, I chose to narrow my review to the 127 peer-reviewed articles. Again, I limited this scope by narrowing my discussion to a few of the earliest articles from the search and then the articles from the past two years to contribute to my understanding of the research and increase my ability to carry out a

reasonably important study. There has been a phenomenal output of refereed narrative inquiry articles in the past few years. Again, I will not engage in conversation with each of the areas, but instead will provide an overview of the multiple voices using narrative inquiry as a research methodology.

The earliest search result for refereed journal articles was a 1990 article by Connelly and Clandinin entitled “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry.” According to the Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) article I refer to earlier in this chapter, “The term narrative inquiry was first used in the educational research field by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) in an article published in *Educational Researcher*. Their conceptualization of narrative inquiry arises from a Deweyan (1938) notion that life is education” (p. 22). However, a 2005 article by Susan Chase in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* offers a more interdisciplinary approach to narrative inquiry and provides a longer historical discussion of the research methodology in other disciplines. Conle (2003) notes there has been an “astonishing proliferation of a field that was in its infancy 15 years ago” (p. 3). The ERIC search results illustrate this observation. In the articles published in the early 1990s, many researchers focused on the methodology of narrative inquiry itself, explaining and illustrating its potential as a form of educational research—especially in the area of teacher education (Carter, 1993; Conle, 1996; Diamond, 1993; Mishler, 1990).

The refereed articles from 2006 – 2007 in the ERIC search are representative of a diverse range of educational issues being addressed through the narrative inquiry research method. I have synthesized these articles into five major categories. The area of multicultural education has the largest number of articles reporting a use of the narrative

inquiry method. These articles range from narrative inquiries exploring how Israeli Kindergarten teachers cope while teaching in an environment of war (Brady & Baum, 2007) and student construction of meaning from a text book account of the Israeli-Arab conflict (Porat, 2006) to a narrative inquiry where Black and Latina/o children talked about spirituality with family members (Norton, 2006). The research topics are diverse in this category, but focus on the effects of culture on an educational experience or way of knowing (Chan, 2006, 2007; Famer, Knapp, & Benton, 2007; Obeng, 2007; Sciliz, 2007).

A second category of narrative inquiry studies focuses on the experiences of educators during periods of school reforms (Craig, 2006, 2007; Drake & Sherin, 2006; Yu & Lau, 2006). Teacher knowledge and experiences is a third category of narrative inquiry studies. Barrett (2007) focuses on the experience of teaching environmental education; Beattie, Dobson, Thornton & Hegge (2007) tell about how eight experienced educators seek life-long learning; and Levy's (2006) narrative inquiry focuses on the experiences of networked learning in continuing education. A fourth category, which has less articles in this current time range, but has historically been a focus for narrative inquiries in education, are studies in preservice or teacher training (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006). The fifth and final category are the articles that focus on the methodology of narrative inquiry itself (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Coulter, Michael, & Poyner, 2007; Otto, 2007).

Conversations to Contextualize the Field of Narrative Inquiry.

Historical Context of Narrative Inquiry.

Kreiswirth (1992) poses a set of questions that is important to this thesis: “The large question I want to ask is why? Why narrative? And why narrative now? Why have we decided to trust the tale? And what does this say about how we define, talk about, and organized knowledge?” (pp. 629-630) The questions can in part be answered by briefly examining the rise in the interdisciplinary study of narrative.

In an introduction to the collection *Narrative and Identity* (2001), Brockmeir and Carbaugh explain that, “Narratology emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a particular structuralist way of studying written narrative texts, primarily fictional literature. Since then, narratology has moved towards an interdisciplinary semiotic and cultural theory of narrative texts and contexts” (p. 4). Both Brockmeir and Carbaugh (2001) and Chase (2005) point to a presentation given by William Labov and Joshua Waletzky at the 1966 meeting of the American Ethnological Society as “pivotal” to the growth and acceptance of narrative as a legitimate research methodology. The Labov and Waletzky paper, “Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience,” published in 1967, “not only paved the way for a systematic investigation of all forms and genres of nonfictional narratives and communication, but it also, in turn has influenced the study of fictional narrative” (Brockmeir & Carbaugh, 2001, p. 6). Brockmeir and Carbaugh argue that narrative theory today has extended “its scope and cultural interest” and “distanced itself

from the 'grand narratives of structuralism' and its focal concerns upon invariant rules, deep structures, sentences, and dualism" (p. 5). As the study of narrative has been influenced by post-modern ideas, Brockmeir and Carbaugh assert:

There has been a growing interest across the human sciences in treating narratives as the means which social and cultural life comes into being, an interest that includes the narrative and rhetorical fabric that underlies most of our knowledge, including scientific thought. (p. 8)

The study of narratives has also become the study of identity, culture, and knowledge.

Bakhtin's Influence on Narrative Studies.

Michail Bakhtin's influence on the study of narratives has been instrumental to the conceptualization of identity as it is understood and formed through the use and possibilities of language. Brockmeir and Carbaugh (2001) explain that Bakhtin compared the tropes that he believed constituted the modern novel to life narratives:

What, in his view, is distinctive about the modern novel such as its special sense of temporality, polyphony, and intertextuality. . . is a basic characteristic of the narrative construction of a life. As a narrative self-account is itself part of a life, embedded in a lived context of interaction and communication, intention and imagination, ambiguity and vagueness, there is always, potentially, a next and different story to tell, as there occur different situations in which to tell it. (pp. 7-8)

There is a certain limitlessness that exists in the telling of narratives and construction of identity if seen through this Bakhtinian lens:

In every person's life there always remains unrealized potentials and unrealized demands, unfulfilled options of identity. . . . Bakhtin's theory of narrative discourse suggests a view of human beings as always making themselves, as always able to render untrue any definitive version of identity. . . . Viewed in this way, we may conclude that the study of life narratives is not only wedded to actual and particular human life worlds, but turns into a laboratory of possibilities for human identity construction. (2001, p. 8)

Bakhtin's literary study of narratives becomes a powerful route to examine the multiplicities of identity construction and can be continually read as an influence in the interdisciplinary narrative studies that have followed his work.

Bruner's Influence on Narrative and Identity Studies.

Within the body of Bruner's writing on narrative, self, and cultural construction, I find the most compelling answers to Kreiswirth's (1992) questions of *why narrative, why now, and why trust the tale*. For the theoretical framework of this thesis, Jerome Bruner's work in the psychology of narrative and identity becomes central. Bruner's theoretical work will be woven throughout the rest of this thesis, especially in Chapters Five and Six in which I analyze the participants' narratives. At this point in the thesis I intend only to introduce some of the key elements of Bruner's theories that have helped justify personal

life narratives as the means to study identity transitions from high school to first-year university.

Bruner (2001) often refers to self-told life narratives and autobiography interchangeably: "In autobiography, we set forth a view of what we call our Self and its doings, reflections, thoughts, and place in the world" (p. 25). Autobiography becomes central in Bruner's (1990) methodology:

We obviously cannot track people through life and observe or interrogate them each step of the way. Even if we could, doing so would transform the meaning of what they were up to. . . . One viable alternative is obvious—to do the inquiry retrospectively, through *autobiography*. . . . I mean, simply, an account of what one thinks one did in what settings in what ways for what felt reasons. . . . It does not matter whether the account conforms to what others might say who were witnesses, nor are we in pursuit of such ontologically obscure issues as whether the account is "self-deceptive" or "true." Our interest rather is only in what the person thought [s]he did, what [s]he thought [s]he was doing it for, what kinds of plights [s]he thought [s]he was in, and so on. (pp. 119-120)

For Bruner, autobiography is a fascinating point of study because the narrator engages in a process of telling how the events from the past have shaped and influenced not only the events but the narrator's understanding and sense of self in the present:

A narrator in the here and now, takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in the there and then, one who happens to share his name. He must by convention bring the protagonist from the past into the present in such a way that the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and

become one person with a shared consciousness. Now, in order to bring a protagonist from the there and then to the point where the original protagonist becomes the present narrator, one needs a theory of growth or at least of transformation. (2001, pp. 27-28)

I, like Bruner, was interested in how my participants would tell their stories of the transition from high school to first-year university. I wanted to know how the self in the present, either as a student or instructor of first-year university would tell about the growth and transformation from the self then, either in high school or first years teaching or studying at a university.

I became interested in the issues surrounding the transitions from high school to first-year university because my first-year of university was marked by difficult yet, eventually, transformational experiences. I told my stories of first-year university often, most likely because it was a *turning point* (Bruner, 1986) for me. I found it important and intriguing that when I would tell my first-year stories, others wanted and almost seemed to need to tell their stories from this similar time frame. Bruner (2001) argues that Western cultures have distinct moments where turning points are more likely to take place. He defines turning points as “episodes in which, as if to underline the power of the agent’s intentional states, the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist’s story to a belief, a conviction, a thought” (p. 31). Bruner explicitly states that the time after high school is often a culturally-recognized turning point for many individuals in Western societies:

Turning points are steps towards narratorial consciousness. Not surprising that in most autobiographies, they are located at points where the culture in fact gives

more degrees of freedom—elbow room for turning points. In America, for example, high-school graduation is one such point. “I’ve always done what my parents wanted. At that point I started thinking about what I was and I decided that...” all such passages are marked by a mental verb. This signals an “inside” transformation, a change in intentional state. Had the autobiography been written before the break, you sense it would have been a different autobiography.

(Bruner, 2001, p. 33)

Bruner suggests that turning points become a potentially powerful time to engage in narrative inquiry studies.

Jerome Bruner’s work is largely focused on the psychology of narratives, making his body of research an intriguing place to begin exploring the connections between identity, perception/construction of specific realities, and the telling of autobiographical narratives. For Bruner (1991), “The central concern is not how narrative as a text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality” (pp. 5-6). He proposes ten features of narratives that can help a reader or listener gain a sense of how a mind is constructing a reality: (1) Narrative diachronicity; (2) Particularity (3) Intentional state entailment; (4) Hermeneutic composability; (5) Canonicity and breach; (6) Referentiality; (7) Genericness; (8) Normativeness; (9) Context sensitivity and negotiability; (10) Narrative accrued. Bruner (1994) states that his approach to narrative “is a constructivist one—a view that takes as its central premise that ‘world making’ is the principal function of mind” (p. 28).

Verisimilitude and Verifiability in Narrative Studies.

The sixth and ninth of Bruner's (1991) list of ten narrative "world making" features most directly refer to issues of truth and accuracy. When explaining the sixth feature, referentiality, Bruner argues that listeners must judge a story by what seems real rather than by whether or not the described event or happening can actually be checked. He states: "Narrative 'truth' is judged by its verisimilitude rather than its verifiability" (p. 13). Narratives should be judged by whether or not they seem lifelike and possible considering the teller and the context. Therefore, referentiality is closely connected to Bruner's ninth feature: context sensitivity and negotiability. Bruner explains, "We inevitably take the teller's intentions into account and do so in terms of our background knowledge (and, indeed, in light of our presuppositions about the teller's background knowledge)" (p. 17). This implies that "We seem to be able to take competing versions of a story with a perspectival grain of salt, much more so than in the case of arguments or proofs" (p. 17). When narratives are used as data, the researcher and the readers of the research are challenged to use a "narrative mode of thought" (Bruner, 1986), rather than the "logical argument mode of thought" (Bruner, 1986) that is more traditionally associated with scientific research. Within the scope and the discourse of narrative inquiry, I need to search the narrative data for lifelikeness and accept that inaccuracies, untruths, or misrepresentations can be incorporated as part of the analysis.

Some autobiographers are particularly self-reflexive about the issues of memory, accuracy, and truth in their memoirs. For example, Mary McCarthy's (1957) unique autobiography *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* tells about the conflict in McCarthy's

childhood after the death of her parents in 1918. However, throughout her recollections she also writes “notes to the reader” where she questions the truth and accuracy in her telling. Before she begins any narration, McCarthy writes:

Many a time, in the course of doing these memoirs, I have wished that I were writing fiction. The temptation to invent has been very strong, particularly where recollection is hazy and I remember the substance of the event but not the details. . . . Then there are cases where I am not sure myself whether I am making something up. I think I remember but I am not positive. (pp. 3-4)

McCarthy proposes the reason that she may be hazier in her memory and less truthful than other autobiographers is because she was orphaned at a young age and did not have parental influence to check the accuracy of her childhood memories. Freeman (2001) suggests “to confer new meanings onto the past is not necessarily to falsify it, but only to situate within a broader interpretive scheme, one that may have been unavailable at the time of the experience” (p. 291). During in an analysis of the narrative it, therefore, becomes important to consider the time and context of the telling.

Other researchers have explored the narrative truth in other’s telling and have analyzed why an individual’s autobiographical account may vary due to context, audience, and projected identities. Two examples of such research studies are found in *Narrative and Identity* (2001). Voneche (2001) explores how Piaget “wrote several autobiographies aimed at different audiences, thus presenting himself in different ways and on different scenes” (p. 233). Voneche controversially concludes that Piaget offered different versions of himself, but “the fundamental element of all these identities giving rise to different narratives seems to be the fear of madness in a man of bold imagination

and wild ideas” (p. 244). Schulster (2001) searches composer Richard Wagner’s memoirs and personal correspondence to try to determine whether or not Wagner actually experienced a moment of creative inspiration for the opening of his opera “Das Rheingold”. Through careful document analysis, Schulster suggests that Wagner was more likely to have invented his “divine inspiration” moment because of the influence of contemporary philosophers and a desire to create an identity as a “Master.” Schulster writes: “The tale of creative vision made for an impressive story, if not a true story. But, most important, it fit Wagner’s growing conception of himself as a true genius, an Artist, the Master: It was the sort of creative experience a Master *ought* to have; it was *evidence* of his identity” (p. 214). Although the two researchers explore different individuals’ autobiographical accounts and draw different conclusions, Voneche and Schulster share a method of looking beyond whether or not the autobiographical accounts are true to examining *why* that particular version of the truth or untruth has been told and *how* it affects the teller’s identity.

Narrative Studies and Curricular Connections.

Conle (2003) argues in her article “An Anatomy of Narrative Curricula” that, in the fifteen years in which narrative inquiry has proliferated in the field of educational research, “no extensive proposals on how one might see the connection between curricular learning outside the traditional use of narrative in literary education” (p. 3). In her article she argues that experiences investigated narratively “also become curricular experiences for the inquirer—and possibly for the audience, if the experiential narratives

are read or listened to by others” (2003, p. 4). She explains further: “If the narrative activity tends to have autobiographical learner inquiry as its key component (e.g., Conle et al., 2000), the object of the inquiry is the learner himself or herself. . . . ‘Teacher’ and ‘student’ are co-inquirers and co-learners, each with their own crucial expertise contributing to the process” (p. 4).

Conle (2003) outlines five outcomes of narrative curricula which provide a solid framework for assessing the educational value of a narrative inquiry study. Conle’s first outcome is described as “Advances in Understanding”: “Students-inquirers-audiences may come away with a deeper comprehension of particular issues or phenomena. They may understand something differently from the way it was understood before. There may be a deeper appreciation of complexities” (p. 11). The second outcome is “Increased Interpretive Competence”: “Narratives should help us notice what had not been seen before and help us know what to neglect in our efforts of interpretation” (p. 11). The third outcome “Richer Practical Repertoires” is described as follows:

The development of useful repertoires of both an imaginative and practical nature. Although practical repertoires that are readily available for recall are among the aims of case-based instruction, educators using more experiential narratives hope for tacit repertoires acquired through the vicarious experiences these practices can provide. (p. 11)

“Changes in Life” is the fourth outcome. Conle (2003) refers in this outcome’s description to Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) insistence that “through narrative inquiry new stories will be told and lived. Autobiographical narrative inquirers have reported specific changes in their personal and professional lives (Lindsay, 2001; Conle, 1999) or

in the lives of their students (Conle, Li, & Tan, 2002)” (p. 11). The final outcome is “Visions Gained”: “Visions of what can be—or of what should not be—are important factors in decision making, and narratives put those visions before our eyes and ears” (p. 11).

In the conclusion to her article, Conle (2003) forcibly argues that “Curricular complexity and meaningfulness result from connections to life and quest-like inquiry experiences” (p. 13). She states:

Narrative is not merely a good means toward a predetermined end; it does not serve as useful illustration or to provide telling examples. It is a very complex phenomenon. Because it is pervasive in everyday life, it can create the bridges between the everyday and the academic world that, for example, John Dewey (1938) had in mind. (p. 13)

Conle’s article provides an answer to the questions that may arise when reading a narrative inquiry study, “So what does this have to do with education? How is this curricula?”

In this review of the literature for my educational narrative inquiry, I was in a constant conversation between the issues of transition, theory, and research methods. I learned from this dialogue that my questions were worth investigating and would contribute to the ways of knowing and telling about the teaching and learning occurring in first-year university.

CHAPTER THREE

Allowing For Growth and Transformation: Methods & Methodology

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Purpose of the Study

Often our life experiences just happen; we do not take the time to notice our landscapes, mark our routes, or tell our stories. There is power and poignancy in the telling and hearing of the participants' stories of the growth and transformation occurring in the context of the transition from high school to university. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state: "The purpose of . . . retelling, like any retelling in any aspect of the narratives of our lives is to offer possibilities for reliving, new directions, and new ways of doing things" (p. 184). Brockmeir and Carbaugh (2001) discuss the importance and appropriateness of narrative in the finding of identity and construction of realities:

Narrative proves to be a supremely appropriate means for the exploration of the self, or, more precisely, the construction of selves in cultural contexts of time and space. . . . The very idea of human identity—perhaps we can even say, the very possibility of human identity—is tied to the very notion of narrative and narrativity. (p. 15)

What we are told about and what we tell about ourselves in stories becomes largely how we learn to see ourselves.

During the second interviews in this study, I concentrated on the participants' perceptions of whether telling about their first-year university experiences motivated learning, reflection, or action. Most of the participants shared that telling their stories

provided a sense of wholeness to their first-year teaching or learning experience, made them feel proud of their changes, and allowed them to connect past experiences with present realities. This study became significant to the participants because it gave them the opportunity to tell what they needed to tell in order to make sense of their experiences and identities. When lived and told, first-year university teaching and learning narratives became curricular experiences (Conle, 2003) for reflecting on identities in constructed realities.

Statement of Research Questions.

The following questions directed the search for stories of growth and transformation that may occur during the transition from high school to first year university:

1. What do personal narratives reveal about students' and academic instructors' perspectives of first-year university experiences?
2. What similarities and differences exist between the narratives told by academic instructors and first-year university students?
3. What do personal narratives reveal about the individuals' identities and narrative as a way of knowing and understanding the transition from high school to university?

These questions become integrated into the analysis of the narratives in Chapters Five and Six. In the final chapter, I return to explicitly address each question as a conclusion to the narrative inquiry process.

Rationale for Narrative Inquiry as Data Gathering Methodology

Following from the “conversation” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007) or review of the literature in Chapter Two, I selected narrative inquiry as the most appropriate research methodology for my study. Looking at transition to university through the analytic lenses described above provides a unique place for my inquiry to contribute to the scholarly conversations about the phenomenon. I chose to structure my study as a narrative inquiry, not just because of my conversation with the existing literature, but also through my own experiences conducting pilot studies in preparation for writing my thesis.

During the coursework requirements for my Master’s of Education degree, I completed two pilot studies investigating the transition from high school to university. The first study (Watt, 2005) interviewed one English Department administrator, one English 1200 regular-section instructor, and one English 1200 writing-instructor on the impact of writing instruction on the transition for students from high school to first-year university English classes. In the second pilot study (Watt, 2006), I interviewed three students from an English 1200 writing-intensive section about their perspectives on the transition from high school to university English classes. At this point, I thought writing would matter to everyone I interviewed about first-year university. I believed every participant would want to tell me some story about how writing in university affected their sense of self and the communities they were entering and leaving behind. For the instructors of English in my pilot study and in this current study, writing was an important part of their stories, especially their stories of frustration that students were not

academically prepared to write at the level they were expecting. However, most English instructors identify themselves as readers and writers. Their identity is closely linked with their ability to express themselves in writing and to understand and analyze the powerful effects of language. Nonetheless, writing was not the only issue identified and discussed by the instructors. Many stories of their own learning, teacher training, or pedagogical philosophies were shared with as much, or more, enthusiasm as their discussions about first-year students' writing preparation. For many of the students I interviewed, writing was not a part of their transition stories. In fact, many said they felt prepared in writing and instead wanted to talk about other areas of their academic or social transitions that had seemed far more anxious and worrying to them.

As I listened to the actual stories that students and instructors wanted to tell during my pilot studies (Watt, 2005; Watt, 2006) I decided I wanted to know more about a research methodology that would encourage the telling and analysis of narratives. As I explored the field of narrative inquiry, I became convinced that narratives would provide an insightful way to investigate how people come to know and articulate their lived experiences. Narratives would provide another "mode of thought" (Bruner, 1986) or way of knowing to the more traditional discursive reasoning found in regular theses:

We regularly utilize both narrative and discursive reasoning in order to organize and make sense of our worlds and our experience. We explain our lived experiences in terms of plots, and more often than not, those plot structures produce the most sensible statements and explanations of our experience and beliefs. (Worth, 2005, p. 9-10)

Using narrative inquiry as my research methodology allowed me to explore what the participants determined were their most important first-year university teaching and learning experiences. Narrative inquiry also offered me the opportunity to explore the participants', and my own, ways of knowing both discursively and narratively.

Context

Setting is a key element of story structures or grammars. Time and place must be established early in narratives to guide the readers' or listeners' expectations, help them to make sense of the actions that follow, and allow them to predict characters' motivation. This was a study of narratives: The context of the study was also the setting of the narratives and therefore key to understanding all that follows.

This study took place at the University of Manitoba, which is Manitoba's largest post-secondary institution, and its only research-intensive and medical- and doctoral-granting institution. It currently has a population of over 27,000 students (University of Manitoba, 2007-2008, <http://webapps.cc.umanitoba.ca/calendar08/university.asp>). The University of Manitoba is located in Winnipeg, Manitoba's capital city and the home to 75% of the province's population. There are two other universities and several colleges providing post-secondary education in Winnipeg. The University of Manitoba has two campus areas in the city. The Bannatyne campus is home to most of the health and medical sciences faculties and is located in downtown Winnipeg. Located on the southern edge of the city, The Fort Garry campus is home to most of the administrative buildings, Student's Union and student services, and many of the other faculties. The Fort Garry

campus has a commuter culture as most students live off campus, many with their families to save money, and drive, bus, walk, or cycle to school. There are only approximately 900 spaces for students in residences on campus (Housing and Student Life, 2007). These spaces are designated for students in all years, including graduate and international students.

Understanding "U1" is important to this study because first-year students at the University of Manitoba enter "University 1" or "U1." This is a programme of study, "designed to give entering students the opportunity to adjust to university life and academic demands, explore options, and gain experience before they make definitive decisions on their academic and career goals" (University of Manitoba, 2007-2008, Section 1: University 1 Overview). The U1 program is described as having *three main pillars*: (a) academic advising, (b) academic support, and (c) orientation. In the 2007-2008 on-line calendar there is a further explanation: "University 1 is the first 30 credit hours of most University of Manitoba programs, and depending on choice of target faculty, may be completed through either full-time or part-time study." (Section 2.1).

During the first 60-credit hours of university, students are required to take a minimum of "one three credit hour course with significant content in written English" (University of Manitoba, 2007-2008, Section 3.3). However, many arts-based faculties require six credits of written English for acceptance after U1. Students have some choices of courses that they will take to cover the written requirement, but the majority of these courses come from English, History, Religion, Philosophy, or Women's Studies departments. In order to meet the writing requirement, many first-year students take an

introductory English course even if they have no intentions of pursuing further studies in English.

The participants for this study were recruited from English 1200 Representative Literary Works, one of the first-year course offerings meeting the six-credit-hour writing requirement. The course is described in the 2006-2007 University of Manitoba calendar as follows: "An introduction to the study of literature, with emphasis on the development of reading and writing skills. Poetry, prose and drama from various historical periods" (University of Manitoba, 2007-2008, Aurora Course Descriptions). During the 2005 – 2006 academic year, the English department offered 13 on-campus sections of English 4.120 (known in the 2006-2007 academic year as English 1200) with a total registration number of 501 students (English Department Registration Statistics, 2006). Each section had its own instructor who determines the texts to be studied and the focus of each class and assignment.

Two sections of English 1200 are designated as "Writing Intensive Sections." Writing-intensive sections have been in existence since 1996 and are provided extra funding from Central Administration. Regular sections of English 1200 have a set cap of 50 students and instructors of these sections require only the final draft of each assignment for assessment. In contrast, the two writing intensive sections have a set cap of 35 students and instructors require two drafts of each assignment for assessment. The instructors are provided with a teaching assistant to help with teaching, marking, and conferencing with students. The instructors and teaching assistants of writing intensive sections are highly encouraged to use writing workshops as part of the drafting process. When I originally structured this thesis, I believed that writing instruction would be an

important aspect of smoother transitions for first-year students. I wanted to interview instructors and students from a regular section and a writing intensive section to investigate whether their perspectives of first-year teaching and learning seemed to be different as a result of the more or less explicit teaching of writing. After completing the interviews, it became evident that registration in the writing intensive section did not seem to affect the narratives about first-year university that the students or instructors told.

As explained in Chapter One, I chose to limit recruitment of volunteers from the English 1200 community for a variety of reasons. The first reason was personal, the second reason was pragmatic, and the third reason was potential. I wanted the participants to share one, common, current educational experience. The situated discourse community of this course, especially during second term, linked very different individuals through a shared experience of participating in the course. This provided an avenue for comparing and contrasting the data that would emerge. I chose to interview and co-author narratives with the participants during the second term of first-year rather than first term because I wanted students to have some time to adjust to university and reflect upon some of what Bruner (1986) refers to as “turning point” moments in their experiences thus far.

Participants

Eight members of the University of Manitoba community participated in this study. The participants were two volunteer instructors of English 1200 Representative

Literary Works and six volunteer students—three from each of the instructors' classes. One instructor and her students were from a regular English 1200 section, and the other instructor and her students were from a writing intensive section of English 1200. The recruitment process of these volunteers is explained in detail in the procedures section (p. 79). Before I describe the participants any further, I want to acknowledge the well-documented "volunteer bias" that is frequently discussed in research methodology classes and texts. McMillan (2004) describes the tendency for volunteers "to be better educated, higher socioeconomically, less authoritarian, and less conforming than nonvolunteers" (p. 116). I needed participants to volunteer and feel no sense of obligation or coercion to be involved in the study so results could be less biased. Also, I simply wanted to collect stories of individuals' perspectives. If the individuals who volunteered had the tendencies described above, I knew that those tendencies would likely, also become parts of their stories. In this way, if these tendencies then became part of their stories, I could explain, at least in part, that this condition was recognized from the onset.

In this narrative inquiry study, it was my goal to listen carefully to how the participants shared their perspectives of first-year teaching and learning, and to represent those stories accurately for the participants. In order to meet this goal I needed to have a limited number of participants so that I could meet and interview each participant twice—once to gather the initial data from which the narrative was derived and the second to check with the participants that I had told their stories in a manner with which they were comfortable with the accuracy. I chose to recruit two instructors, not only to offer a difference in perspective, but also because I was initially interested in examining whether being an instructor, or student, of a writing-intensive section affected the

perception of first-year teaching or learning. I chose to interview three students from each class to gain a range of perspectives and experiences. I did not seek a representative sample of all first-year students and instructors or even a representative sample of English 1200 students and instructors. My decision on the numbers of participants was largely pragmatic: I wanted to hear a variety of stories and experiences, but I wanted to be able to collect the data within a six-to-eight week period in the second term of an academic year. I also wanted to be able to analyze the data thoroughly but within a limited time frame.

Instructors.

The two instructors were both enthusiastic about being involved in the project and interested in talking about pedagogy and first-year teaching issues. A more specific description of each of the instructor participants are provided before their individual narratives in Chapter Four.

Students.

The students who volunteered, came ready and open to talk about their experiences in first-year; and they shared a variety of perspectives on transition issues. As a group, the students shared some interesting overlaps of personal background that was revealing about the context of the study. There is perhaps nothing surprising about the overlaps, especially considering the students were volunteers, all attended University of

Manitoba, and all were able to and had chosen to attend university. This is an issue that is discussed in Chapter Two's review of the field of transition literature, especially in Frenette's (2007) study about social and financial barriers to attending first-year university. All student participants except for Marty, who is a mature student, lived at home with their parents. The students lived in all areas of the city, and one participant lived in a smaller community outside of Winnipeg. Again, all of the students except for Marty identified that at least one of their parents had attended university. Another shared characteristic of the student participants was that none of the six had been to visit their English instructors during office hours. A more specific description of each of the student participants are provided before their individual narratives in Chapter Four.

Procedures of the Study

The Head of the English Department was first contacted and provided with a written description of the proposed research. I requested and received permission to conduct the study within the Department and then began the process to recruit volunteers. In my letter to the Head of the English Department I described my criteria for the two instructor volunteers as follows:

1. The instructors should be currently teaching the English 1200 Representative Literary Works course.
2. One volunteer should be instructing a regular section and one volunteer should be instructing a writing intensive section of English 1200.

3. The volunteers should show some interest in pedagogical issues, be willing to participate in two interview sessions, and allow me to recruit students from their sections of English 1200.

I suggested in the letter to the Head that she, or another administrator within the Department of English responsible for undergraduate or first-year teaching, could forward me a contact list for all the instructors of current English 1200 sections or all the instructors that fit the above criteria. In response to my letter, the Head of English suggested two current English 1200 instructors, one teaching a regular section and one teaching a writing intensive section, whom she believed to be most likely to agree to participate in the study. The Head added that if I contacted the suggested instructors and they did not feel they were able to or wanted to participate in the study, I could re-contact the Head, and she would provide me with the names and contact information for all the other English 1200 instructors.

I invited the suggested instructors to participate in the study through a written explanation of the project. Both instructors quickly confirmed their interest, and I personally delivered more detailed information about the research: (1) an invitation to participate in the study, (2) questions I would ask during the first interview, and (3) the consent form (See Appendices for all instrumentation used in the study, including interview questions and scripts, p. 202-211). This allowed me the opportunity to discuss in person any issues or concerns surrounding the research study with the instructors. At this stage I tentatively booked times for their first interviews and arranged for my brief recruitment visit to their sections of English 1200 to explain the research study to their students.

At the beginning of a regular class time during the first week of winter term, I visited each instructor's class and briefly explained my research, inviting students from each of the participating instructors' sections to participate in the study. I asked interested students to sign and leave contact information on a volunteer sheet that was sealed in an envelope by the last student in the class and handed to the instructor. I then arranged to pick up the sealed envelope from the English Department office after the class time. In one section, seven students signed the volunteer sheet, and in the other section eleven students signed the volunteer sheet. Since I only required three volunteers from each class, I emailed all students individually, gave them a few more details about the time commitment, and invited them to respond to my email with suggested dates and times for a first interview. In my email I stated that I would select volunteers on a "first-come-first-served" basis, so the first students to respond would become the participants of my study. Within two weeks all student volunteers were recruited, and first interview times were arranged. Students were also provided with more detailed information about the study at this time including the invitation to participate, first interview questions, and the consent form.

Both instructors were interviewed with the same set of fifteen open-ended questions based on elements of story structure (See following section on Instrumentation for further discussion of the rationale for the questions and see the Appendices for all interview questions). All of the students were interviewed using a different set of fifteen open-ended questions, again based on element of story structure. The interviews were tape recorded and took no longer than 60 minutes, except for when I negotiated extra time with the participant during the interview. At the beginning of the first interview, all

participants were offered the opportunity to select the pseudonym that would protect their identities in all following transcriptions and written documentation. The instructors' first interviews took place in the week following classes in the first term. The students' first interviews were completed in a three week period prior to a mid-February "Reading Week" break in classes so that narratives would be gathered from a relatively similar time-frame during the academic year.

After each of the first interviews was completed, I transcribed the interviews. Once I had the interview transcriptions completed, I began to write a first draft of the participants' narratives. I used a repeated readings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) method of analysis to write a two-to-four page narrative for each participant. I used the ideas and words from the first interviews about the participants' first-year transition experience. As much as possible, I used exact words, images, or incidents, but I often re-arranged order or focused on some incidents over others (See Data section p. 88 for further explanation of this process and also see Appendices p. 207 of an example of a section of transcription-to-interview). Next, through email, I sent to each participant a (1) copy of the first interview transcription, (2) draft of the narrative, and (3) set of questions I would ask in the second interview. The participants were invited to member check their interview and their draft narrative to ensure that each was correctly quoted. Also, the member check of my transcription of their personal narrative helped me to understand how and if each participant accepted their narrative as an accurate description of their story. The member check process involved each participant in the drafting of their narrative. Also, the list of questions in advance helped to prepare them for the second

interview by indicating that the narrative would advance. This process actually prepared them for thinking about the development of their narrative.

The second interviews were arranged within a three week period following the mid-February break. The second interviews were much shorter (approximately 30 minutes). The interview questions for the second interview focused on a member check for accuracy and comfort in how I represented the participants' stories and voice in the narratives. The second interview also focused on the participants' responses to being involved in a narrative inquiry study, especially how they felt about telling the stories of their experiences. After each second interview, I transcribed the recording and made any changes to the participant's narrative as negotiated through a discussion of all the potential changes during the interview. I sent each participant the transcription of his or her second interview and a new draft of the narrative if changes had been made.

In order to prevent any connections between the instructors and participating students, I waited until after final grades were submitted in early May to send an update on the progress of my research to each participant. When transcribing the first interviews and writing the participants' narratives I gained a sense that many of the participants felt isolated, as if they were the only ones experiencing anxiety during the transition. I thought it might provide a context for the shared experiences of first-year university if the participants were able to read their own narratives positioned with the other participants' narratives. During the second interview, all participants agreed to share their narratives—with pseudonyms protecting identities—and all requested to read the narratives of the other participants. I waited to share the narratives until I sent the progress of my research to the participants in May. If the participants had any responses after reading the other

participants' narratives, I encouraged them to email me with their comments, questions, or reactions.

Instrumentation

Invitation to Participate in Storytelling and Pre-Interview Task.

Interviews were a major component of this narrative inquiry design, because I predicted that participants would not feel comfortable sharing their perspectives of the transition from high school to first-year university with only the prompt, "Tell me your story." I based this prediction on my own experiences as a research consumer: Before taking a qualitative research class as a graduate student, I had experienced and could recognize research in the form of interviews but I had not been exposed to narrative as a data-gathering method. Denzin and Lincoln (2000), for example, describe that our society is one in which "members seem to believe that interviews generate useful information about lived experiences and its meaning" (p. 633). My lack of exposure to a narrative approach to data gathering caused me to question whether I would know how to respond if a researcher asked me to tell my transition story, especially if I had no prior relationship with that researcher. As I thought about the task of recruiting volunteers for the study, I desired a research project that would interest them in participating but also would sound recognizable and legitimate, when I described the study to instructors and students.

In my brief presentation to each instructor's class I shared my intention for the study to be narrative and I explained the research procedures in a condensed form. Once I had established contact with the potential participants, I wanted to give them more detailed information about the inquiry. I wrote the "Invitation to Participate in Study and Storytelling" (Appendices p. 202) to further articulate my understanding of narrative and to help participants feel comfortable with what would happen during the inquiry process.

As a part of this invitation I suggested to the participants that they first write about their first year experiences and bring this reflective writing to the first interview. However, at the first interviews of the instructors, neither volunteered their writing or even mentioned the task. I did not ask explicitly about it because I was conscious of the importance of building a level of comfort and trust during the initial meetings. I did not want to give the impression that I was accusing the participants of "not doing their homework" or insisting on tasks that might make the research process seem overly-time consuming for the busy participants. When the instructors did not volunteer their writing, I modified my research plan to consider writing pieces only if they were volunteered. None of the student participants brought writing with them or discussed this part of the invitation.

This lack of writing responses in part made me question how carefully the participants read the information I provided about the study. However, in the end, the universal lack of writing responses worked to be advantageous, as the narratives in this study are all built from the talk or the dialogue that came from the interviews. The participants were not limited to the story or stories they had committed in writing before

the interviews. The participants' discussions of their perspectives on their transitions to the teaching and learning of first-year were candid and not rehearsed.

First Interview Questions.

Chase (2005) describes the complexities of narrative interviewing as a *paradox*:

On the one hand, a researcher needs to be well prepared to ask good questions that will invite the other's particular story; on the other hand, the very idea of a particular story is that it cannot be known, predicted, or prepared for in advance.(p. 662)

Chase suggests that a researcher must gain a sense of "what is storyworthy given the narrator's social location in his or her culture, community, or organizational setting" to prepare broad questions "that will invite the other to tell his or her story" (p. 662).

However, she also warns that a narrator's particular story "is not identical to—and may even depart radically from—what is 'storyworthy' in his or her social context" (p. 662).

In my attempt to prepare for interviews, I designed the sets of first-interview questions (Appendices p. 203-206) using the elements of story structure, which are often recognized as *storyworthy* in literary analysis. These are: setting, characters, events/conflicts, internal responses, and consequences and resolutions. By asking questions using this story structure, participants were able to tell about their "landscapes of action" as Bruner (1986) describes, "where the constituents are the arguments for action: agent, intention or goal, situation, instrument, something corresponding to 'story grammar'" (p. 14). I hoped that the clearly structured questions would lead participants to

explore, “The other landscape [which] is the landscape of consciousness: what those involved in the action know, think, or feel, or do not know, think, or feel” (Bruner, p. 14). The questions for the students and instructors were constructed using the same story structures, but the specific questions were designed to respond to the different experiences involved in teaching and learning.

Second Interview Questions.

The interview questions for the second interview were not designed until after the first set of interviews were completed. They were instead, written in response to the data from the first interviews (McMillan, 2004). In this way, the questions focused on checking with participants that the first transcription and the narrative draft expressed their perspectives accurately. Questions designed this way allowed participants to reflect upon the process of telling and reading their stories. My inquiry led me to believe that I would have to design a unique set of questions for each participant in the second interview. However, I found that I could address the specific questions for each participant through follow-up questions to the shared set of questions on the process of being involved in the research.

Data

The data used in this study are the transcriptions and related field notes of eight story-structured interviews and the transcriptions of eight follow-up, member-checking interviews.

Co-authoring Narratives.

I transformed the transcriptions from the first interviews into narratives through a process of observing participants' responses and behaviours during the interviews, writing reflective field notes after the interviews, repeating readings of the transcriptions, and finally extracting and ordering words and images from the transcriptions.

Before beginning the initial interviews I did not know which questions would encourage participants to tell their stories of transition nor did I know what stories they might tell. However, I observed certain changes in responses and behaviours when a question seemed to trigger a more emotive or a stronger narrative response for a participant. These responses and behaviours were unique to each participant but often the participant would lean closer to me, speak quicker and longer, laugh more frequently, repeat words or key phrases, and become more animated in voice, facial expressions, or hand gestures. I would mentally note these changes and then shortly after the interview, write reflectively about these key moments in the interview in field notes. These notes became a record of my first impressions of the narratives I felt were most strongly emerging for each participant. During the process of repeatedly reading of the

transcriptions, my observations were often given textual evidence from the transcription. The “chunks” of talking would often become longer and more linguistically vivid (use of analogies, repetition, personification, metaphors) than in the answers to previous questions. I would highlight on the transcription

In repeated readings I physically highlighted the key narrative moments on the transcriptions. I also highlighted later incidents in the text when participants would refer back to these key moments to expand upon the described experience, clarify the incident in light of new information, or defend a later decision or opinion. Once this process was completed for the entire transcription, I re-read the highlighted sections and decided based upon the highlighted evidence which narratives were most fully developed in the interview. At times I re-ordered, clarified grammar, or added explicit links between ideas that had been described separately to strengthen the text as a narrative expression (See Appendices for example of turning a section of transcription into a section of narrative).

The participants were invited to change, add, or edit their narrative drafts and we discussed the changes during the second interview. The narratives in this study are co-authored since the drafts were comprised mainly of the participants’ spoken words and the participants were involved in deciding upon the content and structure of the final draft.

Representing Narratives in the Text.

There are two main reasons I chose to situate the narratives as a separate central chapter in the thesis. One reason was to shift as a researcher into a supportive voice that

would allow the narratives themselves become the main focus and the second reason was to allow for the text itself to become representative of the journey metaphor central in this thesis.

Representing Narrative Researchers' Authorial Voices.

The first reason I separated the narratives from discussion or analysis is because I was sensitive to various levels of researchers' authorial voices in a narrative inquiry study. There was a danger in this study was for me as researcher to appropriate the voice of the participant. Knowledge of researcher voice was an important consideration in constructing the participants' voice within each narrative. Also, member check reaffirmed that the participants' voice was retained. Chase (2005) describes three levels of researchers' voices: (1) authoritative voice, (2) supportive voice, and (3) interactive voice. The *authoritative voice* is often used during the interpretation and analysis because researchers want to "separate their voices from narrators' voices" to "assert an authoritative interpretive voice on the grounds that they have a different interest from the narrators in the narrators' stories" (Chase, p. 664). This type of voice is helpful for the research to use when s/he is turning to "*how* and *what* questions that open up particular ways of understanding what the narrator is communicating through his or her story" (p. 664). In this authoritative voice, "the researcher speaks differently from, but not disrespectfully of, the narrator's voice" (p. 664). The authoritative voice is the dominant voice I used in writing this thesis, especially in the final three chapters.

I believed it was important to present the participants' narratives in the *supportive voice*. The supportive voice, according to Chase (2005) is developed by some narrative researchers to push "the narrator's voice into the limelight" (p. 665). In a supportive voice, the researcher "makes decisions about how to translate and transcribe the narrator's story, which parts of the story to include in the final product, and how to organize and edit those parts into a text or performance" (p. 665). A supportive voice creates a "self-reflective and respectful distance between researchers' and narrators' voices" (p. 665). I agree with Chase's argument that, "There is a time and a place. . . for highlighting narrators' voices and for moving temporarily to the margins the ways in which researchers (along with a host of social, cultural, and historical circumstances) have already conditioned these voices" (p. 665-666).

The third authorial voice Chase (2005) describes is the *interactive voice* in which researchers "examine *their* voices—their subject positions, social locations, interpretations, and personal experiences" (p. 666). This practice is grounded in the idea that:

Researchers need to understand themselves if they are to understand how they interpret narrators' stories *and* that readers need to understand *researchers'* stories (about their intellectual and personal relationships with narrators as well as with the cultural phenomena at hand) if readers are to understand narrators' stories. (p. 666)

I integrated this interactive voice throughout the thesis to situate my own stories, reflections, and interpretations.

Textually Representing the Journey Metaphor

A second reason I placed the participants' narratives in a separate chapter was because I wanted to emphasize the metaphor of the journey, not only through the content of text, but also through the reading experience as it was shaped by the text's construction. The metaphor of a journey is so important to this thesis that it takes the very first word of the title. This thesis has become the story of a journey through a narrative inquiry study and its effect on my own and my participants' perspectives on the transition to first-year university. The thesis, as a text, has been designed to reflect the metaphor of a journey. The first three chapters represent the "journey to" the study. The first chapter introduces the study, the second chapter situates the study, and this third chapter explains the particulars of the study. The fourth chapter is the central chapter, both in its physical position and in its focus on content. Without the participants' narratives there would not be a study and there would be no reason for a journey. The final three chapters represent the journey outwards from the narratives towards analysis, cultural and social positioning, and application in wider learning contexts.

Data Analysis

Narrative and Literary Analysis.

Narrative inquiry requires a means to reflect, interpret, and position stories within an immediate context and a wider social and theoretical context: "The writer tries to

compose a text that at once looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experience within a place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 140). Narrative inquiry suggests coding based upon story structures:

For example, names of the characters that appear in the field texts, places where actions and events occurred, story lines that interweave and interconnect, gaps and silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities or discontinuities that appear are all possible codes. (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 131)

Although the data can be coded, this can only occur through a systematic approach to analysis.

In Chapter Six, I used literary analysis as an important part of the interpretation of the participants’ narratives. Through a close reading of *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900), the themes and metaphors emerging from the participants’ narratives are further explored socially and culturally. Otto (2007) argues for a research methodology she calls *novel inquiry* stating, “Literary narratives merit inclusion as a source of data for educational inquiry” (p. 73). She proposes a fairly extreme version of literary analysis where fiction, especially novels, becomes the main data source for studying human phenomena.

Although a novel was not the only source of data for this study, I believe many of Otto’s points defending novel inquiry are applicable to my analysis in Chapter Six. Otto (2007) suggests that, “To dismiss narrative modes of inquiry by categorization would be to lose a body of data that illuminates—and probably leads to understanding—formerly uncomprehensible aspects of human’s very humanity” (p. 78). She argues that, “Such data need not be categorized as literally truthful on the one hand or the purely imaginary

on the other, but might be judged solely in terms of its contributions to the rich world of human experience” (p. 79). I believe reading Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) in juxtaposition to the participants’ narratives does contribute to understanding the human experience of transition to university.

Repeated Readings.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest repeated readings of the data to make connections and find recurrent, emerging themes. I repeated readings of the transcriptions and the narratives to compare and contrast participants and to explore what was being told about the transition to first-year university. Participants shared insights from their experiences that I categorized into advice for the university English department, advice for high schools, advice for the university as an institution (counselling services, writing help, etc.), and advice for future first-year students. Although this data is not the primary focus of this thesis, it provides potential for creating professional development workshops, opening dialogues between high schools and universities, and developing practical resources for first-year students, especially in the English context.

I also carefully repeated readings of the narratives and physically cut, pasted, and colour-coded a representation of recurrent themes so that I would be able to visualize what patterns were emerging between the participants’ stories. I repeated this process with the transcriptions of the second interview and once again gained a visual representation of the emerging, recurrent themes. From these visual representations I was

able to discover a focus and an outline for the analysis that occurs in Chapters Five and Six.

Self-reflection.

There are some elements of autoethnography in my analysis which Chase (2005) describes as a methodology where researchers turn “the analytical lens on themselves and their interactions with other, but here researchers write, interpret, and or/or performs their narratives about culturally significant experiences” (p. 660). Although I included personal narratives of my first year experience and my role in the research process of the inquiry, I do not believe this thesis is a true application of autoethnography, which is often a more collaborative, performative, or alternative form of research.

Data analysis method of self-reflection (Denzin, 1989) is a more accurate description of my interrogation into my role and influence on the study as a researcher. My personal experiences became the lens through which I saw the data. At times, this self-reflection also became the interpretive voice (Chase, 2005) in which I positioned my inquiry. Although repeated reading analysis provides a systematic approach to the data, I still brought myself to the readings. That is, themes “emerged,” but were informed by the experiences that have formed who I was at the moment I was analyzing the data. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) warn qualitative researchers:

Acknowledge that no matter how much you try you cannot divorce you research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is to

become reflective and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it. (p. 34)

My analysis and my writing required me to consider my assumptions and biases, listen closely, and tell the stories of my own and my participants' experiences. The stories follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Stories Lived and Told: The Narratives

Introduction to the Narratives

The central focus of this thesis is situated here in the central chapter. It is in the next few pages that the participants' stories are finally "lived and told" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). I believe the stories residing in this chapter are powerful, poignant, and stand on their own, so I want to move out of the way and let the narratives speak for themselves. In this chapter I am attempting to use my *supportive voice* as a researcher as described by Chase (2005):

This narrative strategy aims not for establishing authenticity but rather for creating a self-reflective and respectful distance between researchers' and narrators' voices. There is a time and there is a place, these researchers might say, for highlighting narrators' voices and for moving temporarily to the margins the ways in which researchers (along with a host of social, cultural, and historical circumstances) have already conditioned those voices. (pp. 665-666)

However, before I move temporarily to the margins, I will briefly discuss the decisions I made about ordering the narratives.

I grouped the students' narratives and then grouped the instructors' narratives separately, which is only marked by a heading. The headings in this chapter deviate slightly from the APA guidelines to give the text more of an anthology structure, allowing the reader to experience each narrative as individual text. This separation is to

aid the readers of the thesis during times when I examine the similarities and differences that exist between the narratives told by the students and the instructors. The individual narratives have been ordered alphabetically according to the participants' pseudonyms. I briefly describe each participant before their narrative begins. I have chosen to italicize these descriptions to clearly separate my voice as a researcher from the participant's voice as a narrator.

STUDENTS' NARRATIVES

Alex (pseudonym) attended an English high school near to the university.

Although she wanted to attend university for personal reasons, Alex also explained that university attendance was expected in her family. Alex was in her second year of the University 1 programme, and described her struggle to discover that she would like to major in Human Nutritional Sciences.

Alex's Story

I guess I didn't really think about what university was going to be like when I was in high school. I never really thought of alternative options. In my family, you just go to university unless you have a good reason not to. Not that I didn't want to, because I think anywhere I see myself in the future involves being in university now.

My high school was a big, multicultural, English school about five minutes from campus. Maybe because we were so near, I got the opportunity to go to the university a couple of times for classes. I'd also sat in on some lectures with my sister when I came with her on "Take Your Kids to Work" day, so I had some ideas of what the classes would look like. So I certainly noticed campus was very, very large when I got here and that there were lots and lots of people. I really think you can find anything you want here, especially because everybody is really friendly and helpful.

I was really glad I had met a group of girls from my soccer team who were a few years older than me to show me everything around the campus and give me great advice.

They were like, "Don't blow your first year." Everybody messes up in their first year, but I think I kind of stayed away from that. I didn't go out partying every single night like a lot of people I know did. My friends also really helped last year when I was trying to figure out what I wanted to study. They told me to try new things even if I was only a little bit interested.

For me, I'm the kind of person who likes to know what I'm doing and what kind of direction I'm going in. When I went into university I wasn't really sure. I knew I liked writing and I knew I liked Science at the same time, so I was looking for something that would sort of balance those. I thought the only thing I could do was psychology. In grade 11 we went to the Convention Centre for a career sampling day. It was helpful but it just showed mainly careers like doctor, dentist, and pharmacist. I wish there was a way to show us more. We read about the big things from the time we're like two—fire fighter, dentist—but if I had known more about some of the less known faculties in grade 12, I could have been more focused. I could have known where I was going and what I had to do, like what courses I needed to take and what grades I needed to get into those faculties.

By the middle of first year I felt kind of lost. I was just taking a whole bunch of random courses, and I was sort of enjoying them, but I didn't really know what was out there. I'm still figuring that out now. I went to the office in the Department of Science and I talked to the counsellors. I told them I was looking for something really relevant and connected to everyday life. They didn't seem to have a lot of ideas. They sort of said, "Well, you can't really do both English and Science at the same time unless you want to

do a psychology interdisciplinary." I didn't really like my psychology class, so I didn't find this very helpful.

Instead I started talking to my friends who were mainly Science students. The only reason I ended up taking a nutrition class last semester was because all my friends were like, "Oh, it's a really good GPA booster and it's really easy and interesting." Now, I think I might minor in English and I think Human Nutritional Science is going to be my major. I even think I might like to be a professor in this area, so I could do some research and writing.

I went to talk to the counsellors in Human Ecology to find out more about Human Nutritional Science, but I got a counsellor in training and she was going off what the other girl was saying. It was sort of confusing. I think it might be best if I go to talk to my nutrition professors, the one I have now and the one I had last semester. I realize now that you just have to seek out the people who are going to help you as well as doing the research yourself if you want to get anywhere.

Faye (pseudonym) attended a small French-immersion high school in Winnipeg. She did not want to come to university this year, but she agreed to attend University of Manitoba because of pressure from her family.

Faye's Story

I fought really hard against coming to university. I'm not very brave at all, so I wanted to take a year off and work at a job or something. But my mom was insistent I come to school. My dad's a teacher and I guess he influenced my mom by telling her stories of lots of his students who took a year off and never came back. I assured my parents that if I took a year off it would be to make money, but I think they're scared I'll end up like my brother who never finished high school. Every single time they bring it up they say, "You don't want to be stuck at Tim Horton's like your brother, do you?"

When I was little, I thought university would be really exciting. I'd get to make my own schedule and fill my own time by putting a class here and there. I was really into art back then so university would be a chance to take lots of cool art classes. But by the end of high school I was so against coming to university.

Yet I did end up coming for orientation, and the second day, and the next, and I'm still coming. But in the beginning, I just felt so forced into it. My friends weren't here. Nobody came with me. It was a big adjustment. There are so many people here and the place is so huge. We are always moving instead of staying in one place. I guess going from small classes of 15 – 30 to classes of 200 was pretty shocking. It's weird, but I feel small in a way. There are so many people, but I feel kind of lonely.

I knew there were places I could go to talk or get support, but I just didn't. I don't know. I felt better sitting in a tunnel with my earphones on and writing. Some of the tunnels are cold, but it's a pretty good place to hang out and study—better than the library in some ways. I ran into a guy I knew from my old high school in the tunnels and we've started meeting up more. So I guess my social life exists more underground.

I'm starting to feel a little more outgoing because I'm out of my comfort zone so often that I guess I'm getting used to it. My identity is different now in ways that are hard to articulate. Mostly, it is just me changing my view—I figure I'm going to be here so I might as well make the most of it.

Like Alex, Lindsay (pseudonym) was also in her second year of University 1, but took a year off between her first year and her current year of studies. Lindsay's high school was the University of Winnipeg Collegiate and this experience prepared her for the schedule, size, and campus culture of university, but she had a difficult first year because she took classes that did not suit her.

Lindsay's Story

Now? Now, I'm very happy, which I'm really relieved to be able to say because I wasn't in my first year. I'm finally enjoying what I'm taking, I can definitely see myself figuring out what my plan will be, and it's making sense now because I know what I love and what I don't want to do. I actually enjoy going to school again.

I'm from a smaller community just outside of Winnipeg. The high school is fairly big, but I just wasn't happy there—I wasn't challenged enough and I felt everyone around me just didn't feel the same way I did. I wanted a change so in grade 11, I started at University of Winnipeg Collegiate. I was pretty much a university student just in high school classes. After grade 12, I decided to make the move to University of Manitoba for my first year because I planned to go into architecture and I wanted to start from here from the beginning. I think because I was used to being on a campus for high school I didn't find the place very intimidating and it didn't take long until I knew my way around.

It was kind of a shock to me that I didn't enjoy a lot of the classes I took in first year. I don't know why I took certain classes like Calculus and Physics. I guess I thought

faculties would look at your classes as well as your grades when you applied and I think I just thought, "I did well in high school, I'll probably do well in university." Also my dad helped me do my registration and he's an engineer and did great in calculus—it was one of his favourite classes. He feels really bad now and worries that he pressured me, but I don't think he did. I still decided myself.

My first year was really rough. I didn't know if I still wanted to do what I planned and I dropped a lot of classes. Near the end I almost felt like, "Why am I still going here?" I was really discouraged because I didn't think I'd ever get to be where I wanted to be. I never thought I'd be one of those people—I always thought I knew what I wanted to do and then when I got into this mess I thought, "Oh my gosh!" I didn't have the 30 credit hours I needed to apply to a faculty after first year so I just felt stuck and I decided I needed to take some time off.

Last year I worked and I travelled. I went to Brazil and then I went to Europe for a while. I think the thing I learned in my year off was that there was no need to rush. I could take my time—figure out what I wanted to do. I think it allowed me the chance to hear the voice I had for some reason ignored. I kind of knew from the beginning that I wanted to pursue fine arts and design, but I think I needed my first-year experience to justify everything. You look at my transcript and I have a D in calculus and then an A in environmental design. Hmmm—it just kind of proves what I'm strong at and where my weaknesses are.

I was really nervous at first when I came back this year because I still had bad feelings from my first year, but after a couple of classes I *really* felt like I was starting

over and this is what I was meant to be doing. I don't think I can ever stop learning! I think it would be great if I could spend my life just learning and taking classes.

Marty (pseudonym) returned to university as a part-time mature student three years ago after a ten-year break from her initial, first-year experience at the University of Manitoba. Marty attended a very small high school in rural Saskatchewan and found her first-year overwhelming when she first moved to Winnipeg. Marty chose to return to school to meet a personal goal and gain a sense of independence and security.

Marty's Story

I love school. When I get back in September and I walk down the hallways, I feel like I'm home. I love the challenge. I like to be surrounded by the ideals and think outside my world. I like it when I'm sitting in a lecture and I hear something and suddenly new possibilities open up to me. For me, this return to school is about making a goal for myself and following through. I don't think it would all mean as much to me if I hadn't had the life experiences between my first time in first year and now.

In 1994 I was living in a small town in southern Saskatchewan, and I graduated from a high school class of about twelve. We were told we *had* to go to university or we would end up doing nothing or pumping gas. I moved to Winnipeg for university, because it was home base for me. It was the place that I was born and the place where I still had lots of family. I lived with my aunt and she tried to help me adjust to life in the big city by doing things like showing me bus routes. Even with her help, I felt like a complete town kid. It was all just too overwhelming.

Campus was the size of my town. I didn't even know how to ask for help. I couldn't get my head around needing a map to find my way around campus. It was before

the university had started its U1 programme to ease first-year kids in more. There was an orientation, but I would have liked someone to show me what to do when I first got here. There seemed to be a real sink or swim attitude that I don't think was fair. Some kids just need extra help.

I signed up for a full course load, but I ended up dropping all my classes except for psychology and anthropology. I remember going into huge lecture theatres and sitting there with a huge text in front of me while some smart guy stood at the front and talked about all this smart stuff. I didn't know how to take notes. High school hadn't prepared me for that. I thought it was all just me: I was the only one struggling. I had this huge student loan, I was down to two classes, and I just kept thinking about the thousands of dollars I owed and I wondered, "Is this worth it?"

I didn't go back to school after my first year. I worked full time at a pharmacy instead. My parents had broken up in my first year, and my mom moved to Winnipeg at about this time. My mom was always encouraging me to go back to school and she would point out what courses might be good for me. I wanted to do something too. I wanted to have a passion.

After a couple of years of working, I signed up for a Pharmacy Tech course at a college, but shortly after I was in a pretty bad car accident. Since it was such an intense course, I didn't think I could afford to miss any time, so I had to drop out. I started to work at the credit union where I work now about five years ago. I thought I might find one of the areas that I really liked, but I've tried lots now and I never found anything that fit.

When I decided to go back to school this time I had just ended a relationship. Going back to school had a lot to do with security for me. I wanted to get that piece of paper to have for myself and to show to others that I was secure and independent. I wanted to feel like I could take care of myself. So for the last three and a half years I have been working at least part time hours and taking two classes per term in the evenings. My plan now is to go into dental hygiene, but the programme is very competitive and based on GPA so I'm working to get mine up.

The first time I went to school I didn't have very mature expectations. I had romantic notions and I was just not ready. I was not emotionally prepared for the experience. When I came back three years ago, it was a decision. I was savvy to the city. I was ready to meet this goal. I took a chem class and I had to re-teach myself algebra. I stayed up to like three in the morning every night, but in the end I got an A. It was like, "That hurt, but I did it!" It is a very gratifying experience. I know I will take some sort of classes for the rest of my life. I'm a lifer.

Ryan (pseudonym), the lone male participant, attended a Winnipeg high school. He was in his first year and describes the experience of being able to be “out” in university, in contrast to how he had concealed his homosexuality in high school.

Ryan’s Story

I’m just going to say this—I’m gay, right? I’m gay. So in high school I had to suppress myself because I knew I’d be teased even more if people knew. But now in university, I’m my own person and I can express myself more in that way.

When I was in high school, I started off pretty bad academically. I didn’t really care so much, I don’t know why. I guess I was going through some pretty tough times then and the kids at school really didn’t help. I picked myself up after that. You know, I started to realize I was throwing my future away, so I decided I needed to work hard because I really wanted to do university, get a good education, and get a good job.

The first week of university was overwhelming. There were so many people here and so many things going on. There were free pancakes and bands playing outside. It was just like, “Wow, I *really* like university!” I realized no one was going to bother me here—there was no high school drama and I could help out and meet people through gay student services.

It’s very relieving to be accepted for every part of me, not just some parts. But there is still stress. There is still stuff with family, and there is still worrying about whether friends will accept me or not and then there’s school, which will always stress me out. I’m just so much more on my own now. In junior and senior high school I was

basically spoon fed. I breezed through and now I'm paying the consequences. Now, it's totally different and I really have to put myself into it. I'm just learning that.

The courses here are hard, but if I manage to go through it all and get my goal, even if it is just a pass, I feel good. It's my first year and apparently, it's one of the toughest years. It's a whole different feeling from high school. So when I get a pass or a really good mark, I'm glad, basically.

University is something I want to do—it's a personal thing. My two older brothers didn't finish post-secondary so I'm kind of my parents' last hope. I also want to do this for myself. I want to take this opportunity and accomplish something. I can't be straight, so I just want to take this chance and get a good job and make my parents proud in *that* way.

Yuna (pseudonym) attended a high school where she studied in a mixed academic and drafting vocational programme. She had hoped to study architecture when she first applied to university, but was no longer certain she would pursue this route of studies.

Yuna's Story

I learned I *had* to go to university when I was offered a job coming out of the drafting programme at my vocational high school. This man came to our class and said, "Okay, well I'm offering you guys a job. It's nothing fancy, just structural beam design. You will have coworkers and a radio, but you can't listen to the radio while you're working and you can't get up to talk to each other unless there's a problem." In my mind I saw a couple of middle-aged balding guys with a grey wall and wood separators in front of a '95 PC. I was like, "No, I'm sorry. That's not me." I don't want to be an average person. I don't want to be a follower. I want to be a trendsetter.

In high school I put on a lot of faces and I probably continue to do so. I'm not exactly sure why—it's not just to make other people happy, but I don't like to get angry, hot, and bothered so I prefer to grin and bear it. I probably present a not very lively expression. I'd say I'm more of a watcher. I don't think I've changed much since high school, but I'd definitely say I've grown a lot as a person. I think just being here has gotten me thinking outside of university to the beginning of the rest of my life. I've been asking myself what do I want to do with my life, what do I want to continue with, what do I want to study, who do I want to become?

I really wanted to apply to architecture, but I'm thinking it might not be right for me. During my vocational route through high school, I worked on three projects that were actually built. But I was sitting there and I was thinking, is this what I want to do with the rest of my life? I wouldn't be making buildings for me; I'd be making them for someone else so there would be lots of compromise. I learned that especially in one project. I don't mind if there's a little compromise, but there is only a certain degree I can go without thinking, "I'm selling out."

I guess I've always had doubts. I've never settled on one thing. When I was little I wanted to be a psychiatrist, then a lawyer, then a writer, and then a librarian, but not a normal librarian down the street, but you know an archivist of older texts. But I guess I've always wanted to be around knowledge. So I am still taking electives for architecture and there's a class offered only in Spring and I'm still committed to taking that. I'm thinking about going in to talk to an advisor about options and researching some other careers and seeing what I can do.

INSTRUCTORS' NARRATIVES

Bianca (pseudonym) was the instructor of the regular section of English 1200 who volunteered to take part in the study. Bianca had several years experience in the department, but had not yet reached tenure or promotion reviews. Her "probationary", pre-tenure status affected how she told her story and discussed first-year transition issues during the interviews. She felt pressure to produce published research to meet tenure expectations, but still needed to balance the responsibilities of teaching. Bianca talked openly about her experiences as a first-year student and connected these learning experiences to her life now as a professor.

Bianca's Story

For me, walking into a classroom and talking about books is a thrill. I love it. The first year syllabus is like a "Greatest Hits" of literature, and students usually find something that appeals to them. In my experience, working with first-year students is without a doubt both more stressful and rewarding than working with upper-year students. I find myself getting caught up in their first-year trials, but there is such power in watching students arrive with their own expectations, energy, and newness. I often smile more after teaching first-year students, because it is like watching the lights turn on after they overcome their initial resistance and begin to think about literature in a new way.

I think it is a very jarring experience moving from a high school English class, which I suspect many of them looked forward to and found fun, to university where we are not doing autobiographical readings anymore. Students are horrified and astonished that they could misinterpret a poem. I think they are shocked that we're not talking about their feelings anymore in relation to the text and that I talk to them with academic vocabulary. They're happy to talk about latitude and longitude in geography, but if I want to insist on the difference between a simile and a metaphor in my classroom they are dismayed. I think they're disappointed and disillusioned that literature at the university level is almost scientific. I know it's very painful, but I still think it's a transition they have to make.

However, I am very aware that is not all about me. I am really sympathetic to lifestyle issues. Students are sometimes absent not because the classes are not challenging, or boring, or too challenging, but sometimes just because they're young. When I was a first-year student I was utterly delinquent, especially in my first year literature class. It was an early time slot and I was sleeping in and missing classes. I lived in residence, my parents were three hours away, and I was liberated. Luckily, I had a friend who was very responsible and went to all the classes. When I looked back at my notes a few years ago, I noticed that 60 -70% of them were photocopied. And I liked the class and I liked the professor.

My life as a student was one in which I never asked questions and I never ever attended office hours. The idea of going into a professor's office was terrifying to me. It didn't matter how many times they said, "Come into my office hours." I was sure that was no place for me and that it would be like an exam where I was the only student. I

also very rarely asked or answered questions in class. I think if someone would have said to me, "Bianca, what do you think about this? I know you're interested in this from your essay, so tell me what you think." My heart would have beaten so rapidly and I would have thought I was going to throw up, but I would have said something and it would have gotten easier every time.

My brother became a first-year student at university the first year I became a professor at university, so our careers have been interestingly aligned. Through phone conversation and family time, I was able to get his perspective on the university he was at and think more about my university. It was enlightening to think about what he was adjusting to and what he was surprised by. He was in shock and awe that I was a professor, and it was a really good indication to me that he had overestimated what professors were like.

I think until grad school I also had an overestimated, over-inflated, God-like view of my professors, which is why I was afraid to talk in class or to go visit them. I also tended to hand in papers late, because I thought they weren't good enough. I would try for three more days to make my papers better, so I wouldn't embarrass myself or disappoint my profs. It was in grad school that I realized professors were human too—they missed deadlines and they made mistakes and they had specialized knowledge. I think becoming a teaching assistant was kind of a middle ground; I got a kind of behind-the-curtains look and gained a more realistic sense of professors' limitations.

Perhaps I should have more anxieties or fears or energy issues around teaching, but I feel confident in my teaching. It is my research, rather, that I feel is incredibly anxious and wrought and raw and frightening. I'm at an earlier stage developing in this

area and it is probably why I am so sympathetic to students and the messy, messy world of writing.

I used to say students had been let down by high school, but I'm not sure anymore. Even after the time I've dedicated to writing matters in my classroom, I'm sure my students make mistakes at the next level regardless of what I'm doing. To wax philosophical, I'm just wondering if they're not reading enough for grammar to get through to them at some level. I wonder how much of writing is teachable and how much is just osmosis. Writing was never a problem for me as a student, and I have always attributed that to the fact I read. I came in knowing how to write, but I was lucky to acquire those skills because they were consistent with my interests as a person. I suspect that students are reading less, and writing is getting weaker.

I know first year can be painful, but my wish for first-year students would be that they could stay curious rather than anxious. If first years could bring an open mind and courage, they could see university as a whole new world and not a continuation from high school.

Daphne (pseudonym) was the other volunteer instructor in the study and taught a writing intensive section of English 1200. Daphne was a more senior colleague who has passed tenure and promotion. She also felt pressure to publish and felt the pull between teaching and research, but she did not feel the anxiety of the tenure process. Daphne entered academics as a second career and discussed her experience as a mature student during her first-year back at university. Several of Daphne's stories reflected upon her role of a mother of two daughters who have recently negotiated undergraduate degrees and discussed how these experiences have influenced her teaching of first-year students.

Daphne's Story

I was a very atypical university student. I think this might be the first time that I've had a first-year class with absolutely no one remotely like me. I came as a mature student with a previous career in nursing. Although it is not something I have been able to draw upon with this particular class, what usually happens is that I try to foster the mature students' perspectives because I think it's a very good learning tool for both the mature students and the younger students.

I guess what I try to remember is my own experiences in classes with usually at least one other mature student. I felt we, as mature students, had a different relationship with our classmates because the younger students would say things to us that they might not say to each other or to the professor. The younger students would tell us about their

responses to the course, and they clearly had different confusions and insecurities than we did.

Sometimes the younger students seemed confused by the material, but so often literature is from the mature perspective. We studied *Romeo and Juliet*, which is the love story of very young people, but there was a lot going on in that play that presented a more mature perspective—the nurse, the parents—and the younger students seemed to have difficulties with that. They'd make offhanded comments about it that wouldn't come up in the class, and as mature students we would discuss it with them. Sometimes it was a matter of the younger students finding the assignments more demanding compared to high school, but I was looking at reading, writing, and thinking tasks unlike anything I had seen for many, many years.

Although I don't think I've ever been unsympathetic to my students, I think my role as a parent watching two daughters go through their undergraduate degrees has made me more aware as a teacher of first years. My older daughter ran into problems because she went into university with fairly perverse reasons for following a particular career path, but she quickly found out it didn't suit her. One of the things that helped when I talked to her was that she said, "I feel like I've painted myself into a corner." And I said, "Sweetheart, you're 19. There are no corners you can paint yourself into at that age." Then she said, "But I feel like such a failure!" And I thought, "How can you say that to me? Of all people! Like some Greek tragedy! I'm the person who had quit almost everything I started in my life—my first job, my career, my marriage—and I'm fine! I'm happy now." When I was younger I stuck with what I was doing when I wasn't happy with it, so this was my opportunity to help my daughter. It took her a terribly long time to

figure it out, but once she stumbled on what she wanted to do in life, nothing was a struggle anymore. Everything was just what she wanted to do and she became extraordinarily focused. It was very interesting in terms of what a student goes through during the educational process.

My other daughter was very different. She decided within two weeks that she wanted to be an English professor. She had resisted that career choice for a long time, but she turned around and said, "Yes, I will." But she did find all of university quite stressful because she is such a perfectionist and puts pressure on herself. Watching my children in university made me more understanding of how emotional students can become. It's not just a problem, but an overwhelming problem for them. I guess I have tried to become even more insistent when I try to tell my students that I am here to help if only they'd come talk to me. You know I'd always said that in the past, but I think I say it more often. My motherly instincts come in with my students because they are young and they do need some nagging.

Academically, I feel first-year students are coming in with little experience in literature, especially how to analyze it. They have little exposure to pre-twentieth century texts, and they are intimidated by the language. They're just processing too much information, and they don't have the depth of allusion that they need. They don't understand how literature is a whole series of things that work together. The great thing about the research that I do is that it does provide anecdotes that help me enliven the class. That is one of the ways some of the energy from my research can invigorate my teaching and vice-versa.

In some ways I find first-year teaching stressful because the challenges are more profound than upper-year teaching, but it can also be the most rewarding. It happens virtually every year that someone will come up to me and say, "I had to take this course and I didn't want to take this course, but now it is my favourite." I once had a class with a group of engineers who were more engaged than anyone else in the class. One of them told me he had bought all the books in the summer and one of them was a collection of Christina Rossetti's poetry. He had read it all! It is very rewarding knowing that out there right now there is someone building bridges who loves Christina Rossetti's poetry.

CHAPTER FIVE

World Making: Narrative and Identity in First-year University

Beyond Listening to Stories: Reflecting on Telling and Searching for Interpretation

Beyond Listening to Stories.

In the preceding chapter of narratives, I as a researcher, used a supportive voice (Chase, 2005) to allow the participants' narratives of their first-year teaching and learning experiences become the focus of attention. In this chapter, I turned back to my authoritative and interpretive voices (Chase, 2005) in order to move beyond storytelling and story listening into the realm of narrative inquiry and analysis. The process of finding these analytical and interpretive voices required self-reflection and a re-searching of the literature to find some way to conceptualize the themes that were emerging from the interview and narrative data.

I did not come to the participants' stories with theories of how narratives would shape an individual's sense of self or world, but rather the participants' stories challenged me to examine the intimate relationship between difficult transitions and the growth and transformation in identities in a constructed reality. In retrospect, I am not sure what I expected the participants to tell about as they shared their first-year university learning and teaching stories, but I suppose I expected more stories of difficult transitions between differing discourse communities and the lack of institutional support. I did not expect to find a pattern, or recurring theme, of individuals telling about their changing identities in

a constructed reality. However, when I listened to the participants' stories, it became clear to me that the stories that resonated with the greatest personal importance were told about how the participant perceived his or her own identity within his or her own constructed reality or world. This prompted me to read Bruner, Brockmeir, Carbaugh, Harre, and the other theorists and researchers I discuss in the next three chapters.

The search or re-search for identity in the first-year experience was arguably the most recurrent theme in all of the participants' narratives and transcriptions. The characteristics of identity have been described as "multiple, historically situated, negotiable, and changing over the lifespan" (Ivanic, 1998, p. 19). Castell (2004) further explains that, "For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there maybe a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action" (p. 6). For many people in Western cultures, there exists a great need and desire to find out who one is at a given time in a given place. We search for ourselves as we journey through our life experiences. We also search for ourselves as we *tell* about the turning-point moments in our journeys. As Brockmeir and Carbaugh (2001) state, "The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others organize our sense of who we are, who others are, and how we are to be related" (p. 10). During the first-year university experience, many students need to re-organize and re-search their sense of who they are, who others are (including fellow students and their instructors), and how those involved in the university community relate.

Reflecting on Telling.

One of my greatest struggles with presenting this narrative inquiry has been finding a way of showing and telling my emergent themes without sounding like I preconceived my conclusions long before I read the data. It could be argued that since I participated in authoring the narratives that I chose the incidents that would best reflect my “pet” theory of narratives constructing identities and realities. My response to this potential criticism is to use this section to show data from the second interviews and tell about my process of analyzing the data and then finding myself needing to begin a whole new search for a way to interpret and explain what emerged. This will provide a sampling of how the narratives were constructed. Then you as a reader will be able to adjudicate the lifelikeness or the plausibility of my research story and, therefore, my interpretations.

The bulk of the analysis of this inquiry is focused on the narratives themselves, rather than the data collected in the second interviews. I chose this focus because the narratives provide an opportunity to explore *what* is being told about first-year university teaching and learning experiences as well *how* the stories are told. However, it was through the themes that emerged in the second interviews that I became more convinced I needed to further explore the connection between telling about an experience and constructing a reality or identity.

Chase (2005) reminds narrative researchers that “every instance of narrative is particular” because of the “patterns in the storied selves, subjectivities, and realities that narrators create during particular times and in particular places” (p. 657). The participants told narratives of their first-year university experiences through the prompts of an

interview format to me, an unknown researcher. This telling of first-year university is a particular instance of narrative and does not represent the *whole* experience or the *true* experience, but it does represent a story from that particular time and place. Most of the participants shared in the second interview that they had some experience telling their first-year university story before. Marty for example said in our second interview, "I think one of the post questions you had was did it, is it a story that you've told before or something. And I have! I have told it before." The most common response from the student participants was that they had told some of their story, but often not in such a detailed or focused setting. Ryan said he told about his experiences, "Only when people ask, 'How are you doing in your first year?' But nothing like that." Alex also said she had told her story but, "Just not from start to finish. And maybe there are even things I missed out in there [referring to the narrative composed from her transcription], but I think I've told pieces." Lindsay said she had also told her story, "Probably to some people. It was more condensed definitely."

Other participants discussed that they had not told their stories. These participants may have talked more informally about their first-year experiences. However, by responding that they had not shared their first-year narratives before it may show that they were conceptualizing the process of telling as something formal, more like the particular telling in the interview situation that we had just experienced. Faye said she had not talked about her first-year story, but she had "written about it to myself on occasion, but it is mostly just ranting." Yuna said that she "never really *had* to tell someone my story, so I saw myself kind of dumbfounded. Not dumb, but just awkward to the situation a little bit." She said that she felt that the narrative from the interview had

accurately captured her, "Especially at the time." Bianca told me that she had never told her story about her first-year experiences as a teacher or a student before because, "Nobody's ever asked me." She discussed how daily she might share incidents about her past and her current teaching experiences with her partner or incidents or anecdotes from her first year with friends or colleague, but she has never told how her first year experiences affected her journey to becoming an English professor. She expressed surprise at becoming so "confessional" about her experiences. Bianca explained:

I never really reflected on the impact of the parallel story of my own and my brother's first-year experiences. When I read this part of my story I was able to identify how beneficial the exchanges between myself and my brother had been on my professional development.

Bianca described "feeling nervous" about reading her narrative, but said, "I was delighted to see both the transcription and narrative on paper. It captures my story in a textual form and gives my experiences a solidity they may have been lacking before."

Many of the students and instructors reflected in the second interview upon how telling their narratives gave them insights into their identities or into the experience of teaching or learning in first-year university. Alex explained how telling her story allowed her to see her transition-to-university experience as a more complete whole:

It was just good! 'Cause it was just more me talking and figuring it out in my head. I hadn't really sat down and said, "This is my transition story from high school to university." And it was good to kind of think it through and kind of put it into words. I'm still not sure I know what I want to do and I'm trying to figure it out. So it was kind of good to think of it in a new way.

In this statement, Alex told a great deal about how sharing her narrative shaped how she constructed the reality of her university experience thus far. When given the opportunity to tell about her experiences transitioning to university, Alex considered where she was now and how she had arrived at this place. She expressed the experiences that mattered to understanding her identity and through this articulation she constructed the reality of her university world.

In the second interview, Yuna told me:

I enjoyed telling my story. I think everyone should have the opportunity. Like everyone feels their story is different, and is not the normal, or the average story. I think everyone should get into it with someone else, even if it's an older person, compare your stories, or even give advice to a younger person who is considering coming here.

Yuna said that since the initial interview she had talked to a friend two years older than her: "She's helped me out through it [transition to university], and it was neat to hear some of her stories and how she felt. It's nice to talk to someone about it." Yuna also shared that telling her story motivated her to take "a more active role" in her learning:

Like academically, I'm looking for things instead of just being passive, like thinking I can just get this from my notes. I went into [my English professor's office hours] to talk about getting another syllabus and discuss one section I might have missed. I'm hoping things will change for the better.

Telling and reading her narrative seemed to help Yuna become more aware of her identity, and responsibilities, as a learner.

Marty described the experience of telling her story as "cathartic":

I've been so immersed in it [my story about first-year university and the time since]. Honestly, I think this experience has been cathartic just reading it. It's not as much of a self-centered story as I had always thought. It has been a different view point saying it to you and then reading it back and to know I really said that. And nothing was a bad experience if you take it as part of a whole and see it as part of an experience.

She said that by telling and reading her narrative she feels "much better about that story now." Marty described telling the story: "[The experience] was like such a weight. You know I had to climb out of this bad experience from high school and my first year of university was really hard—but it was just an experience. I had to go through it to learn." She explained that she had not told the story any more after her first interview and that she now feels ready to move on: "I've talked about it long enough, I think. It's time to look beyond the trees to see the forest." Marty expressed her pride in her ability to see her story as a more complete experience. Telling offered her the possibility to learn about her need to move to a new story landscape.

The power of narratives to articulate experience, become aware of identity, and construct new realities was not reserved just to the student population, but became equally important to the academic instructors. In the second interview Daphne said, "Teaching first-year students often makes me question who I am and how I relate to others and think about the world." She explained that in her first-year teaching she is often faced with mistaken first impressions, because her students are far more complex than she might first understand them: "Teaching first year is always a fascinating process." I discovered that writing about first-year teaching and learning narratives was

also a fascinating process and one that challenged me to search for new interpretive and analytical tools.

Searching for Interpretation.

My research questions guided my initial analysis and interpretations. I paid attention to how students and instructors told about their first-year teaching and learning and how these perspectives may be expressed the same or differently. I also searched for what narratives might reveal about individuals' identities and ways of knowing the transition from high school to university. As soon as participants shared their reflections upon telling their stories, I began some level of interpretation which I included in the above descriptions of the data. Interpretation at this stage was on a personal level. I noticed how participants seemed to be describing the active and constructive role of narratives in understanding self and first-year experiences, at least in the particular telling-experiences of this inquiry. However, I knew my observations and initial assessments of the narratives and second interview data needed grounding in theories or other research studies. In a conversation about my data with my supervisor she suggested I read some of Jerome Bruner's work. I began a search of his work and began reading. I also began reading a collection of essays edited by Brockmeir and Carbaugh (2001) entitled *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*. (See Chapter Two for a fuller discussion of the field of narrative literature). The ideas and theories presented in these works seemed to have a strong connection to the data from my inquiry.

I began to see the potential of these theories to help me analyze and interpret the emerging themes.

I wanted to find an analytical frame for discussing the narratives, so that my interpretations were not randomly selected. I was intrigued by Bruner's (1994) approach to narrative as a "constructivist one—a view that takes as its central premise that 'world making' is the principal function of mind." I wanted to know how Bruner had provided evidence for such a claim in his own work. Bruner's (1991) article "The Narrative Construction of Reality" explains his theory that, "The central concern is not how narrative as a text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (p. 5-6). He proposes ten features of narratives that can help a reader or listener gain a sense of how a mind is constructing a reality: (1). Narrative diachronicity; (2). Particularity; (3). Intentional state entailment; (4). Hermeneutic composability; (5). Canonicity and breach; (6). Referentiality; (7). Genericness; (8). Normativeness; (9). Context sensitivity and negotiability; and (10). Narrative accrued. These features could be examined in personal narratives and become a framework for exploring how minds were constructing a reality during a particular telling.

Bruner's (1991) features figured to some extent or another in each of the participants' stories of transition from high school to first-year university. Although it is possible to make an argument that all of the features are present in all of the participants' narratives, I find it more useful to draw attention to the most exemplary of the features within specific narratives. The rest of this chapter is structured in an analysis of the narratives using Bruner's ten features as a framework for interpretations. At points, I juxtaposed participants' narratives as I explored dominant features of identity formation.

Other times I more explicitly linked groups of narratives to examine similarities and differences. Individually and accrued, the narratives provide a means to analyze how minds are constructing realities of university teaching and learning and how stories are constructing identities within those constructed realities.

From There to Here: Retrospective Teleology in Narratives

Bianca: Teaching Herself in First-Year.

Bianca's story is an exemplary retrospective teleology, a "there to here" narrative. In her narrative, Bianca reflected upon her life as a first-year student describing herself as "utterly delinquent," linking her behaviours of sleeping in and missing classes to the fact that her "parents were three hours away" and she was "liberated." She explained that she liked her English literature class, but her new-found freedoms caused her to miss classes and depend upon photocopying a reliable friend's notes. She links her experiences there and then to her understanding of the first-year students that she teaches here and now as a professor: "I am very aware that it is not all about me. I am really sympathetic to lifestyle issues. Students are sometimes absent not because the classes are not challenging, or boring, or too challenging, but sometimes just because they're young."

Bianca also tells about her development as a teacher and how earlier learning and teaching experiences helped shape her current teaching methods and philosophies. During the first interview, Bianca gave many concrete examples of how she tries to encourage first-year students' participation in her class. Bianca explained that she discovered that partnership exercises, where students talk to each other about their

responses to the literature and then tell the class about their partner's ideas, seem to work best to encourage more students to participate. Her search for pedagogical practices that will help her students find their voices in first year is given an origin through her telling about her own lack of participation in first-year classes in her narrative:

I also very rarely asked or answered questions in class. I think if someone would have said to me, "Bianca, what do you think about this? I know you're interested in this from your essay, so tell me what you think." My heart would have beaten so rapidly and I would have thought I was going to throw up, but I would have said something and it would have gotten easier every time.

She also explained during her interview that she uses a seating chart in her classes so that she can call students by name and ask directly for all students to participate. When Bianca was a student in first-year, she was not named, which meant she could remain invisible and silent. Now as a teacher, Bianca names her students, calls on them to speak, and provides the support of partnership exercises. Bianca is addressing a need she felt was not met when she was a first-year student.

Bianca tells her narrative to explain why or how she ended up in the particular position, location, or situation that she describes. Bruner's (1991) first three features of narrative can be quite easily identified in Bianca's story. Bruner simply describes narrative diachronicity as "an account of events occurring over time" (p. 6). Particularity is also evident in such stories in that they refer to particular happenings. Bruner explains that "the 'suggestiveness' of a story lies, then, in the emblematic nature of its particular, its relevance to a more inclusive narratives type" (p. 7). The third feature, intentional state entailment, refers to Bruner's argument that since narratives are about people acting

in a setting, “the happenings that befall them must be relevant to their intentional states while so engaged—to their beliefs, desires, theories, values, etc.”(p. 7). If we put these three features together, we could state that stories are about particular happenings over a period of time, which are relevant and even perhaps transformational to an individual’s intentional state. Therefore, narratives become more than just about what happened, but also how those events may be interpreted as affecting how an individual constructs his or her reality or identity.

According to Brockmeir (2001), “this merging of structures of development, narrative, and time” can be called *retrospective teleology* (p. 252). He writes:

Something extraordinary has occurred, a turning point in life, success or crisis, an unexpected revelation, self-doubt or catharsis. Now, perhaps in a moment of recovering one’s breath, the question arises, triggering the narrative event: How could it all happen, how was it possible? In so far as the story then tries to give an answer to this question, the narrative event (and the extraordinary situation embedded in) usually appears as sort of result or even consequence of the narrated event. (p. 253)

Bruner (1990) also claims that a story, “reveals a strong rhetorical strand, as if justifying why it was necessary (not causally, but morally, socially, psychologically) that the life had gone a particular way. The Self as narrator not only recounts, but justifies” (p. 121). According to Brockmeir and Bruner, the autobiographical narratives we tell are a means to communicate to others and ourselves that we are who we are because of how we have interpreted the particular events we experienced during a particular time. Both Bianca

and Daphne told narratives about how they became the professors that they are today because of their past learning and family experiences.

Daphne: Revealing Herself Through Others.

Daphne's narrative was also a retrospective teleology that combined the telling of her own experiences returning to first-year studies, her daughters' experiences in their undergraduate degrees, and her students' experiences in her classes. The multiple roles Daphne describes lend insight into the sense of crisis and conflict that may occur for first-year students: "Watching my children in university made me more understanding of how emotional students can become. It's not just a problem, but an *overwhelming* problem for them." However, during the second interview Daphne at first expressed surprise at how she was represented in her narrative. After she first read the narrative, Daphne said she was surprised that her roles as a mature student and mother became dominant in the story: "These roles are certainly not irrelevant, but they are not the first thing I think about when I am teaching first-year students." However, she knew from reading the transcription of the first interview that she had talked about those roles in great detail and she was happy to keep the story the way that it was, especially if it contributed to the structure of the composite or accrued narrative of the first-year experience.

The stories of Daphne and her daughters' experiences in first year had a strong linking quality amongst many of the other narratives in the study, as elements of many of the other participants' experiences are found within. Daphne's two daughters had very different, yet anxious and worrying, first-year experiences. Daphne's older daughter

began university with a clear career in mind, “but she quickly found out it didn’t suit her.” Daphne’s daughter expressed her sense of failure to her mother:

And I thought, “How can you say that to me? Of all people? Like some Greek tragedy! I’m the person who had quit almost everything I started in my life—my first job, my career, my marriage and I’m fine! I’m happy now.” When I was younger I stuck with what I was doing when I wasn’t happy with it, so this was my opportunity to help my daughter.

Daphne had been a nurse before she returned to university to study English as a mature student. She had changed directions from a career in health to a career in academics. She had changed directions from one marriage eventually to a second marriage. There were probably times when Daphne felt the crisis of being lost during these changes. When her daughter experienced and expressed her anxieties, Daphne was able to respond with sympathy and encouragement and, in this response to her daughter, became more aware of her first-year students’ situations. Her oldest daughter eventually figured out another educational and career path and “once she stumbled on what she wanted to do in life, nothing was a struggle anymore. Everything was just what she wanted to do and she became extraordinarily focused.” Daphne’s younger daughter did not have a “lost” experience, because she quickly decided during her undergraduate degree that “she wanted to be an English professor. She had resisted that career choice for a long time, but she turned around and said, ‘Yes, I will.’” Although she had a clear goal in mind, Daphne said her younger daughter, “did find all of university quite stressful because she is such a perfectionist and puts pressure on herself.”

The stress and conflict experienced by Daphne's daughters gave her a new perspective of and a renewed commitment to first-year students: "I guess I have tried to become even more insistent when I try to tell my students that I am here to help if *only* they'd come talk to me. You know I'd always said that in the past, but I think I say it more often." Daphne extends the invitations for students to come to her to talk and to tell their stories.

Marty: Gratitude for Experiences.

Marty had a longer gap between her high school experience and her current experiences in university than any of the other student participants. The "there" Marty travelled from was further physically and socially than most of the other participants in the study. Marty grew up in a small town in southern Saskatchewan and had never visited any university campus before. She did not know how to negotiate the urban landscape of the university, which was so different from her familiar rural horizons. She described "feeling like a total town kid" because she did not know how to take a bus and felt "overwhelmed" about a campus "the size of her town." During her first year of university, the current University 1 programme was not in place, and Marty describes feeling like the university had "a total sink-or-swim attitude." She explains that there was an "orientation," but that was not enough for Marty to feel like she had any sense of her bearings. Physically, emotionally, and socially, Marty was facing an environment completely different from what she had experienced before. She admitted, "I would have liked someone to show me what to do when I first got here." Instead, she felt isolated,

overwhelmed, and uncertain, so not surprisingly Marty did not return to university after experiencing a first year that she described as “not being emotionally prepared for.”

Bruner (1986) might argue that Marty was overwhelmed by processing unexpected events, rather than being unprepared emotionally. He claims:

The more expected an event, the more easily it is seen or heard. There is a limit on the amount the system can take in. . . . The more unexpected the information the more processing space it takes up. All this is banal enough, but its implications are anything but that. For it means that perception is to some unspecifiable degree an instrument of the world as we have structured it by our expectancies. (p. 47)

In Marty's case, she came to university and had to process the events of academic life, but she also had to process life in the city. It took a six-year gap of work and other city experiences before Marty felt ready to return to her studies. She describes the return: “When I came back three years ago it was a decision. I was savvy to the city. I was ready to meet this goal.” Marty sandwiches the statement, “I was savvy to the city” into the middle of telling about making a decision and feeling ready to study. It was revealing how Marty recognized that she had enough urban experiences to feel comfortable in her environment. Marty now felt she had more processing space to direct toward the material in her classes rather than just her survival in her environment.

Marty provided some of her own interpretations for the events occurring in her first-year as part of her telling, exemplifying Bruner's (1991) fourth feature of world-making narratives: hermeneutic composability. Bruner discusses the multiple interpretations of a narrative due to its dual functions as expression for one and understanding for another:

“This in turn implies that there is a difference between what is *expressed* in the text and what the text might *mean*, and furthermore that there is no unique solution to the task of determining *the* meaning for this expression” (p.7). He highlights two contextual factors that affect the telling and interpretation of narratives: the intention or the “why” of telling a story and the background knowledge of the storyteller and the listener (p. 10). During her interviews and narrative, Marty provided a great deal of personal background knowledge and also suggested some of her intentions for telling her story. Marty explicitly shared gratitude for the ten years between her studies. She could now describe university as “home”—a place where she finally felt comfortable and a place that she believed would make her dreams possible. She explained, “For me, this return to school is about making a goal for myself and following through. I don’t think it would all mean as much to me if I hadn’t had the life experiences between my first time in first year and now.” Marty attributed the events that happened in her first-year experience as being relevant to her intentional state at the time and relevant to her intentional state now. Marty expressed her story, but she also offered the reader or listener a potential meaning for her story. She interpreted the difficulties during her first transition to university as meaning that she is more capable of gratitude for her current education than she would have been if she had a straight route from high school through university.

Alex and Lindsay: Lost and Found Department.

Unlike Marty, Alex and Lindsay were comfortable with the university landscapes in first-year, and both had expected a fairly smooth and successful transition from high

school. Before they even began first-year university, both young women had walked on university campuses, been part of the crowds, experienced the classrooms, and already felt part of the academic culture. The story Alex and Lindsay both began to tell followed an “I came, I saw, I conquered” plotline. Alex and Lindsay were both experiencing a second “U1” year during the interviews, and it is illuminating to examine the content and structure of their narratives together. Three of Bruner’s (1991) world-making narrative features are clearly exemplified in these two narratives. Bruner’s fifth feature is called canonicity and breach, which can be explained as meaning that stories must have a “so what” or a “why tell” factor. Bruner (2001) elaborates:

The “why tell” function imposes something of great (and hidden) significance on narrative. Not only must a narrative be about a sequence of events over time, structured comprehensibly in terms of cultural canonicity, it must also contain something that endows it with *exceptionality* (p. 29).

Most western discourse communities teach children from very early ages that a story should have a point or at least some conflict to keep the listener interested. We do not want to hear about the perfect day; we instead want to hear about how the perfect day was ruined, or almost ruined. Bruner (1991) writes, “To be worth telling, a tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from” (p. 11). However, these breaches can themselves be “highly conventional and strongly influenced by narrative traditions” (p.12). In this way, Bruner’s fifth narrative feature is also closely tied to the seventh and eighth features: genericness and normativeness. Genericness is the term that describes how the telling and interpreting of narratives is shaped by genres: “While genres, thus, may indeed be loose but conventional ways of

representing human plights, they are also ways of telling that predispose us to use our minds and sensibilities in particular ways” (Bruner, 1991, p. 15). Normativeness is a feature that is similar to canonicity and breach: “Because of its ‘tellability’ as a form of discourse rests on a breach of conventional expectation, narrative is necessarily normative. A breach presupposes a norm” (1991, p. 15). The eight participants in this study told stories in the forms, conventions, and genres that they heard stories, even if they did so unconsciously.

Alex and Lindsay both tell narratives of the transition to university that seemed to show a conventional or generic structure and included a breach in the canonical telling. The breach, in fact, is what makes the narratives “tellable” and interesting to the listener, but it is the time of the breach when Alex and Lindsay express the greatest anxiety and crisis in their identities. Alex and Lindsay both described shock and anxiety when they found themselves feeling uncertain during their first years about their current classes and future choices.

Alex and Lindsay both experienced university while they were attending high school. Alex attended a high school “about five minutes from campus.” She explained, “Maybe because we were so near, I got the opportunity to go to the university a couple of times for classes.” The geographic closeness enabled her teachers to bring classes to the university and offer their students a chance to be exposed to the academic landscape. Alex also had family connections to the campus. She revealed in her interview that she has a parent who is faculty at the university and her older sister is involved in academic life as a graduate student. Alex shared, “I’d also sat in on some lectures with my sister when I came with her on “Take Your Kids to Work” day, so I had some ideas of what the

classes would look like.” Alex had experienced some of the landscape of university before her first year, even if her exposure was more like a short holiday rather than her current extended stay. Alex was aware of the size of the campus and the student population, “So I certainly noticed campus was very, very large when I got here and that there were lots and lots of people.” However, Alex’s telling is excited and positive: “I really think you can find anything you want here, especially because everybody is really friendly and helpful.”

Lindsay also experienced campus life during her high school experience. In grade eleven, Lindsay transferred from a high school outside of Winnipeg to University of Winnipeg Collegiate where she described herself as, “pretty much a university student, just in high school classes.” Her classes were held on the campus of University of Winnipeg and Lindsay had experienced the scheduling and size demands of an academic campus life. Most of her friends from the Collegiate remained at the University of Winnipeg after graduation, but Lindsay chose to attend the University of Manitoba, “Because I planned to go into architecture and I wanted to start from here from the beginning.” Her exposure to a campus landscape seemed to transfer to the University of Manitoba landscape, “I think because I was used to being on a campus for high school I didn’t find the place very intimidating, and it didn’t take long until I knew my way around.”

Alex and Lindsay both felt comfortable and at home on campus. They were not struggling with feeling physically lost or overwhelmed by the size or busyness of campus-life. However, the breach from the canonical telling, or the exceptionality that makes their stories “tellable,” occurs as both described a growing sense throughout their

first year of feeling lost. Being lost, or at least perceiving that one is lost, is a highly emotive experience. The lack of direction or clear route to a destination often becomes entangled with identity: How come I cannot figure out where I am going? What does this mean about me? If I do not have a clear direction, does this make me a failure? Place and person became clearly connected and articulated through Alex's and Lindsay's storytelling about these "lost and found" breach-moments.

Alex and Lindsay told stories about feeling lost not on campus, but within the university as an institution and shared how they felt a lack of clear directions and guidelines was frightening and frustrating. Institutionally, universities are structured largely through the division of studies into specific faculties and departments. When a student chooses a faculty and more specifically a major and minor within the faculty, s/he is committing to learn specific content and embody a certain academic identity. One of the first and major divisions a first-year student will decide upon is whether to commit to a more Arts-based or Science-based route to a degree. At the University of Manitoba, the first-year of studies is called "University 1" and is designed to allow students to experience a wide range of classes and academic content before committing to a faculty or stream of study. The rationale behind such a programme is to allow first-year students flexibility in their course loads, but they are not given a specific map of how to obtain a certain degree. Instead, students are offered a wide variety of optional routes to a wide variety of end destinations.

Lindsay entered the University One programme with a clearly-defined goal for when she left university: She wanted to become an architect. When Lindsay registered for her first-year classes, she considered what subject areas she had done well in during high

school and listened to advice from her father, an engineer who had excelled in calculus and physics as a student. However, once she was actually taking the classes she realized she was not enjoying them:

My first year was really rough. I didn't know if I still wanted to do what I planned and I dropped a lot of classes. Near the end I almost felt like, "Why am I still going here?" I was really discouraged because I didn't think I'd ever get to be where I wanted to be.

Lindsay did not have the 30 credit hours she needed to apply to a faculty after first year, so she said, "I just felt stuck and I decided I needed to take some time off." She explained that taking one year off travelling and working helped her gain perspective about the experience:

I think the thing I learned in my year off was that there was no need to rush. I could take my time. Figure out what I wanted to do. I think it allowed me the chance to hear the voice I had for some reason ignored.

She said that her transcript of grades from her first-year gave her evidence and justification to listen to her intuition and make a decision to slightly alter her direction of study:

I kind of knew from the beginning that I wanted to pursue fine arts and design, but I think I needed my first year experience to justify everything. You look at my transcript and I have a D in calculus and then an A in environmental design.

Hmmm—it just kind of proves what I'm strong at and where my weaknesses are.

Through retrospective teleology, Lindsay explains how she had to temporarily feel the misery, doubt, and fear of being lost, in order to listen to her intuition and find direction

again on a slightly different path. She tells, "I can definitely see myself figuring out what my plan will be, and it's making sense now because I know what I love and what I don't want to do. I actually enjoy going to school again." It is through her new sense of direction that Lindsay had re-discovered a love of school. She gained confidence in her identity as a fine arts student and worked herself out of the feeling of being lost that she later expressed as a breach in her canonical telling.

Unlike Lindsay, Alex did not have a clearly defined career goal when she began her first-year of university. She described this uncertainty in her narrative:

For me, I'm the kind of person who likes to know what I'm doing and what kind of direction I'm going in. When I went into university I wasn't really sure. I knew I liked writing and I knew I liked Science at the same time, so I was looking for something that would sort of balance those.

Career advice in high school had focused on traditional professions and Alex thought that psychology might be the best, or only, match for her interest in both writing and science. However, during her first-year she quickly discovered that she was not interested in her psychology class and she began to feel more anxious about finding an alternative route of study: "By the middle of first year I felt kind of lost. I was just taking a whole bunch of random courses, and I was sort of enjoying them, but I didn't really know what was out there." Alex actively began to search for direction by seeking advice from counsellors in the Science department, but she did not find their suggestions overly insightful or helpful. Instead, Alex found her greatest help was listening to friends who were already part of the university system and offered her insider information about options for possible courses:

The only reason I ended up taking a nutrition class last semester was because all my friends were like, "Oh, it's a really good GPA booster and it's really easy and interesting." Now, I think I might minor in English and I think Human Nutritional Science is going to be my major. I even think I might like to be a professor in this area, so I could do some research and writing.

She again looked for more formal advice through the Human Ecology department's counselling system, but did not find this support very helpful. However, Alex was very assertive in finding her own direction and she stated, "I realize now that you just have to seek out the people who are going to help you as well as doing the research yourself if you want to get anywhere." Alex sought directions by actively using the human and institutional resources in her life, while Lindsay found her direction by taking time off and away to find perspective.

The outcomes of Alex's and Lindsay's stories are different, and their approaches to resolving the conflicts within their narratives were unique; however the structures of the stories of their first-year experiences are similar. After the initial excitement of being part of first-year, both young women began to feel uncomfortable about the classes they were taking and unclear about their future directions of study. Both explicitly connected their personal identity with their route of study: Alex stated, "I'm the kind of person who likes to know what I'm doing and what kind of direction I'm going in"; Lindsay shared, "I never thought I'd be one of those people—I always thought I knew what I wanted to do." When Alex and Lindsay began to feel uncertain about their classes and future directions, they also began to feel uncertain about their own identities. It was during the

canonical breach in their narratives that Alex and Lindsay had to re-make or re-construct their worlds and their identities.

Growth and Transformation in the Breach

All of the participants' stories tell about transitions from there to here, although for most of the students the time frame is more compressed than the instructors. The instructors have a wider range of life experiences to connect and link, but most of the student participants are looking back over only a few months, rather than years. The length of the narratives is often indicative of the shorter time frame or narrative diachronicity between the there and the here. Marty was ten-years removed from her high school transition to university and told of experiences from a wider time frame. Lindsay and Alex both experienced a second University 1 year and the stories of their journeys from there to here took longer to tell. They had already made more explicit connections between how what they experienced in high school and their "first" first-year was affecting their decisions in the present. Ryan's, Faye's, and Yuna's stories are the shortest narratives and, not surprisingly, these three participants have had no break between high school and university. Their younger age and straight route into first year means they have told their stories of transition less often and have had less time to reflect upon how their recent experiences may be affecting their present situations. Everyone's narratives and identities are in a constant state of construction or re-construction. However, these younger participants seemed to be still experiencing the breach or the exceptionality in

their narratives, so it seemed more difficult for them to express how their worlds and identities were being affected by the current experiences.

The eight participants told stories to explain how they negotiated different landscapes, journeyed from there to here, and found themselves after they felt lost, and through these stories they often told about how they had grown or transformed through their experiences. Bruner (2001) explains that “in order to bring a protagonist from the there and then to the point where the original protagonist becomes the present narrator, one needs a theory of growth or at least of transformation” (pp. 27-28). The growth and transformation may be told as completed or on-going, but stories that are deemed worthwhile to tell about ourselves are usually about a self in some stage of development. It was in the narratives of Faye, Ryan, and Yuna—the three participants in the earliest stages of their university education—where I found striking examples of growth, transformation, and world making being described in the midst of construction.

It became more tempting to fill the silences of these younger participants with my own interpretations of their experiences. Possibly due to the fact that these participants were still amidst the conflict stage of their story, there were fewer instances when Ryan, Faye, and Yuna explicitly connected past experiences to present circumstances. I chose to provide some of the additional information that these participants shared in their second interviews to contextualize their current state or comment on their future choices. Please note that I am aware that I am more speculative in this section and that I took more authorial control in these interpretations. However, I do so to demonstrate the potential for growth and transformation of these narratives.

Faye: Tunnel to Acceptance.

There are echoes of Marty's "first" first-year experience in Faye's narrative. Both Marty and Faye told about their awareness of the crowds and the vastness of the place, and their narratives are filled with images of isolation and feelings of disconnection.

Faye's anxieties were central in her telling of her first-year experience:

There are so many people here and the place is so huge. We are always moving instead of staying in one place. I guess going from small classes of 15 – 30 to classes of 200 was pretty shocking. It's weird, but I feel small in a way. There are so many people, but I feel kind of lonely.

The "there to here" narrative Faye told was a story of not wanting to come "here" in the first place. Faye's story is largely about negotiating a landscape in which she did not want to find herself. In her narrative she said, "I fought really hard against coming to university. I'm not very brave at all, so I wanted to take a year off and work at a job or something." She connected bravery with starting at university, insinuating there is something fearful or intimidating about the academic world she did not want to join. The feared element of university or the lack of confidence in her identity as a "brave" person or a confident university student becomes the breach in Faye's canonical telling of the transition to university.

In order to construct her own world and identity in university, Faye explicitly discusses how she ignored the official institutional places of support to find her personal space:

I knew there were places I could go to talk or get support, but I just didn't. I don't know. I felt better sitting in a tunnel with my earphones on and writing. Some of the tunnels are cold, but it's a pretty good place to hang out and study—better than the library in some ways.

The “tunnels” are underground connectors between buildings on the Fort Garry campus of the University of Manitoba. Due to the harsh Winnipeg winters, the tunnels are often used by students as they move across campus for various classes. The tunnels are designed functionally to be arteries for travel, but Faye found solace and rest in these underground spaces. The tunnels serve as apt metaphors for Faye's first days and months adjusting to the university landscape and life. Initially, Faye tunnelled into herself: sitting alone, underground, putting on earphones, and entering the internal world of writing. It was in these places below the surface of mainstream campus life that Faye said she began to accept her situation of being in first-year: “I figure I'm going to be here so I might as well so I might as well make the most of it.”

Faye remains in the breach of her narrative, as many aspects of her world and identity remain unresolved. I became more aware of some of the background to Faye's story in the second interview. I do not know whether it was due to her increased comfort meeting me for the second time or her desire to further contextualize the conflicts she was experiencing in her life, but in the second interview Faye revealed that she was uncertain where or if she would attend university next year because of upheaval in her family life. Faye's parents have planned to retire to Vancouver Island following Faye's first year and they were strongly encouraging Faye to move with them to attend University of Victoria. Faye was already uncertain about returning to University of

Manitoba for her second year because she was interested in a programme offered at University of Winnipeg. However, she was not sure she wanted to start over at a new university, even within the same city since she has now made some connections and constructed some sense of a world within the tunnel systems below University of Manitoba. In response to her parents impending move, Faye expressed her desire to remain in her home environment, "Everyone I know is here. I don't really want to start new again. . . . Away from everyone basically that keeps me sane." Faye explained that remaining in Winnipeg on her own to continue her studies has proven to be more challenging than she first thought, because she was uncertain where she could afford to live and shared that she needed to find a job with flexibility and relatively high pay so she could continue to study and remain focused on her academic work.

Ryan: Out as His Own Person

It was mid-way through the first interview when Ryan decided to tell me about his sexuality, and this proclamation became the first line of his narrative: "I'm just going to say this—I'm gay, right? I'm gay." After revealing this part of his identity to me, Ryan seemed to relax and became more candid and complete in his discussions about high school, home, and university. Ryan's openness about his homosexuality was new with his move to university. He said, "So in high school I had to suppress myself because I knew I'd be teased even more if people knew. But now in university, I'm my own person and I can express myself more in that way." In university Ryan felt safer in his identity as a gay man and was finding the community, connections, and a support system that were lacking

for him in high school: "I realized no one was going to bother me here—there was no high school drama and I could help out and meet people through gay student services." Ryan's identity has not been changed because of university, but his willingness to be out and open with his sexuality seems to be allowing him to grow and transform both individually and socially.

The process of growth and transformation was not without anxiety for Ryan. Within his narrative, Ryan told both explicitly and implicitly about pain and tensions within his family. He shared, "It's very relieving to be accepted for every part of me, not just some parts. But there is still stress. There is still stuff with family and there is still worrying about whether friends will accept me or not."

The "stuff with family" was the narrative Ryan identified as his current most important life narrative when we discussed the significance of his transition-to-university story during our second interview. He explained that his family narrative was the most important because it was filled with a great deal of conflict at the moment. However, he connected his family narrative to his school narrative, "School has partly to do with family." In his narrative, Ryan connected his desire to gain a university education with his desire to make his family proud:

University is something I want to do—it's a personal thing. My two older brothers didn't finish post-secondary so I'm kind of my parents' last hope. I also want to do this for myself. I want to take this opportunity and accomplish something. I can't be straight, so I just want to take this chance and get a good job and make my parents proud in *that* way.

Ryan seemed to be seeking his parent's approval through his education, because he felt he is lacking their acceptance of his being gay.

Ryan's acceptance of his identity as an openly gay man is influenced by those around him. Bruner (2001) argues that the process of self-formation is socially situated:

It becomes plain, as one observes this process of self-formation, that it is probably a mistake to conceive of Self as solo, as locked up inside one person's subjectivity, as hermetically sealed off. Rather, Self seems to be intersubjective or "distributed" in the same way that one's "knowledge" is distributed beyond one's head to include the friends and colleagues to whom one has access, the notes one has filed, the books one has on one's shelves. (p. 35)

Ryan is not alone in his transformation and growth, but he is instead situated in different communities with different levels of support and acceptance of his gay identity. In high school Ryan was afraid to be out, in university he is supported and free to be himself, and at home he struggles for acceptance. Ryan's telling of growth and transformation seemed to be at an early stage, and it is not clear yet to me which community Ryan most aligns himself. At the time of the telling he was only months separated from his high school experience, and he shared with me that many of his high school friends and acquaintances did not know that he is gay.

Ryan seemed enthusiastic in his description of his university community: "There were so many people here and so many things going on. There were free pancakes and bands playing outside. It was just like, 'Wow, I *really* like university!'" He was excited about his university community, but he was only on campus for school time. Ryan still lived at home, so his family concerns faced him daily. Ryan does not have to make an all-

or-nothing decision between the community of family and friends at home and the community of friends at university. However, at some point he may be likely to grow more connected to one support network than the other. From Ryan's telling, it seems like this process of re-making his world and identity has begun, but during this construction period Ryan is feeling pain and conflict.

Yuna: The Changing Heroine

Yuna's story was far less anxious and conflict-laden than Ryan's, or even Faye's, narratives; nonetheless, I still hear an expression of many of the themes that other participants tell about in their stories. In this way, Yuna's narrative is particularly exemplary of Bruner's tenth world-making narrative feature: narratives accrued. This feature refers to how stories exist in layers with other stories forming what is often referred to as culture, history, or tradition (p. 18). Bruner states:

Even our individual autobiographies. . . depend on being placed within a continuity provided by a constructed and shared social history in which we locate our Selves and our individual continuities. It is a sense of belonging to this canonical past that permits us to form our own narratives of deviation while maintaining complicity with the canon. (p. 20)

Within Yuna's narrative, we can see layers of the other participants' stories and also layers of wider cultural and shared social histories.

Yuna's vocational high school offered her the opportunity to take part in real-life work experiences before her tertiary schooling began. Yuna chose to take part in the

drafting programme because she, like Lindsay, was interested in pursuing a career in architecture. Yuna attributed her motivation to attend university to the hands-on experiences building projects, working in teams with others, and receiving job offers, but these experiences also have prompted self-reflection about what she wants from her life and from herself:

During my vocational route through high school, I worked on three projects that were actually built. But I was sitting there and I was thinking, "Is this what I want to do with the rest of my life?" I wouldn't be making buildings for me; I'd be making them for someone else so there would be lots of compromise. I learned that especially in one project. I don't mind if there's a little compromise, but there is only a certain degree I can go without thinking, "I'm selling out."

When she told about her journey from there to here, she reflected upon how her first-year experience was prompting her to look closely at who she was and what she wanted to become:

I don't think I've changed much since high school, but I'd definitely say I've grown a lot as a person. I think just being here has gotten me thinking outside of university to the beginning of the rest of my life. I've been asking myself what do I want to do with my life, what do I want to continue with, what do I want to study, who do I want to become?

The breach in Yuna's stories is not an external action or plot line, but instead is an internal process of searching for her identity in the new world she is constructing. As she talked about her questions, Yuna seemed patient with not yet having the answers. Like Alex, Yuna seemed willing to continue the exploration of options and search for new

directions. Like Lindsay, Yuna seemed to be listening to her intuition or her internal voices that might be telling her to pursue options outside or architecture:

I guess I've always had doubts. I've never settled on one thing. When I was little I wanted to be a psychiatrist, then a lawyer, then a writer, and then a librarian, but not a normal librarian down the street, but you know an archivist of older texts.

But I guess I've always wanted to be around knowledge.

Yuna described that she has changed since high school, but in ways that are hard to articulate, something both Ryan and Faye also struggled to put into words. Yuna said in her narrative, "I don't think I've changed much since high school, but I'd definitely say I've grown a lot as a person." She acknowledged the growth that has already occurred in her story, but as a listener of her tale, I felt Yuna was just beginning this process of growth and transformation.

Yuna constructed her changing world and identity as part of a wider social and cultural continuity of narratives. In the second interview, Yuna reflected upon the impact of telling her story, and she compared the personal changes she experienced in her transitional first-year to other genres:

You look at all these stories, whether they're screenplays or movies, plays, and books, even Japanese comics. There's always a main character, the hero or heroine, who changes, but it seems like everyone around has already gone through their changes and they stay in one place. (Second Interview, Feb. 21, 2007, Lines 220 – 224)

Yuna described her own experiences in direct relationship to cultural and literary narratives showing an awareness that her experiences were shaped and influenced by

what she had seen, read, and heard in her sociocultural context. She then connected the role of the changing main character back to her own experience, “That’s kind of how I describe it. I’m the only one going through changes. It seems like all my friends are like, ‘Oh, it’s just another year in my life.’” (228-230) Yuna might have felt like she was the only one who had been changed by the first-year experience, but the juxtaposed narratives within this study and within a wider cultural and literary context show that Yuna’s narrative is one part of a larger story.

Conclusions

In this chapter I examine some of the features of the narratives that allow us to notice the structures, canonical breaches, and world-and-identity-making properties of the eight participants’ stories. The narrators all told stories unique to their individual situations and contexts, yet there are echoes of each story in the others. There are resonating similarities that can be read in the narrative expressions of the transition to first-year university and the perceptions of the teaching and learning that occurs within this time of world construction and canonical breach. As the students’ and the instructors’ narratives accrue, wider features of our cultural, historical, and literary context become apparent in the ways that they tell about constructing university worlds and identities. In the next chapter, I consider how accrued cultural and literary narratives can help us further search and understand the participants’ stories and ways of knowing about first-year university.

CHAPTER SIX

Landscapes of Action and Consciousness: De/Constructing the University of Oz and Beyond

Accrued Cultural and Literary Narratives

Why is first-year university often metaphorically described as a journey in which some travellers successfully arrive at a destination and others are left behind? A metanarrative linking geography, experience, and identity permeates the participants' narratives in this study, but also wider cultural and literary ways of knowing and telling about first-year university. For example, let us return to Sears' (2004) constructed metaphor for the transition to first-year university, which I discussed in Chapter Two:

Every year first-year university students perform an astonishing act of daring and skill as they leap across the great chasm that separates high school from university. Some do not make it, plunging into the depths of the canyon we dispassionately refer to as "attrition." (p. 166)

The geographical references in this metaphor are striking, especially when juxtaposed with a literary example from *The Wizard of Oz*. Baum was almost certainly not thinking about Dorothy and her friends experiencing the transition to university, nor was Sears likely thinking about *The Wizard of Oz* explicitly when he was writing about first-year university. However, as Bruner (1991) argues, narratives that help people construct their worlds, realities, and identities accrue, both in telling and interpretation. When we read Sears' description juxtaposed against Baum's literary narrative, our understanding of each becomes informed by the other:

After a few hours the road began to be rough, and the walking grew so difficult that the Scarecrow often stumbled over the yellow bricks, which were here very uneven. Sometimes, indeed, they were broken or missing altogether, leaving holes that Toto jumped across and Dorothy walked around. As for the Scarecrow, having no brains, he walked straight ahead, and so stepped into the holes and fell at full length on the hard bricks. (Baum, 1900, p. 26)

Reading Sears through “Oz” eyes, we begin to question who becomes the Dorothy, Toto, and Scarecrow in first-year experiences and why we use journey and geography metaphors to tell about the time of transition. Baum’s story of friends on a quest to find home, brains, heart, and courage becomes a possible pedagogical allegory, which could help translate individuals’ personal experiences into a shared cultural point of reference.

The term accrual is used by Bruner (1991) in his description of ten features of narratives that construct realities. The term accrual is most commonly used in financial language and means to “grow by addition.” For example, by adding to the amount one keeps in his or her savings account, more interest will accrue on that sum. If we use this financial meaning to think metaphorically about banking narratives, we can imagine that adding new personal narratives to an account already holding personal and literary narratives will increase the total number of narratives. However, the accrued interest will be the extra value that grows from these narratives being added or banked together. Bruner explains what he believes to be the extra value of adding narratives to personal autobiographies or cultural canons: “Yet narratives do accrue, and, as anthropologists insist, the accruals eventually create something variously called a ‘culture’ or a ‘history’ or, more loosely, a ‘tradition’” (p. 18). This chapter explores the accrued cultural,

literary, and personal metanarrative of the first-year university experience being represented as a geographical journey.

Productive and Personal Point of Reference: Literature as Narrative Analysis

My own narrative of the transition to first-year university has become banked with the stories of world and identity making shared by the participants in my inquiry. For my first year of university, I moved from a small city in Alberta to Canada's national capital, Ottawa. I felt out of place, not at home, and no longer certain of my surroundings. In the first month or so of the academic year, I handed in a paper for my English class and I felt fairly confident that I would receive a top grade, just as I had in my high school English classes. When my first paper came back with the mark of C-, I had the distinct and shocked feeling, "I was not in Kansas anymore." As the years passed and I told the story of my first-year university experiences in many different contexts for many different audiences, I returned each time to the line about Kansas. I did not have to explain to anyone why I was referring to the mid-western state, a place I have not actually ever visited in my life. My North American and English friends simply knew, without any further contextual information, that I was referring to *The Wizard of Oz*. Kansas, Dorothy, the yellow brick road, the Wicked Witch of the West, Munchkins, the Emerald City—these images have become part of the Western world's shared icons and accrued narratives since the 1900 publication of L. Frank Baum's novel and the 1939 release of the MGM film.

I expanded my metaphorical references to Oz as part of an introduction to an assignment for one of my Master's of Education assignments. I told my story again, but I added further Oz layers. *The Wizard of Oz* was a culturally-shared reference point, and it held the potential to help me more clearly express my belief that the transition from high school to first-year university can be "a long journey, through a country that is sometimes pleasant and sometimes dark and terrible" (Baum, 1900, p. 15). As I discuss in the first chapter of this thesis, I believe literature provides a "productive point of reference" for understanding autobiographical narratives:

For most themes and problems raised in the new style of narrative integration, the world of literary texts and the language of fiction and poetry will certainly remain a productive point of reference. . . . When we enter a fictional world evoked by a story and imagine ourselves wandering the streets of a city or the hills of a country in which the action of the narrative is located, we behave in this world as if it were the real one; we do so even if we know that it is only a narrative model of it. (Brockmeir & Harre, 2001, pp. 54 – 55)

As I wandered through the varied and colourful cities and hills of Oz, I became more convinced I had found a piece of literature with the potential of becoming a narrative model of the first-year university experience. Freeman (2001) claims:

Within limits, there exists the possibility of "naming" the profound ways in which we, and our stories, are culturally constituted; we ourselves can sometimes identify the very cultural myths, plot structures, and metaphors we live by. And in the process of identification the space of narrative expression can expand. (p. 289)

I wanted to be able to expand the space of my participants' narrative expression beyond simply telling and hearing about first-year university teaching and learning experiences. I wanted to analyze their stories and explore "the very cultural myths, plot structures, and metaphors we live by."

Academic Criticism of The Wizard of Oz

Academic criticism of *The Wizard of Oz* is not overly abundant, considering the novel's and film's celebrity status in North American pop culture. After a few initial reviews of the book, the most significant academic articles about Oz did not appear until the 1960s. In 1964, Henry Littlefield, a high school history teacher, published an article titled "*The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism*" in *American Quarterly*. In this article, Littlefield argued that Baum "in the form of a subtle parable" had "delineated a Midwesterner's vibrant and ironic portrait of this country as it entered the twentieth century" (paragraph 12). Littlefield uncovers a possible allegorical reading of *The Wizard of Oz* by ascribing economic and political meanings to the images in the novel. He bases his claims for this symbolic reading by describing the climate of the United States around the time of the presidential election of 1896, the time Baum was writing his novel. Littlefield concludes this article by stating that, "The relationship and analogies outlined above are admittedly theoretical, but they are far too consistent to be coincidental, and they furnish a teaching mechanism which is guaranteed to reach any level of student" (paragraph 41). He analyzed the text as a teacher, looking for a new and fresh way to

explain the historical context of a time that may have seemed distant and foreign to his students.

Throughout the next few decades, several scholars (Attebery, 1980; Jensen, 1971; Rockoff, 1990) expanded Littlefield's reading of Oz as an allegory for Populism. Parker (1994), Zipes (1999), and Hansen (2002), have written articles that outline the academic criticism of Oz and discuss how Littlefield's work has been challenged in the last few decades. The work of Leach (1991, 1993) and Culver (1988), in particular, claim that *The Wizard of Oz* is far more appropriately read as a celebration of America's consumer culture and obsession with industrial capitalism at the beginning of the twentieth century. Zipes (1999) suggests Oz should not be read as America, but rather as the utopian ideal, far removed from American politics and economics. Hansen (2002) reminds those reading the Oz criticism and debate that,

No record exists that Baum ever acknowledges any political meanings in the story and that no one even suggested such an interpretation until the 1960s. There certainly does not seem to be sufficient evidence to overwhelm Baum's explicit statement in the introduction of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* that his sole purpose was to entertain children and not to impress upon them some moral. (p. 262)

Debate may continue to rage about whether Baum intentionally included the symbolism and allegory about the political or economic climate of his time. However, both Hansen and Parker conclude that the allegorical reading remains a useful pedagogical tool for teaching history and economics, regardless of Baum's intent. Whether or not Baum intended for a certain *meaning* in his text, there are many ways of reading *significance* in

his narrative. Could *The Wizard of Oz* also be a powerful teaching tool for understanding individuals' quests for identity in times of transition to university?

Narrative/ Identity Theory and The Wizard of Oz

Bruner and other narrative theorists argue that personal narratives are told and interpreted through understanding culturally-shared genres and canons of narratives.

Brockmeir and Carbaugh (2001) claim:

How a life, and, in the process, a self is constructed is a question to be examined in the light of the narrative forms and discursive formats that are provided by culture and used by individuals in certain social events. Viewed in this way, narrative is a central hinge between culture and mind (p. 10).

In my cultural experiences, especially during my impressionable childhood and young adult years, I was introduced to the story and film of *The Wizard of Oz*; in turn, I constructed and told my first-year university experience in Oz terms. Bruner (1986) specifically addresses how reading different genres affects how we tell our personal stories:

Genre seems to be a way of organizing the structure of events and organizing the telling of them—a way that can be used for one's own storytelling or, indeed, for “placing” stories one is reading or hearing. Something in the actual text “triggers” an interpretation of genre in the reader, an interpretation that then dominates the reader's own creation of what Wolfgang Iser calls a “virtual text.” (p. 6)

I have now returned to reading *The Wizard of Oz* several times since having my transition-to-university experiences triggered. The structure, characters, plot, and imagery of the novel began to resonate with the narratives of my participants and my own experiences. Brockmeir and Harre (2001) state:

Eco (1994) showed that the readers or listeners to a fictional story have to know a lot of things about the real world in order to take it as the correct background or the fictional one. They stay with one foot in the actual world and with the other one in the narrative universe of discourse. (p. 55)

With one foot in the narrative universe and one foot in the actual world, I further want to analyze the participants' narratives through a de/construction of some of the metaphors of Oz, and the experience of first-year university.

Oz as a Place: Telling the Journey of Identity Metaphor

The Wizard of Oz (Baum, 1900) is a novel that provides a strong model of a narrative inquiry study, therefore is an especially fitting point of reference for this thesis. The characters in the novel journey to new landscapes in a quest to better themselves, and as they meet new companions, they share their stories. The novel itself is less than two hundred pages in length, but within this relatively short span Baum includes eight incidents where characters request a story or explicitly tell a narrative about self, identity, and how one got into their current position. By positioning the incidents in a list, the effect of the accrued narrative structure is considerable. Early in the novel, Glinda, the good witch, urges Dorothy to go to the Emerald City to ask the Wizard of Oz for help.

She advises Dorothy, "When you get to Oz do not be afraid of him, but tell your story and ask him to help you" (Baum, 1900, p. 15). Shortly into her journey, Dorothy meets the Scarecrow and he bids her to "Tell me something about yourself and the country you come from" (p. 21). In return, Dorothy asks him, "Won't you tell me a story, while we are resting?" (p. 21). When Dorothy and the Scarecrow meet the Tin Woodman, he says to them, "I will tell you my story, and then you will know." Later in the novel, Dorothy requests that the flying monkeys carry her and her friends out of the land in the west, and the Monkey King says to her: "'This is a long story,' answered the King, with a laugh; 'but as we have a long journey before us I will pass the time telling you about it, if you wish'" (p. 125). When Dorothy and her friends discover the truth about Oz, the revealed wizard says to them, "Sit down, please, there are plenty of chairs, and I will tell you my story" (p. 137). Almost at the end of the novel, just before Dorothy leaves Oz to journey back to her home in Kansas, there is a final sharing of a narrative: "Dorothy told the Witch all her story: how the cyclone had brought her to the Land of Oz, how she had found her companions, and of the wonderful adventure they had met with" (p. 182). Finally, a relieved Aunt Em meets Dorothy upon her return to Kansas: "'My darling child,' she cried, folding the little girl into her arms and covering her face with kisses, 'Where in the world did you come from?'" (p. 189)

Baum's novel is structured around travellers telling their tales as they journey, a *quest* convention or genre that is common in literature. Consider Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, which follows a band of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury with each traveller telling his or her story to pass the time as they journey. Fairy tales provide another example of literature that uses the journey as a metaphor for change, in particular

the change in identity. Baum's repeated use of character's sharing their personal narratives comes from this long-established cultural, historical, and literary tradition. Storytelling and journeying are the two main organizing structures in Baum's novel. Essentially, this is a novel that moves characters and readers as much through narrative space and geographical position.

For Bruner (1994), "Place is not simply a piece of geography. . . . it is an intimate construct whose language dominates the thought of our narrators" (p. 31). Bruner (1986) also uses geographical metaphors to describe the roles of narratives:

Story must construct two landscapes simultaneously. One is the landscape of action, where the constituents are the arguments of action: agent, intention or goal, situation, instrument, something corresponding to a "story grammar." The other landscape is the landscape of consciousness: what those involved in the action know, think, or feel, or do not know, think, or feel. (p. 14)

I do not find it surprising that Bruner uses geography as a metaphor for narratives. In English, we often use geographical, topographical, or situational language to define our living, our traveling, and our experiences. Phrases like, "our place in the world," "possible horizons," and "routes to success," all show how geography is linked with a sense of identity and position in a wider social context. Brockmeir and Carbaugh (2001) argue, "It is stories that connect the identity of people with the identity of places and space" (p. 12). We link place and position to our personal growth and transformations: "I was there and now I am here"; "I hit bottom and now I have climbed up"; "I left that behind to find wider, more open spaces." These phrases are so common that they sound cliché, but in many ways they become the default language for telling stories of personal

experiences and turning points. Many geographical references and journey metaphors, accrued as cultural and literary ways of telling and interpreting, exist in the narratives of the eight participants in this study.

Daphne: A Whole Series of Things that Work Together

Daphne's narrative is an apt starting point for considering how cultural, literary, and personal narratives accrue. When discussing the challenges of teaching first-year university students "Introductory English," Daphne claimed her students, "Don't have the depth of allusion that they need. They don't understand how literature is a whole series of things that work together." Daphne's own narrative was an intricately woven web of literary and personal threads: In other words, a whole series of things that worked together. To exemplify various stages or relationships in her life, Daphne continually returned to literary narratives. *Romeo and Juliet* became the text in which Daphne expressed how her perspectives as a mature student were different from her younger colleagues. She compared her oldest daughter's feelings of despair about changing her path of study to a "Greek tragedy," relying on the listener's or reader's understanding of the literary conventions of this genre. Finally, Christina Rossetti's poetry was named as an example of the joy Daphne finds in teaching first-year students literature and the role of preparing those students for their lives beyond university. The story of "someone building bridges who loves Christina Rossetti's poetry" can be read as a rather beautiful geographical metaphor for Daphne's work as an instructor of first-year literature students. Daphne's teaching *bridged* the literature in the university world to this student's reality

beyond academics. At least this one engineering student has left Daphne's class with literary knowledge and appreciation he did not have when he arrived in university.

Bianca: University as a Whole New World

Bianca used many geographical references, both literal and metaphorical, to tell about her own and her students' arrival in the university world. She stated, "There is such power in watching students *arrive* with their own expectations, energy, and newness." The word "arrive" is literally associated with travel, movement, and journeys, an image which becomes reinforced with the description of the "jarring experience *moving* from a high school English class." When Bianca chose an example of how students struggled to use the academic vocabulary needed for the university-level study of literature, she told about students who were "happy to talk about *latitude* and *longitude* in *geography*," but became "dismayed" when she "insist[ed]" on the difference between a simile and metaphor." Later in her narrative, Bianca expressed a wish that her first-year students, "Could bring an *open mind* and *courage*" so "they could see *university as a whole new world* and not a continuation from high school." The Scarecrow's searches for a brain and the Cowardly Lion's quests for courage, just as Bianca hoped her students could use their inner resources to re-shape their realities and construct a new world.

Bianca's narrative unconsciously has another Oz metaphor that can be explored in the images Bianca chose to tell about how she used to view professors. Beginning the thread of her narrative about the image of professors, Bianca told a personal narrative about the "interestingly aligned" academic careers of herself and her brother. Bianca's

brother began his first year of university as a student the same year Bianca began her first year of university as a professor. Her brother's "shock and awe" regarding Bianca's role as a professor helped her to reflect upon her own "overestimated, over-inflated, God-like view" of professors that she held until she was Teaching Assistant (TA) as a graduate student. Bianca described her role as a TA geographically as "kind of *middle ground*" and also through an Oz-like metaphor, "a kind of *behind the curtains look*" at professors' realities and limitations.

As an undergraduate student, Bianca held an intimidating image of professors as almost non-human or possessing super powers, not unlike the images Dorothy's friends held of *The Wizard of Oz*. The scene where Dorothy and her friends discover the true Oz rather than the fantastical images he first presented them with is described as follows:

As [the screen] fell with a crash they looked that way, and the next moment all of them were filled with wonder. For they saw standing in just the spot the screen had hidden, a little old man, with a bald head and a wrinkled face who seemed to be as much surprised as they were. (pp. 133 – 134)

When the screen crashes, the real man rather than the Wizard is revealed in all his human vulnerability. Bianca's "behind the curtains look" Teacher Assistant experience allowed her to discover the humanity in her professors and helped her to realize that she could identify herself as a professor. Bianca's own confession that her research felt "incredibly anxious and wrought and raw and frightening" sounded vulnerable, human, and ordinary. In this way, Bianca is far more like the description of the exposed wizard than the god-like professors she used to fear. Perhaps Bianca is even closer to the description of

Dorothy as “an ordinary little girl who came by chance of a cyclone into a strange land” (Baum, 1900, p. 20) than any of the wizard descriptions.

Some qualities of each of the Oz characters could arguably be discovered existing in each of the participants in this study. However, it is important to remember that by the end of the *The Wizard of Oz*, the wizard and Dorothy are revealed to be far more similar in background and current experience than they are different. Both Dorothy and the Wizard were American citizens who accidentally landed in a strange place. Through Bianca and Daphne’s stories, we also see that the professors and students in this story are also far more similar than they are different. All of the participants tell of searching their experiences and their home and away worlds for better understanding of themselves as teachers and learners in university.

We Have Surely Lost Our Way

For the student participants, deciding upon a route of study was almost always expressed through geographical metaphors, again linking identity, place, and narrative. As discussed in the last chapter, several of the participants told about feeling lost or lacking direction during times when they were unclear in their academic focus. *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900) also gives an example of the main characters struggling with feeling lost:

“We have surely lost our way,” he said, “and unless we find it again in time to reach the Emerald City I shall never get my brains.”

“Nor I my heart,” declared the Tin Woodman. “It seems to me I can scarcely wait till I get to Oz, and you must admit this is a very long journey” (p.122).

Cultural and literary narratives often use the metaphor or narrative trope of being lost to show protagonists who struggle with feeling like they do not belong, are not reaching their goals, or are no longer certain about what they want. The university narratives of many of the student participants seem to be influenced by the accrued ways of knowing, telling, and interpreting experiences.

In Chapter Five, I explored how Lindsay and Alex both structured their first-year stories around their search for courses and an academic stream that would suit their identities. The time of uncertainty in academic focus became the told breach in their canonical narratives. There are abundant literal and metaphorical references to geography as the narrators told about these breaches, or identity crises. Both Alex and Lindsay began their telling by showing how they were confident and comfortable in their geographic surroundings. Alex said, “Maybe because we were so *near*, I got the opportunity to go to university,” and “I really think you can *find anything you want here*.” Lindsay stated, “It didn’t take long until *I knew my way around*.” However, they used similarly geographically-loaded metaphors to describe their conflicts in choosing academic courses and potential career paths. Alex stated, “I’m the kind of person who like to know. . . *what kind of direction I’m going in*.” She felt if she had more specific and less conventional career advice she could have “known *where I was going*,” but instead “felt kind of *lost*.” She concluded that it took personal motivation and her own initiative “to *get anywhere*.” Lindsay also described her lack of academic focus

geographically: “I didn’t think I’d ever *get to be where I wanted to be*,” and “I just felt *stuck*.” She took time off to explore wider options through world travel. Both literally and figuratively, Lindsay needed time off and away to gain perspective and listen to her intuition.

Marty’s and Faye’s experiences of feeling overwhelmed in the urban and institutional landscapes also work as literary and culturally-recognized metaphors. In chapter five I discuss how Faye described university in terms of geography. When considered as a metaphor, there is an implied meaning that Faye felt like she did not belong to mainstream university culture. She said, “The *place* is so *huge*. We are *always moving* instead of *staying in one place*.” Faye described finding both solace and society in the underground tunnels, which she said were “cold,” but a “pretty *good place* to hang out and study,” concluding, “my social life exists more *underground*.” She also explains her changing identity geographically: “I’m starting to feel a little more outgoing because I’m *out of my comfort zone* so often.” Faye’s environment was new at university, and she attributed changes in her identity as a response to the geographical and social differences from previous learning spaces.

Marty described feeling physically lost and overwhelmed by her environment, but the language of geography also expressed her change in identity from outsider to contributing academic community member. Marty described feeling “like a complete *town kid*” and not being able to “get my head around *needing a map to get around campus*.” These descriptions can also be read as metaphors for feeling like an outsider or out of place in the university world. However, after Marty took a break from university, gained other life experiences, and began to feel “savvier to the city,” her return to

academic life came with a new perspective of her place in the spaces of university. She told about her returns to university as a mature student: "When I get back in September and I walk down the hallways, I feel like I'm *home*." Home is a key element of the Oz narratives. Dorothy discovers at the end of *The Wizard of Oz* that the silver shoes (ruby slippers in the film) she had been wearing for the whole journey could take her home simply by declaring her intention to do so. In the novel, Dorothy says, "Take me home to Auntie Em!" (Baum, 1900, p. 187) and in the film she utters, "There is no place like home!" (MGM, 1939) Instantly she is returned to the place she feels is home. Marty's transformation from feeling like university was foreign to now feeling like home, and was a process that, like Dorothy's, also relied on her internal powers and her declaration that she was "ready to meet this goal." Dorothy and Marty both had to discover what they wanted and where they wanted to be in order to be ready to journey home.

Conclusions

The participants told about their first-year university experiences, world-making, and identity construction through cultural and literary accrued metaphors. Bruner (1994) states: "In a perhaps deeper sense, indeed, it may be that the plights and the intentional states depicted in "successful" fiction sensitizes us to experience our own lives in ways to match" (p. 13). The participants in this study were sensitized by the narratives that they had read, heard, and seen told. Brockmeir and Harre (2001) claim, "As far as human affairs are concerned, it is above all through narrative that we make sense of the wider, more differentiated, and more complete texts and contexts of our experience" (p. 40). The

participants told about their first-year experiences in the language and narrative structures that helped them make sense of the texts and contexts of their experience. Geographical metaphors helped the participants place themselves in their constructed university worlds and position their identities in a wider sociocultural and literary world.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Offering Possibilities: Implications for Learning, Teaching, and Future Research

Home to Kansas: Returning to the Research Questions

As I neared the end of the research and writing of this inquiry into the transition from high school to university, I found myself looking down at my feet quite often. I was hoping I would find myself, like Dorothy during her journey in Oz, wearing a pair of silver shoes, or ruby slippers that could be knocked together three times and commanded to carry me wherever I wished to go. I wished to go to the end of my magically completed thesis, which had been concluded with clear statements of how my questions had been answered through the analysis and interpretation of participants' narratives. I wished to go to the place where personal, practical, and social significance of this inquiry in the field of education had been established. I wished to go to the place where the implications for future research had been addressed. And with all this completed, I wished, most of all, to go home. Alas, I never found myself wearing magical silver shoes and I did not discover a short cut to a solid concluding chapter. However, I did remind myself while re-reading the ending of *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900) that Dorothy ends her journey, her quest, by returning home:

“My darling child!” she cried, folding the little girl in her arms and covering her face with kisses, “Where in the world did you come from?”

“From the Land of Oz,” said Dorothy gravely. “And here is Toto, too. And oh, Aunt Em! I’m so glad to be home again!” (p. 189)

Using the quest journey tropes and conventions so common in literary narratives, Baum created a circular journey for Dorothy. She began in Kansas and she returned to Kansas. This convention of the circular journey or the return to the starting-point, became my framework for this final chapter: I needed to go back to where this inquiry started in order to address and tell the knowledge I had gained during my journey.

The first section of this chapter responds to the three questions that guided this inquiry, drawing some conclusions from the analysis and interpretation of the data. The next section considers some possible applications of this study to the field of education. In the third section I discuss some implications for future narrative research. And finally, I very briefly conclude this thesis, ending this journey for readers and researcher alike.

Question One: What do personal narratives reveal about students’ and academic instructors’ perspectives of first-year university experiences?

The eight participants’ narratives offer a range of perspectives on first-year learning and teaching. First-year university teaching and learning was a unique experience for each individual, but the narratives revealed that transition to first-year university *is* perceived as a complex issue by those living through the experience. Some of the students (Lindsay, Alex, and Yuna) told about the need to find an educational focus or degree path during first year university in order to feel more secure in their identity as a university student. Other students (Marty, Faye and Ryan) discussed the

physical, social, and emotional barriers and supports that they perceived influencing their first-year experiences both negatively and positively. Most students' revealed in their narratives, perceived *turning point* (Bruner, 1986) moments, where they faced some unexpected aspect of the first-year university experience and were required to change, transform, or grow in response. The instructors' narratives revealed that their first-year teaching experiences were closely tied to their first-year learning experiences: The turning point moments that the instructors experienced when they were first-year university students continued to influence how they perceived their pedagogical choices and personal responses to students. The following responses to the second and third questions offer a more in-depth and detailed analysis of the perceived experiences of first-year university teaching and learning.

Question Two: What similarities and differences exist between the narratives told by academic instructors and first-year university students?

One of the most striking differences in the narratives of the instructors and the students were the ways in which the experiences were told. Quite simply put, the instructors had lived longer than the students and had more accumulated life, education, and narrative-telling experiences. This increased accrual of personal narratives affected both what was told by the instructors and how it was told. The instructors' narratives connected many aspects of their present and past experiences and roles. They shared experiences not only about teaching first-year university students, but also about being first-year students and supporting close family members who had experienced the

transition from high school to university. Although their stories may not have been told in such a focused setting as research project before, the instructors had more opportunities to rehearse their stories over time. They may have informally discussed first-year learning experiences with friends and partners or first-year teaching experiences with colleagues and students. The retrospective teleology (Brockmeir, 2001) element of personal narratives discussed in Chapter Five would become more rehearsed and embedded in a wider context of experiences. The instructors had a greater range of experiences, both personal and educational, to draw upon when explaining "I am here because. . ." The students ranged in age and accumulated life experiences, which as discussed in Chapter Five, greatly affected both the length of their narratives and depth of explicit connections between shared experiences.

The instructors focused more on the academic issues facing first-year university students than the students themselves did. Bianca and Daphne both shared their perspectives on the academic issues and gaps in preparation for their subject area of English. Both discussed the effects of a limited repertoire of reading and writing experiences on the critical thinking and writing skills required in university English studies. Although students were given the opportunity to discuss academic issues, most of the concerns about first-year university academic work were quite general. The non-specific discussion of academic transitions is exemplified in a comment in Ryan's narrative: "The courses here are hard, but if I manage to go through it all and get my goal, even if it is just a pass, I feel good. It's my first year and apparently, it's one of the toughest years." The instructors were basing their assessments of the academic needs of first-year students on years of teaching an accumulating number of students. The

instructors were able to observe and express more global trends than the students who could express only their own experience or those of their closest friends. Similar to the findings in Terenzini et al. (1994), the students in this study told more about social transitions than their academic transitions. (See discussion of this study in Chapter Two.) The student participants seemed more focused in their narratives on the experiences of finding a place in university, whether that place was in a faculty or a social support network. In this positioning of self in the university, the students also focused on the experiences of finding their identities in university.

However, there are also many similarities between the instructors' and students' narratives. Again, like the findings in the Terenzini et al. (1994) study, both instructors and students in my study positioned family members as important characters in their narratives of first-year university teaching and learning. Bianca discussed her role as a sister to a first-year student and Daphne shared her experiences mothering two daughters during their undergraduate degrees. Marty, Faye, Ryan, Alex, and Lindsay all discussed complicated, sometimes supportive and sometimes stressful, relationships with parents. Home identities became integrated into their telling of university identities: Sometimes these identities seemed to be told as aligning and other times these identities seemed to be clashing. By telling about family and home, the participants give glimpses of their multiple selves and multiple identities (Castell, 2004; Ivanvic, 1998)

Another similarity between the narratives of students and instructors was a shared positive discourse about first-year university, including the often difficult transition period after high school. During her second interview, Bianca shared that by telling a whole version of her story from learner to teacher she felt she moved beyond the

“negative discourse that dominates water cooler discussions of first-year teaching.” She said, “I was pleased the conversation moved beyond complaints to discussing how things are. I feel it was a far more balanced view of my teaching.” Both Bianca and Daphne articulated that first-year teaching was often more challenging, but also more rewarding than upper-year teaching. Although the students often shared narratives of conflicts that arose during the process of transition from high school to first-year university, the students also seemed to express a sense of gratitude for the growth and transformation that those experiences allowed. For example, Lindsay concluded her narrative by saying:

I was really nervous at first when I came back this year because I still had bad feelings from my first year, but after a couple of classes I *really* felt like I was starting over and this is what I was meant to be doing. I don't think I can ever stop learning! I think it would be great if I could spend my life just learning and taking classes.

Like many of the other student participants, Lindsay struggled at first with finding her niche in university, but once she resolved her personal and academic issues she was able to find a sense of belonging, purpose, and identity. Within their positive discourse about first-year university, students and instructors alike revealed insights into how narratives shaped their knowing and understanding of their identities and transition-to-university experiences.

Question Three: What do personal narratives reveal about the individuals' identities and narratives as a way of knowing and understanding the transition from high school to university?

Exploring the experience of first-year university primarily through the narrative mode of thought is what is unique about this study in the field of transition literature. Chapters Five and Six explored what narratives revealed about how participants come to know, construct, and express their realities and identities in first-year university. Jerome Bruner (1986) argues there are two different and separate ways of thinking, conceptualizing, and expressing: "There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality" (p. 11). For Bruner, narrative and logical arguments are vastly different modes: "A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as means for convincing another. Yet what they convince us of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness" (1986, p. 11). As a researcher working with narratives, I wanted the participants' stories to share what their lives in transition were like.

In the stories of their lives learning and teaching in first-year university, the participants revealed that they came to know their realities and identities using geographical and literary metaphors of the journey or the quest. Previously accrued personal, cultural, and literary narratives informed the knowing, telling, and interpreting of the personal narratives in this study. The participants may not have known that they were telling about their experiences of first-year university using the conventions of quest or journey literary narratives. Also, they may not have thought about their experiences in

the context of a larger first-year university narrative or a larger narrative about the quest of understanding identity. However, the ways that the participants told about their first-year university experiences showed the complex intertextual relationships within a culture.

Possibilities for Application of this Research in Education

This study offer educators possibilities for considering how first-year university narratives could be used as curricular experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state:

Experience has a wholeness and an integrity about it that is neither left in the field nor on the pages of a field text but is alive at the end just as it is in the beginning. The purpose of this retelling, like any retellings in any aspect of the narratives of our lives, is to offer possibilities for reliving, for new directions, and new ways of doing things. (p. 189)

Rather than stories left on the page, this study has already embodied a curricular experience for the researcher and participants to relive and consider new ways of learning and teaching in first-year university. Worth (2005) argues:

Narrative reasoning helps us to empathize with other people, become better citizens, increase our intelligence, and develop a coherent and healthy sense of personal identity. . . those who are able to develop the capacity to reason narratively will be able to have a more comprehensive understanding of the human construction. (p. 1)

The curricular potential for this study to develop narrative reasoning can be explored through both its case-study function and its telling function (Conle, 2003).

In its case-study function (Conle, 2003), narratives can be used as curricular experiences as learners engage, learn, and reflect during the reading and/or hearing of the stories and the discussion and/or writing that may follow. For this study, there is a potential for the narratives to be used as case-studies for professional development opportunities for first-year university teachers, counsellors, and policy-makers. Reading the stories of the first-year university students and instructors could provide a provocative starting-point for conversations about pedagogical and social support structures needed in first-year university. Worth (2005) argues, "We imagine the lives of others that are presented through narrative form and by expanding the moral imagination we are better able to empathize with others and we become better at public thinking" (p. 13). First-year teaching and learning narratives could *deepen* and *humanize* (Freeman, 2001) the conversations that are already taking place in university departments about the response to the issues of transition from high school to university.

In its telling function (Conle, 2003), narratives can be used as curricular experiences as learners engage, learn, and reflect during the telling of their own autobiographical experiences. For this study, there was the potential for the narratives to become opportunities for the participants and researcher to learn about themselves and their realities through telling their stories. During the second interview, Bianca suggested that this type of storytelling might be a way to formalize pedagogical reflection for instructors in her English department:

I think this kind of structured conversation about teaching and learning experiences may be a powerful professional tool for teachers in our department. If

we could have this type of interview every five years or so, it might be beneficial to see our growth and development.

There may be reluctance by some instructors to engage in this type of professional development, but narrative inquiry could provide an important and personal element to pedagogical and professional improvement for those willing to engage in the process. Telling first-year university or transition narratives could also become part of the curricular structures or assignments of first-year university courses (especially in the Humanities). Some of the research, writing, or analytical skills needed for a specific discipline might be approached first through the sharing of personal narratives of students' current educational experiences. I am not arguing that the telling of first-year narratives should become the focus of the courses offered, however, by integrating and acknowledging the personal stories that matter to the students, a greater understanding and commitment to the rest of the course material might potentially be developed.

As another way of coming full-circle in my journey with this inquiry, I return to an idea I introduce in Chapter One about Conle's (2003) proposed five outcomes of narrative curricula. She suggests narratives offer the following educational outcomes: (1) Advances in understanding; (2) increased interpretive competence; (3) richer practical repertoires; (4) changes in life; (5) visions gained. Whether as case-studies or in a telling-function, first-year narratives meet these curricular outcomes. First, narratives advance understanding of transitions from high school to university by providing a human perspective and reminder of what really matters to real people during the process. Rather than speculating why the trends in transition are happening, narratives offer individual responses to situated experiences. Second, both telling and reading narratives aids in first-

year students', instructors', and the researcher's interpretive competence. When telling about a first-year experience, the narrator must consider their experiences and make some interpretations about what information is important and how it has led the narrator to the current state of being or understanding (Brockmeir, 2001). When reading other's first-year narratives, a student, instructor, or the researcher facilitating the study, interprets the stories and contextualizes shared experiences. Third, by collecting and reading first-year narratives a richer practical repertoire of narratives helps students and instructors feel part of a larger context and less isolated in their own experiences. Fourth, telling, reading, or hearing narratives can prompt changes in the immediate teaching and learning that occurs during first-year university, as was the case when Yuna became more active in her role as learner after reading her narrative (See Chapter Five). The change may also be longer-term as participants begin to contextualize their experiences and learn more about how to use narrative reasoning to understand their changing and transforming identities. Finally, narratives told and shared about first-year university can help all characters involved in the transition story gain visions of how to respond practically, sensitively, and creatively to the needs of the learners and teachers.

Implications for Future Research

As I considered the implications of this study on future research, I reflected upon my own journey through this re-search experience. When I began shaping my thesis study, I wanted to fix the problems of first-year. I went searching for *the* answer or answers. This inquiry has helped me grow and has transformed my identity as researcher,

teacher, and learner. I believe narrative inquiry is a method that should not be about fixing, but it could be about empowering. Narrative inquiries offer the participants the opportunity to tell what matters to them and to reflect upon the impact of these experiences' effects on their growth and development. In this section, I explore my ideas for further narrative inquiry studies, even though I also believe there is potential for other studies using a variety of other research methodologies.

I believe there are many possibilities for future narrative research stemming from this study. An interesting alternative narrative inquiry study would be to adopt a similar methodological design, but recruit instructors and students from a Science of Engineering department to compare whether first-year stories would vary due to the interests and culturally accrued narratives. An alternative study design would be to interview and co-author narratives with participants in the year following high school who chose not to attend university. In this study, it would be possible to explore issues of growth and transformation in identities and the construction of worlds and realities outside formal educational settings. Another possibility would be to conduct a narrative inquiry with students in their final year of university to examine how exiting structured education and entering careers affected their identities and world constructions.

When I conducted the first interviews for this study, I felt an overwhelming responsibility for the narratives as they were developing and an intuitive belief that the stories would continue and the participants would have more to tell. During the second interview, I asked each student participant whether s/he would be interested in becoming involved in further interviews and narratives if I continued this inquiry as a longer-term study. I was surprised when six out of six participants expressed their willingness to share

with me the narratives of their journeys through the university years, but I also felt my intuition to continue the study was confirmed by this response.

An inquiry that extended four years beyond this first-year study would provide a time span equivalent of a non-stop route through an undergraduate degree and one year following graduation. Not all the participants would follow this path to graduation or even necessarily remain in university, but this time frame would provide culturally recognized boundaries. By meeting with participants and continuing to interview and develop narratives, it would be possible to trace young adults as their identities continued to grow and transform. The narratives could continue to be developed orally through story-structured interviews that would allow students to re-tell and re-live their university experiences. However, a longer-term study would allow more intimate relationships with participants to be formed, stretching the “four directions of any inquiry” as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2001):

Inward and outward, backward and forward. By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic creations, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present, and future (p. 50).

Increasing the length of the study and the contact with the participants would offer the possibility of engaging in life history work.

Narratives could also be developed through different modes of telling, allowing for an interrogation of how the form of the telling affects the content of the told. Digital and on-line technologies could be explored as means to further express identities and

realities. Providing participants with a digital camera and inviting them to take ten photographs that represent their identities in the university context could provide a visual insight into how they see themselves and their constructed worlds. Participants, under the protection of their pseudonyms, could use blogging and on-line forums to become involved in more continual, immediate reflections and link into a virtual social network.

A longer-term project could also become an appropriate action research project, as participants and I could negotiate how the narratives, in their many forms, could be shared to strengthen understanding of university-years experiences. Participants could partner, in ways they felt comfortable, in professional development, resource creation, or transition programming at a variety of levels.

As the Journey Comes to a Changed Home

Finally, it is time to knock my heels together and return home; and, to note how home has changed for me. I circle back to a question I asked in the first chapter and a question (more or less) that was asked of Dorothy on her return to Kansas: "Jennifer, child, what has happened to you? Where have you been?" The answers are not simple, but they are enriching. I have re-searched, re-viewed, re-told, and re-lived. I have listened to stories, faced assumptions, learned about identities, and considered how worlds are made. I have learned to trust the tale in as much as it can offer the possibility to empower the teller. Like Dorothy, I am so glad to be home again, but I am also so appreciative that I took the journey.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Study and Storytelling

We are all storytellers. We tell stories of our present situations, our past memories, and our future hopes. It is through re-telling and re-living stories that we begin to make sense of our experiences and position them in a wider personal and social context. It becomes the articulation of words in a story form that is often an illumination of what we truly think, believe, and assume about our communities and our identities.

As a researcher (and a story-teller, story-lover, and story-gatherer), I believe the issues of transition of high school to university can best be understood through the personal narratives of the students and instructors experiencing the transition. I want to hear your story about teaching and/or learning in first-year university and listen to how you choose to tell about your experiences. This study will involve two interviews that will focus on helping you tell your story: the first interview will be more formal and structured around the elements of the story and the second interview will be a chance to check whether the story you want to tell has emerged.

Before the First Interview...

Before we meet for the first interview, I encourage you to read the questions I will ask during the interview and reflect upon how you might want to respond to them. I do not expect or even want you to take a long time doing this or to prepare any written notes, but perhaps if you have read through the questions once you might think about them while you are doing other things before we meet. The questions are structured around the elements of a story: setting, characters, events, conflict, internal responses, consequences, and resolution.

Try Writing Your Experiences as a Very Short Story...

I encourage you to write a very short story about your experiences with the transition from high school to university. This can be one paragraph to one page in length. You might use the structure of the first interview questions to help you or focus on one event or moment that shares something you feel is interesting or revealing about your transition. There is no wrong way to do this. Think about what you might say to a friend or family if they asked you, "How is your first year at university going?" or "How is teaching your first-year class going this year?" Please bring a copy of your story to the first interview with me. You could also email me a copy of your story in advance of the interview.

Appendix B: Instructors' First Interview Questions

I will describe this project and give you a written summary of the purpose, procedures, risk, confidentiality and consent for you to keep in your records. Although confidentiality and anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed, I will remind you that your identity will be protected in the reporting of this study by giving you a pseudonym. After transcription, the tape of this interview will be destroyed.

Before we begin the interview, let me remind you of a few important issues. The interview was designed to be open-ended and to focus on your particular experiences. The questions follow the structure of a story and will be used to co-author a narrative about your experiences. Please answer the questions in a way that feels comfortable to you. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions without prejudice or consequence. Please feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation in this interview or at any other point in the process.

Setting

1. How would you describe the University of Manitoba (both as an institution and as an academic community)? Is it the same or different to other academic institutions you have been involved in as a student or instructor? (*Prompt: You may want to address the whole institution of "The University of..." and/or focus more specifically on your experiences of English departments within the wider university context*).
2. Tell me about how you came to teach in this university setting. Tell me about how you came to teach your section of English 1200 this year.

Characters

3. Tell me about yourself as a first-year university student. Did your experiences in first-year shape your later academic career either as a student or a teacher? In what ways?
4. Tell me about your first-year students. Do you feel they are prepared for your class? What do you see as their greatest strengths and largest challenges?
5. Tell me about how you see yourself as a teacher. How do you address the balance between teacher and researcher?
6. Tell me about other characters in your life that may affect the choices you make as a teacher of first-year students. (*Prompts: Partners, children, siblings, parents, community members, university or faculty administrators, etc.*)
7. Do you have anyone in your academic career that you consider/have considered a mentor? Could you describe that person and explain why they are/were significant to you.

Events/Conflicts

8. Tell me about what you have experienced first-year students struggling with academically, socially, or otherwise in your classes.
9. Tell me about when during the academic year you as a teacher notice the greatest struggles, changes, or conflict with first-year students. (*Prompts: Have you noticed a*

pattern of student development or crisis after the first assignment is handed back, first-term exam period, later in the year? Is there any pattern?)

10. Without using actual names, can you give an example of a student whom you have taught that you feel is particularly illustrative of a successful first-year student? In contrast, can you give an example of a student (again, not using actual names) who really seems/seemed to struggle in first-year university? What are the major differences between these two students?

Internal Responses

11. Tell me about how your students' conflicts or struggles affect you as a teacher. Do you find first-year teaching more or less stressful than your other teaching?
12. Tell me about you have found the most surprising, challenging, rewarding, exciting and/or frustrating about teaching first-year university students.

Consequences / Resolution

13. Tell me about what you as an individual or as a member of a department do to meet the needs of first-year students. Do you feel there is more that could or should be done to help first-year students?
14. Tell me about what advice you might give high school teachers, university administrators, or future first-year students about the transition between high school and university.
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix C: Students' First Interview Questions

I will describe this project and give you a written summary of the purpose, procedures, risk, confidentiality and consent for you to keep in your records. Although confidentiality and anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed, I will remind you that your identity will be protected in the reporting of this study by giving you a pseudonym. After transcription, the tape of this interview will be destroyed.

Before we begin the interview, let me remind you of a few important issues. The interview was designed to be open-ended and to focus on your particular experiences. The questions follow the structure of a story and will be used to co-author a narrative about your experiences. Please answer the questions in a way that feels comfortable to you. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions without prejudice or consequence. Please feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation in this interview or at any other point in the process.

Setting

1. How would you describe your high school? (*Prompts: City/Country school, number of students, English/French immersion, culture within school.*) In a more specific context, how would you describe the English classes you took in high school, especially in your final year of high school?
2. Tell me about what you imagined university would be like when you were still in high school. Do you know where these images or expectations came from? Do these images match what you have experienced of university so far?
3. Tell me about how you would describe University of Manitoba to someone who does not attend school here.

Characters

4. Tell me about how you saw yourself in high school. (*Prompts: social group, academic standing, feeling as an insider/outsider, etc.*) How did you see yourself as an English student in high school?
5. Tell me about your friends in high school. Do you still have the same group of friends? Why or why not?
6. Tell me about how you see yourself now in university. (*Prompts: social group, academic standing, feeling as an insider/outsider, etc.*) How do you see yourself as an English student in university? Do you feel your identity (both as an English student and in a wider context) is the same or different than it was in high school?
7. Tell me about your English teachers in high school and now in university. How are they the same or different?
8. Do you have anyone in your life that you consider a mentor? Could you describe that person and explain why they are significant to you.

Events/Conflict

9. Tell me about the first time you noticed a difference between high school and university. (*Prompts: This could be at anytime in the application and registration processes, class experiences, or first exams or assignments.*)

10. Tell me about your experiences with friends from high school who are not attending this university at this time. Have things stayed the same or changed? In what ways?

Internal Responses

11. Tell me about you have found the most surprising, challenging, rewarding, exciting and/or frustrating about the first-year university experience.
12. Tell me about why you are attending university.

Consequences / Resolution

13. Tell me about whether or not you have felt supported in first-year university. In times when you felt supported, where did you find help or advice? In times when you did not feel supported, do you have any ideas or suggestions for how more help could become available to you?
14. Tell me about what advice you would give to high school students about to attend university.
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix D

Example of Turning a Transcription Into a Narrative

Narrative

The following example is taken from the fifth paragraph of Lindsay's story (See Chapter 4 for narrative in its entirety):

Last year I worked and I travelled. I went to Brazil and then I went to Europe for a while. I think the thing I learned in my year off was that there was no need to rush. I could take my time. Figure out what I wanted to do. I think it allowed me the chance to hear the voice I had for some reason ignored. I kind of knew from the beginning that I wanted to pursue fine arts and design, but I think I needed my first year experience to justify everything. You look at my transcript and I have a D in calculus and then an A in environmental design. Hmmm—it just kind of proves what I'm strong at and where my weaknesses are.

Transcription

The above paragraph was extracted from the following three sections of the transcription of Lindsay's initial interview on January 31, 2007. The highlighted sections on these extracts of the transcription match the physical highlighting I put on the hard copy of the transcription during the repeated reading process (See Instrumentation section of Chapter Three for a fuller description of the process of turning a transcription into a narrative).

Transcription Section A: January 31, 2007, p. 4, lines 167 – 181.

J: Yeah. Yeah. And you just chose them because you thought I did well then, I'll do well again, or, or did you think you needed them for architecture?

L: Yeah, yeah. I thought they'd look at your classes as well as your grades, then I'm told they look just at your grades, now I've been told they, they look just at your grades, they don't look at your classes so—I was kind of like, "Oh, why did I take this when I could have taken something else."

J: Exactly. Okay.. was that part of the reason you decided to take a year off then?

L: Um, yeah. My first, my first year was, was really rough, I didn't know if I still wanted to do what I'd planned and I dropped a bunch of classes, so I wouldn't have my 30 credits so I wouldn't be able to apply at the end of the year, so I, I just felt stuck, so I decided I needed some time off.

J: Yeah, yeah. What did you do during your time off?

L: I travelled.

J: Good for you! Where did you go?

L: Oh, [sounds excited] I went to Brazil and then I went to Europe for a while.

Transcription Section B: January 31, 2007, p. 15, lines 669 – 688.

J: ...Alright. What did you find the most rewarding about first year?

L: First year? Probably getting those As in the two classes I really enjoyed.

J: Yeah. ...And that really led you in a new direction.

L: Totally. I kind of knew that from the beginning but it just sort of justified everything.

J: That's interesting! Tell me more about—you knew from the beginning—

L: I knew from the beginning that I really loved that I loved environmental design and I really loved art—

J: Mmmhmm

L:--but it just kind of. You look, look at my transcript and I have a D in Calculus and then an A in environmental design. And I'm kind of like, "Hmmm" and it just kind of, kind of proves that. What I'm strong at and my weaknesses.

Transcription Section C: January 31, 2007, p. 21, lines 925 – 943.

J: Okay. Kay, so you're invited back to University of Winnipeg Collegiate your high school, what advice would you give to a grade 12 class about their move to university? What would you say to them?

L: I'd probably say to people, well, not to rush into it. I remember being like, [hushed tone] "Well, I don't want to be like old kid in school who took all this time off", but uh I don't know. Take your time. Figure out what you want to do. You have lots of time! I think that's the thing I've learned. There's no need to rush.

J: And where did you get that new philosophy?

L: [Giggles] From my time off.

J: From that year off and travelling—

L: Definitely. There are people pretty much in the same situation that I work with. They're in their first year and I'm just like, "You know, you've got lots of time."

Field Notes

The following paragraph is taken from a research or field note I wrote on February 1, 2007, the day following Lindsay's interview. I wrote this note just prior to transcribing the interview.

I think my instinct for Lindsay's story lies in her crisis of letting go of the one identity that she thought she was—the plan and direction of herself going easily along the path of architecture and the time off and finding her place in fine arts. I would like to capture her expression of knowing all along, but needing the experience to justify her true desires. Also, I am drawn to her expression of gratitude for the struggle and her new found love of school.

Appendix E: Invitation to Member Check and Participate in Second Interview

Invitation to Member Check Your First Interview

I have attached a copy of the transcript from our first interview for you to read and consider. A transcript is an exact, word-for-word record of what is said during the interview. At this stage, the transcript shows pauses, repetitions of words, and grammatical errors that occur naturally as people speak. Although it is sometimes a bit shocking or frustrating to “read” what you “sound like,” please remember that unlike writing, speech is unrehearsed and unedited, so is filled with these moments that might stand out to you as errors. When I choose to quote from an interview, I generally “clean up” these issues, although I give indications of pauses as they often show how people are thinking or recalling. I will also use phrases that you use often, as I think they give a sense of your individual voice.

A member check is an opportunity for you to read what you have said to add, change, or omit anything that you feel does not accurately express what you intended to communicate. I encourage you to write notes, cross out sections, or add in the margins anything you would like to change. You can do this electronically and email me back the changes or bring in an edited copy to our second interview.

Invitation to Member Check Your Transition Narrative

I have used the ideas and words from your first interview and your initial story to write a narrative about your first-year transition experience. As much as possible, I have used exact words, images, or incidents, but I may have re-arranged order or focused on some incidents over others. I have included this story from your transcript for you to member check. Again, I encourage you to write notes, cross out sections, or add in the margins anything you would like to change. You can do this electronically and email me back the changes or bring in an edited copy to our second interview.

What happens next? The Second Interview

In the next interview, which will probably be much shorter than the first interview (I think these interviews will be about 30 minutes), we will discuss your first interview and the narrative I have composed about it. I will ask questions about your story and whether or not you feel I have expressed what you truly feel about the experience. You may have new ideas or stories you might want to add or tell, or you may want to clarify something you said.

After the interview, I will likely add to or make changes to your story from our conversation and then email you another copy. We can write changes back and forth until we have composed a story that captures your voice and your experiences. I will use your narrative in comparison to the other participants and my own as data for my thesis. Your confidentiality will be protected with a pseudonym or fake name as discussed in the ethics agreement earlier.

If you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to email or phone me at [hotmail address] or [phone number].

Appendix F: Second Interview Questions: Reflecting on Narratives and the Process of Telling

These questions are meant to be open-ended. Please feel free to answer in any way you feel comfortable.

1. When you read the transcription of the interview, what did you feel was the most important story you told? Do you feel I captured your story and your voice in the draft narrative that I sent you? Were you surprised by how I told your story?
2. Do you want to change, add, or edit anything from the transcriptions of the first interview or the story?
3. After the first interview, how did you feel about telling your story? Has anything changed since the first interview? Have you told anyone else about your first year experiences since talking to me about your experiences?
4. Is the narrative of your first year experiences one of the most important narratives in your life right now?
5. Have you told your story about this experience before?
6. Do you feel you are the main character or a supporting character in the story of your first year experience?

For example, when I think about and tell the story of dropping out of journalism in my first year to pursue education at a different university, I always feel like the main character. I tend to tell the story thinking firstly about my own reactions and feelings, with less consideration of the others involved in the story. However, if I think about or tell about my recent trip to Mexico for my sister-in-law's wedding I definitely felt like a minor supporting character. I was on the fringe of the story, but I felt very comfortable in that role and can't imagine it any other way.